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*Summary Report of the 4th
International Academic Conference
on Religion and Politics:
'A New, Even More Brave World...
The Hope of Faith and the Hope of Politics'*

In Memory of Benedict XVI (30.11-1.12.2023), Warsaw

Abstract: The article is a report on the conference entitled “A New, Even More Brave World... The Hope of Faith and the Hope of Politics. In Memory of Benedict XVI,” which was held from November 30 to December 1, 2023 at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland. The authors overview the presentations of keynote speakers and the discussions during the plenary panels. They also briefly mention the issues addressed in the papers delivered during the parallel panels.

Keywords: religion and politics, conference, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

From 30 November to 1 December 2023, the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw hosted an international academic conference entitled *The New, Even More Brave World ... The Hope of Faith and the Hope of Politics. In Memory of Benedict XVI*. The event was the fourth biennial international conference on religion and politics organized at the University. The main organizers of the event were the Institute of Political Science and Administration of the UKSW and the *Collegium Interethnicum*, while the co-organizers included the Institute

of Political Science of the University of Opole, the Institute of Political Science and Administration of the University of Zielona Góra, the Department of Regional and Global Studies of the University of Warsaw, the International Catholic Jurists Forum and the *De Republica* Institute. It is worth noting that since 2017, the conference in this series has constituted the largest academic event in Poland in the field of relations between politics and religion. The conference was attended by more than 60 scholars representing 23 academic centres from Poland, Australia, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Philippines, Portugal, Romania, and the United States of America. The conference focused on the question of the progressive secularization of social life, the deterioration of human rights and the legacy of the thought of Benedict XVI.

The conference consisted of three plenary sessions and eight parallel discussion panels. Some participants and attendees joined the conference online. After each panel, there was time for discussion and questions to the speakers.

The conference was opened by Rev. Prof Marek Stokłosa, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs and International Cooperation at UKSW. On behalf of the Rector, he welcomed the assembled guests and thanked the conference organizers. He also emphasized the importance and timeliness of the conference theme in today's world.

Next to speak was Professor Andrzej Przyłębski, Director of the *De Republica* Institute. In his short speech, he pointed out how important a figure Joseph Ratzinger was for the social thought of the Church, both in his capacity as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and later as Pope Benedict XVI. In this context, prof Przyłębski recalled the debates on faith between Ratzinger and his compatriot, the renowned German philosopher Jürgen Habermas.

Prof Michał Gierycz, Dean of the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, recalled that the first day of the conference marked the sixteenth anniversary of Pope Benedict's encyclical *Spe Salvi* on the role of hope in Christian life. Prof. Gierycz pointed out that the wide range of academic disciplines represented by the participants would make the conference a unique place to approach the theme from different perspectives, including theological, philosophical and social science approaches.

The introductory lecture '*Faith, Politics and Eschatology in the Thought of Joseph Ratzinger*' was given by Prof Tracey Rowland of the University of Notre Dame,

Australia. Prof Rowland, who is a recipient of the Ratzinger Prize, introduced several themes in her talk. One of these themes was the threat of ideological totalitarianism, which has a unique resonance in Poland. It was with the help of Pope John Paul II that our country threw off the yoke of communism in the form of political subjugation by the Soviet Union. Today, however, Prof Rowland pointed out that the threat manifests itself in the “totalitarianism of liberalism”. The speaker also described the phenomenon of the interpenetration of religion (theology) and politics. This manifested itself from the 1960s onwards in the theology of liberation, which found fertile ground among philosophers close to Marxism and their students, as well as among the poor peoples of Latin America. In Eastern Europe, there were also protests in 1968, but these were caused more by the curtailment of civil liberties – already limited – in the Eastern bloc (the events of March 1968 in Poland, the Prague Spring of 1968) than by a rebellion against the prevailing norms (two different understandings of freedom in Europe). Joseph Ratzinger’s thought refers to and draws on earlier texts such as John Paul II’s encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (on moral teaching) or the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (on the social teaching of the Church).

