

# **RITUALS OF THE HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY KINGDOMS**

## **THE SACRED, SECULAR, AND SACRAMENTAL POWERS**

### **IN PREMODERN EUROPE**

Keynote Speakers: **Gerd Althoff**  
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Organizers: **Royal Castle in Warsaw, Poland**  
**Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences**  
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Before the dawn of Modernity, premodern Europe was “Christendom”, a society in which there was no sharp demarcation between theology and politics, ecclesial and civic institutions, worship of God and loyalty to one’s ruler or people. However, in the early modern period, European intellectuals began to espouse novel linguistic categories that effectively built a wall between religion and politics. In speaking of ‘society’ and ‘religion’ as distinct, abstract entities, these thinkers opened up space for ‘migrations of the holy’ from the realm of the Church to that of the state, resulting in the sacralization of the latter.

This grand narrative of Christendom represented by John Bossy is quite similar to other prominent concepts that were used by the following scholars to describe the history of premodern Europe:

- Henri-Xavier Arquillière (*political augustinianism*),
- Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz (*political theology*),
- John Howard Yoder (*Constantinism*),
- Robert Austin Markus (*de-secularization*).

In light of more recent scholarship, however, these concepts need to be reconsidered. Scholars no longer describe the history of premodern Europe using a linear, unilateral narrative; for instance, they no longer assess the Constantinian shift as a radical break with the Christian past or see the Gregorian Reform as the radical movement of disenchantment that brought about the apparently secular age of today. Instead, contemporary scholarship has begun to take notice of the often contrary but parallel tendencies of secularization, christianization and sacralization operating simultaneously within the same intellectual networks and periods. This recognition calls for an even deeper reassessment of the view that there was, indeed, a European Christendom in which the secular, the sacramental, and the sacred were neither practically nor intellectually distinguished from each other.

The central goal of this conference is, therefore, to begin to more accurately describe the relationship between the 'secular', 'sacred', and 'sacramental' as evinced by the historical phenomena, and from there to build a richer conceptual framework for describing all of these categories and their interplay in premodern Europe. By proposing the concept of the 'sacramental', this conference aims to complement the recently revived debate on premodern theologies of the political ([University of Cambridge 2018](#) and [University of British Columbia 2019](#)).

Moreover, recent discussion of premodern theologies of the political has focused predominantly on the most well known works (i.e., those of Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bede the Venerable, and so forth), or on the influence of these key texts on other, lesser known sources, (i.e. Carolingian exegesis of Scripture). And, while such scholarship has presented serious challenges to the previous linear conceptualizations, it nevertheless has perceived these theologies as primarily the product of individual thinkers, without accounting for ways in which they may have been shaped and even embodied by the worship practices of the Churches.

Therefore, this conference also aims to contribute to the ongoing debate an additional perspective; namely, that rituals (ecclesiastical liturgies and the symbolic actions of civic powers) were important influences defining and propagating the theologies of the political witnessed in the most well known works. We would like to analyze to what extent the rituals of the Churches and civic powers, mediated through texts, may have shaped theological-political ideas in premodern Europe, and conversely, how theologies of the political influenced the performed liturgies of the Churches and of civic powers.

The specific issues that we would like to discuss concern, but are not limited to:

- the conceptual and practical distinctions between the sacred, the secular, and the sacramental in premodern Europe;
- the representations of the secular, the sacred, and the sacramental in political and religious rituals of premodern Europe;
- the mutual influences between political rituals and ecclesiastical liturgies in regard to their origins and performances from Late Antiquity to the dawn of Modernity;
- the impact of ecclesiastical liturgies on framing theologies of the political in premodern Europe;
- the theologies of the political practiced in rituals of civic powers and of liturgies;
- the relationship between premodern and contemporary conceptualizations of the secular, the sacred, and the sacramental;
- paradigms of writing a theological-political history of premodern Europe in modern historiography in regard to the rituals.

We invite scholars from different fields, methodological backgrounds, institutions, and research traditions to deliver a paper (not exceeding 20 minutes) at our conference. An abstract (between 300 and 500 words) and short biography should be sent to Paweł Figurski, Ph.D. ([psalm.network@gmail.com](mailto:psalm.network@gmail.com)) by July 15, 2019.