

A SUMMARY OF CEU'S SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAMME ON POLITICAL THEOLOGY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

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The summer course organised by the Central European University focused on a neglected topic in the history of Late Antiquity: the struggle between Church and Empire or, in other words, the sacred and the secular. The programme's director, Professor György Geréby from the Department of Medieval Studies of the Central European University invited the most prominent scholars of the given topic, including the Constantine-expert Mark Edwards from the University of Oxford and Michael Hollerich, who is famous for his research on Eusebius. The course took place between 22–31 July and due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the lessons were online. This enabled students from all over the world to participate but, on the other hand, the free time activities like visiting Aquincum or the Early Christian cemeteries of Pécs unfortunately could not be carried out.

The ten-day summer school examined the interrelation of the political and ecclesiastical theories from the first century AD until the reign of emperor Julian. Each lecture examined this topic from a different perspective enabling participants to gain a deeper insight into the conflicts and their solutions regarding the relation between Church and secular power. The lectures focused on the following main questions: 1) What reasons lay behind the conflicts? 2) How did the juridical system of the Roman Empire change after Constantine's reign? 3) How did Christianity become from a persecuted community the privileged religion of the Empire? 4) What were the motivating factors behind this shift? 5) How did this affect Christian attitudes towards secular policy?

On each day, participants were able to listen to four lectures held by the professors, then in the afternoon students had the opportunity to discuss their questions based on the previously read literature and the topic of the given lecture. These seminars were moderated by the faculty thanks to which very interesting conversations emerged. In the following passages the author of this article will summarise each lecture's main theme.

György Geréby (CEU) held a general introduction on the research history of Christian political theory with an emphasis on Carl Schmitt's core assumptions. According to Schmitt, the structure of legal order maintains a society, while disorder brings chaos and anarchy. Legal order or a political system as a metaphysical structure requires transcendental legitimacy. These ideas about political theology prompted further discussions concerning the hellenistic background of Judeo-Christian political theology through the questions of the legitimacy of laws,¹ the legitimacy of the Empire,² the legitimacy of the emperor,³ and finally the metaphysical legitimation of the monarchy or, in other words, the question of Hellenistic imperial ideology.⁴

The second lecturer was Mark Edwards (University of Oxford), who gave a detailed historical presentation on Constantine's life and activity and highlighted the dichotomic character of the emperor's rule. The emperor personally was a Christian but did not wish to force his belief on the people of the Empire: he even supported those pagan cults that did not threaten Christianity – the religions that were not “superstitious” – as he was ruling over a non-Christian empire.

Michael Hollerich (University of Saint Thomas [Saint Paul, Minnesota]) gave an interesting lecture on Eusebius and his *Church History*. Besides presenting the Church Father's life and activity, the Professor highlighted Eusebius's central role in all discussions of Early Christian political theology. According to Dr. Hollerich, four aspects must be taken into consideration to determine Eusebius's theo-political vision: 1) the Bible, seen as a divinely revealed decoding key to history as the *oikonomia* of the Logos, 2) the metaphysics of Origen and the Platonic tradition, 3) a historically-based anti-Jewish apologetic well-suited for a Christian church in a liminal state, 4) the conception of sacred kingship.

Volker Menze (CEU) gave a comprehensive lecture on the ecclesiologies of the sixth century. In his discussion of the ecumenical councils, he emphasized the historical and political significance of these events. Connected to this topic, he also spoke about the important role that the emperors played in the life of the church. Claudia Rapp (University of Vienna) compared and discussed the interrelation between ideals of leadership in paganism and in Christianity. The three questions along which the topic unfolded were the following: 1) Is the position of authority given by God or by appointed people? 2) Is the leader an imitator of God or a representative of their people? 3) Are personal virtues a precondition for becoming a leader or are

¹ Examples: 1) God or man is the source and the originator of laws? 2) What is legislation based on?
3) Who promulgates or withdraws laws?

² Example: the analogy between the Empire and the cosmic/divine realm.

³ Example: the rule of the many leads to disorder, so one man must be supreme (Homer, Aristotle, Cicero).

⁴ Example: in Hellenistic Judaism, polity is based on the sovereignty of God.

they irrelevant when the leader imitates God? Andra Juganaru (University of Thessaloniki) – who was also the coordinator of the summer course – gave a fascinating lecture on how the important political role of the monastic movement affected Early Christianity. In her presentation, Juganaru analyzed source texts in support of this statement. One of the most illustrative examples she mentioned was the case of the Egyptian Nitrian monks, who – according to ecclesiastical works – were ‘hirelings’ of the contemporary Alexandrian patriarchs and who (e.g. Cyril of Alexandria) determined the outcome of several political events (e.g. the murder of Hypatia).

Marco Rizzi (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan) spoke about Christian exegesis and political theology from the second to the fifth century with an emphasis on the works of Origen and Augustine and their ideas on free will. Paweł Figurski (Polish Academy of Sciences) spoke about the political liturgies of the Early Church from its formation to Justinian, while Ecaterina Lung (University of Bucharest) presented historical works as sources for the study of political ideas in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium.

I recommend for those interested to follow the website of CEU’s summer school⁵ because the organisers promised that they would continue to set up further courses on the topic of political theology.

⁵ summeruniversity.ceu.edu