The lecture was followed by a discussion moderated by Rev. Prof Piotr Mazurkiewicz, with the participation of Prof Aleksander Bańka (University of Silesia), Dr Paweł Milcarek (*Christianitas*) and Prof Zbigniew Stawrowski (UKSW). In his commentary on the lecture, Prof Bańka emphasized the Catholic, often seminary, background of the leaders of the 1968 protests and the reasons for this state of affairs, i.e. the question of experiencing religion more as a set of norms and rules leading to salvation than as a personal relationship with God. He also recalled that, in addition to Marxism, the idea of existentialism played an important role in the events mentioned. Dr Milcarek, for his part, recalled the role played by the Second Vatican Council’s declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* in the Church’s social thought. The final contribution to the panel was made by Professor Stawrowski, who pointed out the ambiguity of the title of the conference, referring on the one hand to Aldous Huxley’s book and on the other to Christian visions of the Kingdom of God on earth. In the context of natural law, he recalled the Polish achievements in this field, namely the works of the Polish scholars, jurists, and statesmen Paweł Włodkowic (*Paulus Vladimiri*) and Stanisław of Skarbimierz (*Stanislas de Scarbimiria*). In a brief response, Prof Rowland emphasized the role of the Frankfurt School in social change, agreed with Dr Milcarek on the importance of the French debate on the relationship between faith and reason,

and confirmed the distinction made by Prof Stawrowski between Anglo-Saxon liberalism and continental liberalism and the resulting differences.

The opening plenary panel was followed by two panels. The first, *'The Political Thought of Joseph Ratzinger'*, was moderated by Prof Sławomir Sowiński (UKSW). The first lecture was given by Rev. Professor Karol Jasiński (University of Warmia and Mazury), who discussed the intellectual condition of the contemporary West. He highlighted the difference in definition between rationality and rationalism. The panellist also highlighted Pope Benedict XVI's response to the so-called 'disease of reason' that afflicts those who do not want to know the truth because it would make them fundamentalists. The Pope's response to the above-mentioned 'disease' consisted of the need to broaden the concept of reason – to regain trust in reason as an instrument for the discovery of truth, and to open reason not only to truth but also to faith, since faith and reason are both corrective functions that cannot operate separately. The first lecture was followed by a lecture by Rev. Prof Janusz Węgrzecki (UKSW), who presented two concepts of the State: firstly, the concept of the then Cardinal Ratzinger, according to which the State cannot do without ethics and, moreover, should accept ethics from outside (the great religious traditions – Catholicism and the office of the Pope), and secondly, the concept of Benedict XVI, which assumes a truly secular character of the State. Benedict XVI linked the secularity of the State to the separation of the State and the Church, a relationship that this Pope considered to be truly Christian, since the rapprochement of religion and the State leads to the emergence of a theocratic or confessional State. The panellist concluded by recalling the Pope's idea that democracy, like the rule of law, can only be based on truth. The next paper was presented by Dr Mariusz Sulkowski (UKSW), who discussed the relationship between politics and the apocalypse. In the course of his presentation, the panellist acquainted the audience with the thoughts of Benedict XVI on the criticism of the deification of man and the state and the existence of movements that promise to create paradise on earth, such as Marxism. The fourth lecture was given by Professor Brian Scarnecchia (Ave Maria School of Law), who presented Benedict XVI's critique of environmentalism and the relationship between the environment and human beings. The speaker demonstrated that there are observable links between climate movements and political elites who use these movements to promote their own ideas. Prof Scarnecchia stressed that the environment, like the human person, has rights that must be respected, but that there are situations in which environmental organizations, in order to "save the environment", restrict the economic development of certain regions of the world, thus perpetuating their

poverty, e.g. in Africa. The final speaker was Professor Philip McDonagh (Dublin City University), who outlined how politics and the functioning of society were understood by Benedict XVI and how they are understood by Pope Francis. The panellist pointed out that Benedict XVI proclaimed that the relationship between politics and religion makes peace visible. In conclusion, Prof McDonagh reminded the audience that democracy is only possible when everyone has access to food, water, health care, education, work, and security of rights through structured domestic and international relations.

The second parallel panel was entitled '*Post-Secularism, Islam, Europe*'. The panel was conducted in English and moderated by Rev. Dr Piotr Burgoński. It focused on the phenomenon of secularism in Europe and the influence of Islam on Europe.

