

Newt Gingrich examines John Paul II's role in fall of Communism in new movie

Washington D.C., Sep 30, 2009 / 06:03 am (CNA).- Former Speaker of the U.S. House Newt Gingrich, a recent convert to Catholicism, is producing a forthcoming documentary about Pope John Paul II's first return visit to Poland in June 1979. Titled "Nine Days that Change the World," the film explores the impact of the visit on the collapse of Communism.

The film's website says that the Polish trade union movement "languished" before June of 1979. Following the visit of Pope John Paul II and the 1980 Gdansk shipyard strike, the Solidarity movement became the first officially recognized free trade union in the Communist bloc and had over 10 million members.

Nine Days that Changed the World seeks to examine what happened during John Paul II's nine-day visit, why millions of Poles came to see the Pope and what made John Paul II's visit such a "liberating moment."

The story of Pope John Paul II's role in the overthrow of Communism, in Gingrich's view, will show that our true humanity is found "only in a relationship with God."

"I hope people will see the film and think about their relationship to Christ and the importance of courage," Gingrich added, speaking to Deal Hudson of InsideCatholic.com.

Gingrich says he hopes the film, co-produced by his wife Callista, will be an "evangelical vehicle" to counter the "secularist moment" in U.S. culture.

In the former politician's view, the United States is "heir to a Scottish and English Enlightenment that did not reject God, unlike the atheism of the French Revolution."

"In the face of the secularist threat," Gingrich mused, "along with that of militant Islam, endurance is what really matters."

Telling Hudson of his conversion, Gingrich said his wife did not push her faith on him but witnessed to it through her example.

"It was clear it meant a great deal to her," he said, telling how he went to Mass with her at Washington's basilica and wherever they traveled.

Gingrich said his wife "created an environment where I could gradually think and evolve on the issue of faith."

Reading and conversations with friends advanced his understanding until the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United States. Callista's choir was to sing vespers for the Pope, allowing Gingrich to see him up close.

He said it was clear Pope Benedict was "having the time of his life."

"[T]he joy in his eyes belied his reputation as an austere German," Gingrich told Hudson. "As he walked past me, I knew I wanted to become a Catholic."

"I knew that I belonged here." "No --as a Catholic, I should put it: Here is where I belong."

Nine Days that Changed the World is scheduled to be released in Fall of 2009. The website for the film is <http://www.ninedaysthatchangedtheworld.com/>.