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Recension of The Doctoral Dissertation of Mr. Piotr Józef Kubasiak

In response to the convocation of the Dean of the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Vienna, I present my opinion on the doctoral dissertation written by Mr. Piotr Józef Kubasiak which is entitled *Zwischen Existentialismus und Politik. Europa und Geschichte im Denken von Krzysztof Michalski* and is elaborated under the direction of the University's Professor Dr. Kurt Appel.

The dissertation contains 264 pages and is subdivided into four chapters; the text is accompanied by an introduction, a conclusion and a bibliography. From a formal perspective, it is very well structured, crafted and written with accordance to methodological principles of theological dissertation. Mr. Kubasiak uses very clear language which makes his arguments transparent and quite easily readable. From the perspective of knowledge of primary and secondary literature, Mr. Kubasiak proves his expertise in Michalski's studies. The citations are done properly.

The work has a precise subject and a research problem, to which the author remains faithful from its beginning to the very end. It is the thought of a Polish philosopher, co-founder of the Vienna *Institute für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen* and lecturer at the University of Warsaw, and Boston. Mr. Kubasiak sets forth a three-fold research goal in the field of such a specific topic: first and foremost, it is a general introduction to Michalski's thought, then secondly, a presentation of his concept of the intellectual unity of Europe, and finally an attempt to find elements of fundamental theology in his philosophical achievements. It is this last goal that seems to be the most creative moment and ambition of the entire dissertation. The author also here goes beyond the mere presentation of Michalski's thought and attempts to read his philosophy in light of the tasks that contemporary fundamental theology set before itself.

In this respect, the dissertation deals with one of the most important issues of fundamental theology, which is the relationship and dialogue between theology and philosophy. Mr.



Kubasiak is aware of this. His text proves a good knowledge of methodological problems related to such interdisciplinary dialogue. The closeness and interpenetration of the temples of both disciplines cannot lead to the inclusion of differences between them, both in the method and in respective problematic.

For this reason, after presenting Michalski's biography, Mr. Kubasiak delves into the meanderings of the philosophical system he left. The author of the treatise goes through various stages of Michalski's studies and works, starting with his encounter with the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and Jan Patočka. In fact, the thought of the author of *Sein und Zeit*, exerted a huge mark on Michalski's thinking. It is to Heidegger that Michalski dedicated his early writings, including one of the first introductions to Heidegger's thought in the Polish language. In this trend, the Czech phenomenologist Patočka, with whom Michalski corresponded, had a great influence on the interpretation of Heidegger by Michalski. Mr. Kubasiak's dissertation – to its important merit – contains numerous references to this exchange of letters. Nonetheless, what interests Mr. Kubasiak the most in Michalski's philosophical development, is Nietzsche's existentialism. The interest in Nietzsche is, in the author's opinion, the second and the most important point in the intellectual biography of Michalski which happened to be decisive in the last period of Michalski's work. The intellectual meeting with Nietzsche stems from two interrelated and long-lasting interests of Michalski: his research on time and an attempt to understand Christianity. Michalski, from the very beginning of his philosophical activity, makes many approaches to the phenomenon of transience and time. These issues intrigue him both intellectually and existentially. He finds in Nietzsche a thinker who, in his theory of eternal return with his specific existentialism and passion, identifies time as one of the basic dimensions that makes up human life. The philosopher of the will to power turns out, paradoxically, to be the source of Michalski's thinking about Christianity. Known as one of its most intense critics, he proposes a vision of the renewal of this religion in the spirit of returning to its existential roots. In his reading of the theological threads of Nietzsche, Michalski introduces him into a virtual dialogue with Saint Paul. Let us add only that the reading Michalski gives Nietzsche seems to many to be an abuse and misreading of the original enterprise of the author of *Joyful Knowledge*. However, this does not make the project contained in *The Flame of Eternity*, which Michalski dedicates to Nietzsche, to lose its value. Its significance becomes visible in the framework and space put forward by Mr. Kubasiak's theses: Michalski is a more independent thinker than an historian of ideas, and the core of his research results from existentially understood theological and religious interests.

Mr. Kubasiak's interpretation underscores these moments in Michalski's Nietzscheanism, which exposes criticism of a religious experience and language, including theology. In this



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way, the author of the dissertation prepares a compact project for the renewal of theology. Mr. Kubasiak emphasizes Michalski's intuitions about dying, death, time, and resurrection, which can contribute to the elaboration of a new interpretation scheme of the fundamental truths of faith. Michalski's philosophy becomes, in Mr. Kubasiak's interpretation, a proposal for a deeper, existential understanding of the fundamental dogmas of Christianity. Mr. Kubasiak reads and understands Michalski precisely from a theological perspective, whose rate is not only the dialogue of theology with modern thought, but also a new vision of existential-oriented dogmatics. What is in question here is dogmatic which breaks with its predilection to the professional language of classical metaphysics and speculation, putting on a greater openness to the phenomena of human life in its concreteness. Such a dogmatic would be an extrapolation of Michalski's understanding of philosophy, for which philosophy remains more connected with the question than with the answer. It must be admitted that the genealogical layer of Mr. Kubasiak's work offers a rich and valuable material for the renewal of theology.

