



WYDZIAŁ STUDIÓW
MIEDZYNARODOWYCH
I POLITYCZNYCH

‘Religions and Ideologies,
Polish Perspectives and beyond.’

International Council of Christians and Jews
in cooperation with the
Faculty for International and Political Studies
of the Jagiellonian University Cracow.
2011 Conference, July 3-6.

Welcome by Bishop Tadeusz Rakoczy (English version)
Tuesday July 5
Center for Dialogue and Prayer, Oswiecim

The Bishop of the diocese

B I E L S K O - Z Y W I E C
Bielsko-Biala, 5 July A.D. 2011

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am very pleased that the International Council of Christians and Jews, the Faculty of Political and International Studies of the Jagiellonian University, and the Centre for Holocaust Studies at the Jagiellonian University as the organizers of the annual conference which takes place in Krakow, planned in this rich and very interesting program to have one of its sessions in the Centre for Dialogue and Prayer in Auschwitz.

I regret, however, that because of the medical treatment which I have to undergo, I cannot personally participate in this important and necessary academic and social event. Through my delegate I send you warm greetings, my deepest respect, and assure you of remembrance in my daily prayers.

You are on Polish soil. This land has experienced the occupation and the dictatorship of the Nazis and the Soviets. You are in Oswiecim, where in the camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau were murdered hundreds of thousands of innocent people. Disobedience to God the Creator of life, who said, "Do not kill", resulted at this terrible place in the death of so many innocent lives.

The authorities of the Third Reich wanted to destroy above all the Jewish nation, eliminate it from among the nations of the earth. In reference to this cruel proceeding Pope Benedict XVI said:

“Deep down those vicious criminals, by wiping out this people, wanted to kill the God who called Abraham, who spoke on Sinai and laid down principles to serve as a guide for mankind, principles that are eternally valid...By destroying Israel, by the Shoah, they ultimately wanted to tear up the

taproot of the Christian faith and to replace it with a faith of their own invention: faith in the rule of man, the rule of the powerful" (Auschwitz 2006).

And we should remember what was said here on June 7, 1979 by Blessed John Paul II: "Auschwitz is a place which one ought not just to visit. When visiting Auschwitz one should meditate with fear on the boundaries of hatred. Auschwitz is a testimony of war...The ones who are responsible for war are not only those who cause it directly, but also those who do not do all that is in their power to prevent it."

Both Christianity and Judaism represent systems of thought that the Nazis wanted to destroy. God and natural law are in fact a defense against totalitarianism.

Socialism followed a similar path which even more sharpened the fight with God. They destroyed churches, imprisoned and sentenced believers to death. The ideology of evil began to reach previously unimaginable proportions. Since man himself, without God, can decide about what is good and what is bad, he can also act against humanity.

Today, years after the war, we should ask whether in the modern world there is still a place for ideologies? Ideology is a man's fidelity to certain ideas, theses, curricula, which are the result of ontological and cognitive presumptions. In this sense, Judaism and Christianity are not ideologies, because they are based on faith in a personal God, rely on trust and fidelity to this god. Not every ideology is to be condemned. Ideologies that disseminate objective values of truth, goodness and beauty, are worthy of recognition.

Ideologies, in many cases turn out to be also utopian. Is today, a time of crisis of ideology, a possible return of insane ideology? It is still possible, if we do not return to the religious view of man overcoming human selfishness, referring to transcendent values, to the human conscience, to the concept of integral personal development through work on oneself and participation in community life, to self-limiting freedom, and finally to pro-existence (existence for others) expressing creativity for others and social service.

The best remedy for consideration in the event of the return of bad ideology should be dialogue. It is no accident that the modern concept of dialogue was formed on the basis of Judaism and Christianity. As dialogue allows opposition to bad ideologies, which still are reappearing, and is building a dam against uncontrolled fantasies and temptations, we need it in human history as much as possible. For this reason it is so important what you are doing, meeting and working together, and I want to encourage you to devote more and more attention to promoting dialogue among people. Dialogue is hope for the contemporary world, inevitably globalizing at a very rapid pace.

I would like to wish you in this extremely difficult work many inspirations of the Spirit in your ongoing service to humanity and the world. May the martyrs of Auschwitz St. Maximilian Kolbe and St. Edith Stein support your efforts in favor of respect for human beings, the protection and promotion of their rights, and the building of bridges between people. Let the fruit of these efforts be the longed for peace in the world and a better future for all humanity. To all participants of this meeting I address the old Polish "Szczęść Boże!" - God bless you!

Bishop Tadeusz Rakoczy