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## The Ethics of Solidarity According to Józef Tischner

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## The Ethics of Solidarity According to Józef Tischner

**Abstract:** At the brink of the decade of the great system breakthrough, which led to the fall of communism in Central Europe, Polish philosopher, theologian, and ethicist Józef Tischner published a series of essays that included the project of social ethics. It was a clear and concrete project, which was deliberately adjusted to the difficult times of hard political fight and conflict of values, addressed to all good people, regardless of their outlook and political affiliation. Tischner put emphasis, first and foremost, on pro-social values, such as solidarity, mutual support, respect toward people with contrary opinions, aiming at unity in society and harmony over divisions, based on the axiological foundation. The author of the text contemplates the question to what extent was Tischner's ethics of solidarity introduced in the practice of Polish social life directly after its announcement and to what extent its postulates remain timely and inspiring today, in an essentially new social and political situation.

**Keywords:** ethics, solidarity, phenomenological analysis, moral maturity, dialog

Till the last months of his life Józef Tischner<sup>1</sup> was a clever, competent, and engaged observer of the events happening on the Polish public life scene. Already at the beginning of his philosophical life, he made a deliberate decision to become a “narrow and obtuse philosopher of Sarmatians,”<sup>2</sup> and he remained faithful to this choice despite the fact he had all what was needed to pursue an international career. However, the affairs of his fatherland were closer and more important to him than any personal ambitions.

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<sup>1</sup> Józef Tischner, a Polish philosopher and theologian, born in Stary Sącz on March 12th, 1931, died after a serious illness on June 28th, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Józef Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości* (Kraków: Znak, 1982), 11.

It is safe to say that fortune was propitious for him, since he was allowed to live in an exceptionally interesting (however, not easy) moment in the history of Poland. As a child he survived war and the period of occupation; years spent in theological seminary and the beginning of his priestly service fell on the period of Stalinism in Poland, later he could witness how the society was building successive structures of “nation’s spiritual self-defense.” These were, among others: “small stabilization” during the time when Władysław Gomułka was in power, as well as “socialism with a human face,” implemented in the epoch of Edward Gierek. Finally, the climax arrived: John Paul II’s election to the papacy and the period of Solidarity. For a philosopher, whose passion was to follow spiritual changes taking place in a nation and a society, witnessing how in ultimate situations the “ethical substance of a nation” materializes in the matter of historical events,<sup>3</sup> was not only a significant intellectual challenge, but also enormous satisfaction.

It seems that in that time there was not another person in Poland that would be equally well prepared in that subject matter and equally determined to, literally overnight, approach an analysis of a rapidly changing social and political situation through applying phenomenology and hermeneutics of a historical process. Naturally, Tischner’s analyses bear a stamp of some provisional character on them<sup>4</sup>; however, what constitutes a sensation is the fact that they were published in a close proximity to the described events. And these were events of a substantial gravity. Since, it is crucial to bear in mind that the successive scenes of the political order in Europe had always emerged from a sea of blood. This time, for the first time, it was supposed to be different: a radical change of the global distribution of political forces began and was happening before the eyes of the astounded world, almost without any violence, and these changes began in the early 1980s in Poland. To be a witness and participant of such a historical precedent is a real challenge.

Józef Tischner wrote that every revolutionary change begins with some idea and refers to some order of values.<sup>5</sup> The constituent feature of the ethos of Solidarity, which decided about the peaceful course of the transformation was the fact that it was based on the Gospel interpreted in a specific way—through the prism of John Paul II’s teachings. Tischner recalled: “I was asking myself what

<sup>3</sup> See: Józef Tischner, *Etyka a historia*. Lectures, prep. Dobrosław Kot (Kraków: Instytut Myśli Józefa Tischnera, 2008), 133.

<sup>4</sup> “*The Ethics of Solidarity* was a book created on the spot”—Wojciech Bonowicz concludes (publisher’s note, in: Józef Tischner, *Etyka solidarności i Homo sovieticus* (Kraków: Znak, 2001), 286) and adds: “Writing on the road did not serve well to the very text. In *The Ethics of Solidarity* it is possible to indicate, among astute and strongly resounding fragments, weaker chapters which contain superficial analyses and undeveloped ideas” (Wojciech Bonowicz, *Tischner* (Kraków: Znak, 2001), 332).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Tischner, *Etyka solidarności* (Kraków: Znak, 1981), 57–61.

solidarity was. And I answered: ‘Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of God.’”<sup>6</sup> These words from the Letter of St. Paul to the Galatians (Ga 6:2) he also recalled during his “undoubtedly most famous”<sup>7</sup> sermon delivered in the Wawel Cathedral on October 19, 1980.<sup>8</sup>

The public will to “fulfill God’s law” connected hearts and minds of people who co-authored the ethical exemplars of the Solidarity movement—and it was yet another anomaly: representatives of radically different, so far antagonized groups—rank and file workers and intellectual elite, met and reached an agreement. As their ultimate priority they took avoiding confrontation (then the so-called power play) and aiming at a peaceful achievement of the political and system goals they set for themselves. The representatives of the party/state apparatus, which in the past had not hesitated to use force to quash social revolts (1956, 1970, and 1976) this time (1980) resorted exclusively to several (unsuccessful) attempts of provocation, and subsequently began negotiations with the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee in the Gdańsk Shipyard (and several other places, among others in Szczecin and Jastrzębie), which were concluded by entering into an agreement, which meant far-reaching concession of the apparatus and de facto beginning of the process of system transformation.