The second plenary panel '*Human Rights and the Brave New World*' was chaired by Prof Joanna Kulska (University of Opole). The panellists were Dr Gregor Puppinck, Dr Marguerite Peeters and Prof Michał Gierycz (UKSW). The panel was opened by Prof Kulska with a short lecture, which served as an introduction to the individual contributions of the above-mentioned panellists. The moderator also noted that 2023 marks the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the 60th anniversary of Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. The first speaker was Dr Gregor Puppinck. His presentation focused on the issue of human rights and the associated challenges. In his paper, Dr Puppinck emphasized that in human rights there is a clear dominance of morality over legal positivism. Human rights are a bearer of moral values, they are universal, and they are also in line with the teachings of the Church. The panellist raised the essential question of the challenges associated with human rights, which stem from the fact that they are based on a kind of anthropology that is ambiguous for the audience; therefore, the way in which human rights are interpreted is of paramount importance. The scholar pointed out that in interpreting human rights, conservatives look to the past, to who the authors of the Declaration were, while so-called progressives look to the future, to the promise of those rights. The second panellist, Dr Marguerite Peeters, reviewed the history of human rights and highlighted the ambivalent nature of these rights. She identified two key periods – the first between 1945 and 1966 and the second from 1966 to the present. Dr Peeters emphasized the need to analyse the evolution of the language used to formulate human rights and listed the factors influencing the change in this language, such as the involvement of feminist activists who promoted the idea of using inclusive language that accommodated women. The final speaker was

Professor Michał Gierycz, whose paper focused on the relationship between the Catholic Church and human rights. In his paper, the panellist distinguished the successive positions of the Church on human rights and pointed to their effect of ushering in the secularization of politics. The Church initially viewed the concept of human rights with suspicion as a work initiated by the French Revolution, which had a strong anti-clerical bias. During the pontificate of John Paul II, the Church's attitude towards human rights changed significantly, as he considered human rights to be one of the foundations of the Church's teachings. After the presentations, the first question put to Dr Peeters concerned the nature of the Holy See's involvement in the UN. The panellist pointed out that the Church had played an important role in the UN on the issue of keeping abortion out of the human rights framework. In the end, however, this action had only a limited impact, she noted. The second question was addressed to Prof Gierycz and concerned the difference between the experience of human rights in the European and American contexts. In his reply, Prof Gierycz emphasized the very different political traditions of the European and American continents. He also pointed to the fact that there is hope for democracy as a modern order that does not negate transcendent relationships and builds a stable political system. The Professor argued that we are not condemned to the so-called totalitarian democracy born in France as a result of the negation of transcendent relations and the substitution of man for God. The third question was addressed to Dr Puppincck and concerned the victory of the so-called progressive interpretation of human rights and the weakness of the conservative approach. Dr Puppincck pointed out that the difference between the conservative and progressive frameworks is that the former do not propose progress. Conservatives seek to restore what was, while progressives affirm the divinity of man. The final question, also addressed to Dr Puppincck, concerned the erosion of human rights and what is considered legalistic "today". In response, the panellist pointed out that it is extremely difficult to translate human problems into human rights. These rights should be translated into natural human needs, or the rights that people have. These include the need to have a child, to protect the family, and to be free to pray.

This plenary session was followed by four more parallel panels. The first (in English) on '*Christianity, Secularization and Common Living in Europe*' was moderated by Dr Piotr Zakrzewski (UKSW). The first paper was presented by Prof Luisa Lodevole (University of Rome "*Tor Vergata*") and dealt with the basic goals set for human beings – why do they live, what are their goals in life? The panellist also addressed the question of the meaning of human life in society. In

