

Msgr. Prof. Robert Tyrała PhD Habilitatus
Rector of UPJPII

Opening speech at the international scientific conference: *Threats to Democracy – Populism, Nationalism, Extremism, Response of Christianity*.
Cracow, 1 December 2022

The Very Reverend Professor,
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Our Partners from the University of Tbilisi and the
University of Erfurt,
Dear Speakers and Listeners of this international symposium

I am delighted that despite many obstacles this international event is finally taking place. I would like to congratulate to Fr. Professor Maciej Ostrowski for his outstanding dedication in this matter. I am also grateful that this conference joins together professors and students from Georgia, Germany, Hungary and Poland. These nine scientific presentations to be given by highly acclaimed international specialists are the proof of how vital is the collaboration on the scientific ground and how important it is for the future of our and other Universities.

I am also extremely glad that apart from the scientific debate you will have the opportunity to visit: Wadowice and Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, as you have already seen: the Wawel Cathedral, Kazimierz and the Sanctuaries of St. John Paul II and of the Divine Mercy in Cracow. This programme is nothing surprising if we consider the biography of its organiser – Fr. Maciej Ostrowski who does pastoral work for the tourists in the Karol Wojtyła Cracow Archdiocese at the Cracow Division of the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society and sitting on Board of Migration, Tourism and Pilgrimages of the Polish Episcopal Conference. It was perhaps his experience, since the age of five, of daily walking tours around the countryside of Jeleśnia under the guidance of his father which must have evoked his deep love of nature and which in later life was translated into the ways of preaching the Gospel and conveying the perception of nature as a means of getting to and discovering God (cf. Cann. 31-44).

You are about to address today a tremendously important and extremely grave subject – *Threats to democracy – populism, nationalism, extremism and the response of Christianity*. I deem this subject highly relevant and I think that we should all give it a lot of consideration. We are currently witnessing the war, and it is not only the war in Ukraine, but also in the whole Europe and even in the whole world. It is the evil which affects us all, especially our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, but we are also very much involved.

In his encyclic „Frateli tutti” His Holiness Pope Francis referred to his address to Sant’Edigio Community in 2013 when he said: ***the commandment of peace is inscribed in the depth of the religious traditions we represent. [...] Religious leaders, we are called to be “in dialogue”, to act for the construction of peace not as middlemen, but as authentic mediators. Middlemen offer discounts to all parties, in order to attain a profit for themselves. Mediators, on the contrary, keep nothing for themselves, but spend themselves generously, until they consume themselves, knowing there is only one profit, which is peace. Each of us is called to be an artisan of peace, joining and not dividing, extinguishing hatred and not preserving it, opening up paths of dialogue and not raising new walls!*** (FT 284).

I think the above words best finish my speech and initiate at the same time your discussion, for we are and we are supposed to be the constructors of peace, to serve the idea of unity, to open the ways for dialogues. This is what I fervently wish to you and to myself. Thank you for the attention and may you have a really fruitful debate.