After tracing Michalski's sources of thought, Mr. Kubasiak proceeds to a systematic presentation of two thematic blocks that dominate the entire reflection of the Polish philosopher. The first of these is the vision of a united Europe, especially in the perspective of a bilateral dialogue between its East and West. This complicated issue, which consists of a whole range of topics from the borderline of history, sociology, culture, politics and many other areas of life, is a pressing problem for Michalski. In this respect, Mr. Kubasiak shows Michalski as a philosopher thinking in a context, an intellectual who always takes up current problems. At this point, Michalski's biography and education affect each other on both sides. The second issue is the role and place of religion in uniting Europe. Mr. Kubasiak shows that Michalski was aware of the importance of religion in the process of European integration. For obvious reasons, Christianity is a special place in this process. Hence, a large part of the fourth chapter is devoted to the analysis of the relationship between Michalski and Pope John Paul II. Without declaring himself a religious thinker, Michalski participated in the famous meetings at Castel Gandolfo, which he co-organized. From this perspective, Mr. Kubasiak's analysis is devoted to the relationship of Christianity and a secular society, and becomes one of the important dimensions of the theological and fundamental layer of the dissertation. Mr. Kubasiak, with extraordinary delicacy, makes a calm extraction of "political theology" from various works by Michalski, and then subjects it to substantive analysis. Also this part of the work turns out to be interesting and useful for further discussions in the fields of political science, European studies and, above all, fundamental theology.

In general, Mr. Kubasiak has realized all the goals set for himself in a very satisfying way. Although his work closely resembles a literary genre of intellectual biography, it does not cease to be a solid scientific reflection that opens new research fields and provides interesting



material for research in several areas of reflection, from the history of philosophy, through political science to theology.

The theological and fundamental nature of work is visible in all its parts. In this respect, Mr. Kubasiak presents a text that can be used to develop new models of systematic theology: I am referring specifically to the criticism of religious language in the spirit of regained and modified Nietzsche ideas, an interesting project of existential dogmatics as well as important intuitions about political theology. The thought of Michalski, just as Mr. Kubasiak presents it, may become one of the important contribution to rethinking the role of theology in the process of European integration. In view of the current EU crisis this should be accepted as a valuable help in maintaining dialogue.

Critical remarks should be noted on the following:

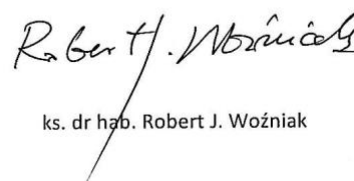
- a. Mr. Kubasiak does not seem to fully appreciate the influence of phenomenology on the development of Michalski's thought; the article devoted to this issue could be more developed, especially if one considers that Michalski remains a phenomenologist, at least in the formal layer of analyzes and descriptions of phenomena. The fact that at the end of his work, Michalski focuses on reading Nietzsche does not mean that he abandons his phenomenological workshop.
- b. A lacuna of Mr. Kubasiak's dissertation is a lack of a description of the place of J. Tischner's project in Michalski's genealogy of thought. It often seems that the views Mr. Kubasiak attributes to Michalski can already be found in Tischner. The relationship of two philosophers is important because, as it is known, both have tied together bonds of friendship and similar philosophical interests. It should be remembered that it is possible that Tischner's publications are probably the source of Michalski's religious thought in the field of the interpretation of the reality of Christianity and its dogmas. Before publication, I would suggest the author to add some pages about this relationship, developed of course from the substantive perspective.
- c. Mr. Kubasiak presents Michalski as a skeptical philosopher in reference to the great meta-narratives of the type of classical metaphysics. At the same time, he tries to recreate the contours of some organic vision of philosophy, which seems to contain some form of metaphysics or some basic vision of the world. In face of this, a question must be asked about the importance of Michalski's reluctance to use the metaphysical language of religion and theology. The dissertation would have gained even more if its author tried to face systematically the problem of whether Michalski actually managed to overcome metaphysics.



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In summary, Mr. Kubasiak's work is extremely relevant to theology and the Church, it is both of a high academic level and existential at the same time. Despite my mentioned critique, I am enthusiastic about his dissertation, which fulfils all exigencies set before works of such type. It is well worth to be accepted and honored as a doctoral dissertation and then published in its entirety. Therefore, I am asking the departmental authorities to admit Mr. Kubasiak to the next stages of the doctoral procedures in accordance with applicable law.


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