her presentation, Prof Lodevole referred to Benedict XVI, who had highlighted the links between the anthropology of materialism and the myth of a “new better world”. In conclusion, she pointed out that the erasure of the transcendent relationship from human life would lead to the impossibility of evaluating human actions from a moral point of view, and that a world without God is a world that has lost freedom. The second paper was presented by Prof Jerzy Ciechański (University of Warsaw), who dealt with European community values and the future of European integration. The speaker emphasized that coercion towards community European values weakens European integration. The panelist showed that Europe is divided on the level of values, which is evident from the history of European integration, and pointed out that the establishment of the European common market supported larger states and marginalized smaller ones. An important point to emerge from the paper was to show the differences between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe. For the former, the values of mass migration and cultural revolution are of great importance, which distinguishes it from the latter. In conclusion, Prof Ciechański cited the case of the war in Ukraine as a factor influencing the revival of traditional values, i.e. nation, sovereignty, patriotism, love of the homeland, honour, heroism. The third paper was presented by Dr Urszula Okulska (University of Warsaw), who discussed the issue of volunteering that flourished in the face of the tragedy of the war in Ukraine. The paper referred to the linguistic level in order to show emotions, ethical obligations and duty as factors influencing individuals who undertake heroic help for the victims. The fourth paper was presented by Dr Dorin-Mircea Dobra (Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca), who described the question of secularism and faith. The panellist began his presentation by clarifying terminology – secularism and laicism. The former term refers to the transition from a religious to a more ‘earthly’ level, while the latter refers to politics and the principle of opposition to clericalism and the limitation of political influence and power to secular individuals. Laicism can thus be presented as secular control of political and social institutions. He also cited the case of his home country, Romania, where churches are being closed. In his presentation, the speaker referred to the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI, pointing out that today everyone refers to so-called values, frequently without knowing their origin (often Christian). The final speaker was Dr Grzegorz Blicharz (Jagiellonian University), who discussed the relationship between global law and Christianity. The panelist began the presentation of his paper by asking whether Christianity should support the idea of global law. Dr Blicharz emphasized that this law should be considered on three levels: individual, state and society.

Three other parallel panels also took place during this time. The first, on '*Religion and Politics – Case Studies, Part 1*', was moderated by Dr Urszula Góral (UKSW), and the second, on '*Religion and Fraternity*', was moderated by Dr Anna Solarz (University of Warsaw). The panel on '*Religion and Politics – Theoretical Issues, Part 1*' was moderated by Prof UKSW Paweł Kaczorowski, and papers were presented by four guests. Prof Krzysztof Gładkowski (University of Warmia and Mazury) introduced the audience to the perspective on war held by the Protestant Pietist current. This faction of Lutheranism, which originated in German-speaking areas, was most prominent in the 17th and 18th centuries. The speaker also showed the influence of Pietism on later Protestant movements in Silesia, such as the Bohemian Brethren. The next paper, by Dr Tomasz Herbich (University of Warsaw), focused on the thought of August Cieszkowski. The messianic character of the view of Poland's role in the world, present *inter alia* in the literature of Romanticism, was not unaffected by the political and social thought of Polish thinkers of the 19th century. Professor Rafał Prostek of the Cracow University of Economics showed how the current legal and political dispute over the ban on face coverings in public places is being shaped. On the one hand, it is a question of religious freedom, on the other, it can be linked to the lack of assimilation and the active presence of the individual in the public social space. Jan Wudkowski, MA (UKSW), was the final speaker on the panel. He demonstrated that terms that are usually absent from the social sciences but used in other fields, such as commodification and quantification, can be applied to the social sciences. The speaker showed that the commodification of certain social phenomena can be exploited by politicians or institutions.

The second day of the conference opened with a panel entitled '*Religion and Politics – Theoretical Issues, Part 2*'. The panel, which was held in English, was moderated by Prof Anna Skolimowska (UKSW). The first speaker was Prof Giorgi Pareshishvili from the Caucasus International University. He presented the role of religion in contemporary political processes, using Islam as an example. This religion, which is also present in the Caucasus, is heterogeneous and takes different forms due to its various branches. As the speaker pointed out, its fundamentalist wing claims the right to influence all spheres of life, including politics, through jihad, the fatwa, or the caliphate. Wiktor Mikosza (University of Warsaw) spoke next. He presented a conservative discourse on the common good in the world of the post-liberal order, using contemporary theorists such as Adrian Vermeule, Patrick Deneen, Gladden Pappin and Chad Pecknold as examples. The next presentation, by Professor Agnieszka Nogal (University of Warsaw), focused

on a vision of practical rationality as a source of protection for the dignity of the human person. The author traced the evolution of this concept through the centuries, from Aristotle to St Thomas Aquinas to the more contemporary figures of Martha Nussbaum and John Finnis. Dr Michał Kuź, of Lazarski University and the Institute *De Republica*, drew attention to the connection between the thought of Eric Voegelin and the exponent of legal positivism, Hans Kelsen. Dr Ihab Shabana from the University of the Peloponnese was the last speaker on the panel. His presentation focused on the interpenetration of the religious and political spheres in the Arab world, using the comparative example of Egypt and Tunisia. The interrelationship between these two spheres has recently come to the fore as a result of the Arab Spring. The speaker highlighted and analysed two groups: the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Tunisian Ennahda, which represent strongly Islamist political organizations in the region.

