

Krzysztof Zanussi stirs thought at Poland in the Rockies

A well-dressed, distinguished man sits jet-lagged through his welcoming in a conference room at the Canmore Nordic Centre, Alberta, preparing for a panel discussion and, later the same evening, a public session directed at the participants of Poland in the Rockies. Discussion commences and Professor Krzysztof Zanussi, along with Polish Minister of Culture Malgorzata Dzieduszycka and Prof. Tamara Trojanowska from the University of Toronto, analyze Poland's ecclesiastical enigma, Pope John Paul II. "Why is this pope such a bad pope, as some say?" Zanussi challenges the audience, before answering, "because he's such a destabilizer."

Zanussi speaks in defence of the Catholic figurehead, explaining in-depth the socio-political situation in which Karol Wojtyla came to the head of the Church in 1981. War, according to Zanussi, is a natural human situation. In the last sixty years however, there was no war and present-day Europe is unwilling to fight because of the material goods she possesses. The pope is trying to bring back faith and tradition, and that makes him a destabilizing force in a society held together by the shoe-strings of consumerism.

"The pope is bad if you think change is bad. Luke-warm faith is nothing. Hot can burn, but it is the only way," cautions Zanussi.

Zanussi likes him because Karol Wojtyla is an actor, a playwright and philosopher at

heart. Meanwhile, he has a sense of humour in line with Zanussi's. The director once brought a group of break-dancers to perform for the pope at the Vatican, hoping to bring popular culture of the street together with high culture of the church. The pope was quite amused, the story goes. 'The panel discussion sways, a tension between politics and religion surfaces, and Zanussi finds himself opposed to a few politicised conference participants. A heated debate is followed by yet more controversial questions, same-sex marriage included, and an apparent divergence in views polarizes the room.

The air calms slightly as the topic turns to the state of culture in Poland today, and the search of Polish identity.

"There is a new wave of playwrights trying to grasp the culture of today," starts Trojanowska, "There is much more diversity—a different approach to the audience."

Zanussi differs in opinion. "Culture is not as lively as it was before. I'm not very happy with what's going on today," he states, adding, "there is a wave of new filmmakers, but they are totally suffocated by the American market. We made mistakes—we have no cultural administration, that's our big problem."

The setting changes a few hours later and Zanussi speaks of changes in Polish consciousness after the fall of communism in 1989, while a filled auditorium of partici-

pants and mostly Polish public listen attentively. He presents the subject in a series' of juxtaposing interpretations of the state of human relations..

"We are living in a society that is totally split," starts Zanussi, "the victims and persecutors live together."

He goes on, however, to admit that nothing is as simple as black and white, victim or prosecutor—he touches on the contradictory feelings attached to contradictory personalities, as reflected by art. "Our protagonists are confusing, we love and hate the same things about them. For example, the fact that we [Poles] think that the world owes us something is thought very naive but, at the same time, we feel it right to accentuate that it's not all our fault. The fact that Zanussi is of the attitude that sometimes forgiveness is a sign of laziness while, in the same breath, he disapprovingly states that the tragic thinking of tragedy is still present, represents in itself the confusing complexity that is the Polish post-Cold War identity.

Poland is in a state of transition, emerging from oppressing security and into freedom without direction. Zanussi offers



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some understanding of the difficult paradox that is the changing Polish nation, and also a positive notion of what is yet to come. "Our country is very wild now, very primitive and aggressive," he concludes, adding, "but we finally lost that illusion that we are a chosen nation—it's very refreshing. There is something today that is evolving. In Poland, there is far more human initiative left."

Karoline Czernski