

Thinking with St. John Paul II 2021/22 — Foreword

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The dispute over whether St. John Paul II deserves the label “the Great” does not seem difficult to resolve. The sanctity of his life, the depth and width of his teaching, the scale of his pastoral mission, and, finally, the impact he had on the world, leave no doubts that we are dealing here with an extraordinary pontificate.

However, doing justice to the unique meaning of St. John Paul II’s life and thought is only the beginning of the road. After all, we are talking about a work that is not, and should not become, closed – but one which is instead a calling. The question of what happens with his heritage is in an obvious way directed at us, at the generations formed by St. John Paul II, at the people upon whom, to a great degree, the continuation of his work depends. What should we do to make sure we do not waste this heritage?

More research is definitely needed to better understand what St. John Paul II wrote and what he did. Taking into account the immensity of his achievements we can confidently assume that research about this pontificate has only started. But the life and thought of Karol Wojtyła are much too serious a matter to leave only to historians. We need St. John Paul II not only as an object of research but also as a witness to Christ, as a thinker, artist, spiritual guide, an expert on (and critic of) modernity, an adviser, and, finally, a still-living source of ever-relevant inspiration.

This is why when, on 18 May 2020, we founded the St. John Paul II Institute of Culture within the Faculty of Philosophy at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) on the 100th anniversary of John Paul II’s birth, it was our goal to create a living center of reflection upon the most important problems of the contemporary Church and the world – a place where we will not only think about St. John Paul II but also *with* him.

The Angelicum – a world-renowned university whose roots reach all the way back to the *studium conventuale* led by Thomas Aquinas, where the young Karol Wojtyła wrote his doctorate, today a place where young people from close to a 100 countries study – seemed like the natural place for taking up deep and serious reflection inspired by the teaching of John Paul II. A year after opening the St. John Paul II Institute of Culture we were able to announce a one-year, interdisciplinary program – the JP2 Studies, within which we invite students to the Angelicum to join seminars and lectures in the academic year 2021-2022.

I am honored to present you with a collection of ten lectures from the JP2 Lectures series that were delivered in the first year of the Roman St. John Paul II Institute of Culture. We invite the most outstanding thinkers in our time who are in dialogue with the thought of St. John Paul II to take part in this cycle of lectures. They reflect upon both what is intriguing and living in his thought, as well as what is particularly important, beautiful, and difficult today in the contemporary Church and the world.

I would like to express my gratitude to the outstanding thinkers who made their contributions to this tome. I hope that the wonderful texts collected here illustrate the idea of our plan for this lecture series in the future. The JP2 Lectures were inaugurated by the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, who lectured on Christian reflection upon contemporary culture; there is also the penetrating study of John Paul II's ethics by Professor John Finnis (University of Oxford/University of Notre Dame); followed by Bishop Rowan Williams's (University of Cambridge/University of South Wales) essay about faith in the modern Areopagus, taking its inspiration from St. Paul's visit to Athens; Professor Marek Cichocki's (Collegium Civitas in Warsaw) lecture is on the spiritual geography of Europe; Professor John Cavadini's (University of Notre Dame) lecture is on St. John Paul II, the Second Vatican Council, and the crisis of modernity; the chapter by Professor François Daguet, O.P. (Institut Catholique de Toulouse) covers the history of

Christian theology from St. Thomas Aquinas to Benedict XVI; Professor Chantal Delsol's (Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée) reflection deals with the end of the Christian world; Professor Rémi Brague's (Sorbonne/Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) lecture is on the meaning of art in Christianity and beyond; Professor Renato Cristin's (Università di Trieste) lecture is on the competing conceptions of European identity; and finally, last but not least, Professor Dariusz Gawin's (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences) lecture is on the meaning of the Polish "Solidarity" movement (1980-1981). These are not only outstanding texts but they also present extremely important aspects of an entire spectrum of topics that we would like to tackle in the future JP2 Lectures cycles.

In closing, I would like to sincerely thank the authorities of the Angelicum for their great kindness with which the initiative of establishing the St. John Paul II Institute of Culture was met and the support they provide in its daily operation. I especially direct my gratitude to the Rector of the Angelicum in the years 2017-2021, Professor Michał Paluch, O.P., to the current Rector Professor Thomas Joseph White, O.P., to the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy Professor Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., and the first Director of the Institute, Professor Ryszard Rybka, O.P., as well as to the many other professors and employees of the Angelicum who helped the Institute get off the ground. From among the latter I should mention the Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Professor Catherine Joseph Droste, O.P., the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Professor Alejandro Crosthwaite, O.P., as well as Benedict Croell, O.P., who deserves special thanks for his unflagging and indispensable support.

I also extend my deep thanks to the priests who agreed to join me in hosting the consecutive, monthly JP2 Lectures during the academic year 2020-2021 and in conducting the discussions that accompanied them. I thank the Professors: Hyacinthe Destivelle, O.P.,

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