The second of the parallel panels of the second day of the conference (in English), *'Religion and Politics – Case Studies, Part 2'*, was chaired by Dr Piotr Sieniawski (UKSW). The first speaker was Dr Alar Kilp (University of Tartu), who discussed the question of religion and war and the relationship between the two. In his paper, the panellist briefly listed the causes of the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. In conclusion, Dr Kilp showed the audience the influence that the Russian Orthodoxy is subject to on the territory of wartime Ukraine and the Baltic States. The second paper was presented by Dr Przemysław Pazik (University of Warsaw), who dealt with the question of the Church in the period after the Second World War. In his paper, the panellist recalled two important historical figures – Giuseppe Dossetti and Stanisław Stomma. The third paper was presented by David Bruna (University of Hamburg), who examined the influence of religion on the institutional development of welfare states in the Scandinavian region. He discussed the example of Finland and its churches. The last two papers of this panel, by Rev. Dr Tadeusz Jarosz (University of La Salette, Philippines) and Żaklina Dworska (University of Zielona Góra), deserve special attention. Rev. Dr Tadeusz Jarosz's paper dealt with the issue of the institutional image, legitimacy and religious aid organizations. He based his research on two examples – the Alfagems High School and the Jordan University College – which illustrate two sociological approaches to the institutional image of schools. The final paper was presented by Żaklina Dworska, who discussed the activities of feminist movements in Muslim countries – Morocco and Indonesia. The panellist used the example of the Musawah movement, which seeks to present Islam as an open religion and one that promotes gender equality. The movement's activities are considered

controversial by local authorities. The panellist concluded by highlighting the successes of the Musawah movement – in Morocco, the law on the minimum age for marriage for both sexes has been changed, and in Indonesia, domestic violence has begun to be criminalized.

The last scheduled plenary panel (in English) dealt with the theory of the ‘Great Reset’. This part of the programme was moderated by Professor Jane Adolphe of the Ave Maria School of Law in the United States. Prof Adolphe spoke first and briefly discussed the issue of the so-called ‘great reset’ and its relationship with international organizations and non-profit foundations such as the World Economic Forum in Davos. An introductory lecture entitled ‘*The Philosophy of the Great Reset*’ was given by Prof Iain Benson of the University of Notre Dame, Australia. Prof Benson began by explaining the concepts of globalization and decolonization, followed by an analysis of Klaus Schwab’s book *COVID-19: The Great Reset*. The speaker demonstrated that Klaus Schwab’s vision of a post-pandemic world cannot function properly and stated that subsidiarity is at odds with global governance. Dr Fulvio Di Blasi and Dr Stefano Gennarini commented on the presentation. The former drew attention to the position of the pharmaceutical companies involved in the production of COVID-19 vaccines and the fact that the results of their research are being withheld. He also pointed out that, during the coronavirus pandemic, the European Medicines Agency had duplicated the activities of the US Food and Drug Administration (the government agency responsible for controlling both food and medicinal products). Dr Gennarini then introduced the audience to the issue of the evolution of the United Nations system and its powers, which extend into the national political space, stressing that the power of the UN is not at all political or legal, but bureaucratic. The panellist pointed out that the coronavirus pandemic made global governance possible, and that the ‘Great Reset’ is no longer an example of a conspiracy theory, but an ongoing project aimed at transferring power to international institutions and undermining sovereignty and self-government at the national level.

At the end of the conference, the Chairman of the Organizing Committee, Professor Michał Gierycz, gave a brief summary. He thanked those who had contributed significantly to the organization of this academic conference, including Patrycja Laszuk PhD, Urszula Góral PhD, Mariusz Sulkowski PhD, Piotr Burgoński PhD and Michał Kmiec M.A. He also thanked the International Catholic Jurists Forum and the *De Republica* Institute.