The period of yet another, startling test of the moral maturity of the entire nation was the martial law, introduced on December 13, 1981, by the then minister of national defense and the chair of the state defense committee, general Wojciech Jaruzelski. With a different moral attitude than the one which was a fruit of the popularization of the ethics of solidarity in Poland, such a legislatively legitimated act of lawlessness could have triggered a spontaneous reaction of hard, decisive resistance on a much wider scale that it really did (in the Wujek Coal Mine in Katowice, in the School for Fire Service Officers in the Warsaw district of Żoliborz, and in several different places). Such a scenario would be really menacing for the society and at the same time quite probable when we take into consideration the exemplars of the national independence tradition (starting from the Bar Confederation 1768–1772, through the Kościuszko Uprising in 1794 to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944). The fact that it did not happen we owe to—at least to some extent—a high ethical awareness of

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<sup>6</sup> As cited in: Bonowicz, *Tischner*, 329.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> “Let us look at the burden we are carrying. This old and yet new word ‘solidarity,’ what does it mean? To what does it call us? What memories does it recall? If I were to define the word ‘solidarity’ more closely, then perhaps I should turn to the Gospels and look for its origin there. The meaning of this word is defined by Christ, ‘Bear one another’s burdens: and so you shall fulfill the law of God.’ Tischner, *Solidarity of Consciences*. Sermon delivered in the Wawel Cathedral on October 19, 1980, in Tischner, *The Ethics of Solidarity*, trans. Anna Fraś (Kraków: Znak, 2005), 37, [www.tischner.org.pl/Content/Images/tischner\\_3\\_ethics.pdf](http://www.tischner.org.pl/Content/Images/tischner_3_ethics.pdf) (accessed 30.03.2017).

the nation, developed at the beginning of the 1980s, and its active in the public life, and at the same time morally mature, element. A considerable role in this work was played by the pastoral and journalistic activity of Józef Tischner, who in that period of time used to “celebrate solidarity and patriotic Masses (among others on May 3rd in the Wawel Cathedral), consecrate standards, deliver lectures, write numerous articles for newspapers and magazines, and became the informal chaplain of Solidarity,”<sup>9</sup> but, first and foremost, published, in the period from October 1980 till April 1981, subsequent installments of the *Ethics of Solidarity* in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a weekly published in Kraków.

We lack research tools that would allow us to explicitly scientifically evaluate what historical role had the outlook, opinions, and postulates promulgated by Tischner and how extensive was their influence on the formation of Poles’ attitudes towards the momentous, and at the same time dangerous, events that were happening on the political scene. Tischner himself claimed to be only a diagnostician, not a therapist. When interviewed some years later by Anna Karoń, he said: “My texts [...] did not want to design reality but only to describe it. Their goal was not to show what should be, they were supposed to describe what is [...] it was an analysis of an ethical substance of self-awareness of man, without going into the social and economic context.”<sup>10</sup> However, the testimony of contemporary people and historical memory explicitly suggest that, contrary to this—overly modest—self-declaration, the real reception of Tischner’s teachings was completely different. Wojciech Bonowicz remarks: “It was not Tischner who suggested that the Solidarity unionists name their union with that word and simultaneously he was most capable of showing the importance of the choice they made.”<sup>11</sup> However, in a different place he states that despite the fact that “Tischner wrote a book, which was to some degree persuasive, aimed at not only the people of Solidarity, but also at those in power, which attempted to oblige both parties to engage in a dialog [this] persuasion to a large degree fell on stony ground, the eventual proof of which was the introduction of the martial law.”<sup>12</sup>

We do not really have to agree with this type of opinion; the more so because we will never get to know the real motivation behind the introduction of the martial law by the state authorities. By relying on the *in dubio pro reo* principle we cannot rule out that general Jaruzelski acted based upon a subjective conviction that in that way he saves Poland from a more substantial evil—for instance from the prospect of a military intervention of the Soviet army. If we adopt such an assumption then we have to presume that also on Jaruzelski’s

<sup>9</sup> Bonowicz, *Tischner*, 336.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Karoń-Ostrowska, Józef Tischner, *Spotkanie. Z ks. Józefem Tischnerem rozmawia Anna Karoń-Ostrowska* (Kraków: Znak, 2008), 99.

<sup>11</sup> Bonowicz, Publisher’s note, 286.

<sup>12</sup> Bonowicz, *Tischner*, 330.

side—no matter how strange it would sound—we faced a *sui generis* attempt of preserving the “ethical substance” of the nation. Regardless of such or different attempts of interpreting the historical events and motives behind the state authorities’ decision, what remains a fact is that their actions conducted behind the facade of the martial law resulted in a relatively small number of fatalities. On the other hand, we must not forget that the scale of unnecessary suffering caused by interning approximately ten thousand women and men, as well as different, various forms of persecution, both mental and economic, was significant, and the long-term geopolitical effects of freezing the process of system transformation had a very unfavorable impact on the international and internal situation of Poland. In spite of all, we should be capable of appreciating the fact that the same authorities, the decisions of which in December 1981 had such a negative impact on the fate of Poland, brought itself to the practice of dialog and negotiations, which eventually led to the 1989 transformations. It is difficult to believe that it would be possible to realize such a scenario without a deep moral transformation on the nationwide scale. Common sense tells us to admit that one of the pillars of that transformation was a strong, clear, and explicit voice of Józef Tischner, which reached all Poles and was also widely disseminated abroad.<sup>13</sup>

The text of *The Ethics of Solidarity*, apart from a set of more or less detailed problems, carried in itself a fundamentally crucial moral message. It was based on a completely different vision of society than the one on which the official ideology of a Soviet state was founded. Since in such a society—according to the Marxist historical materialism—a binding dogma was the one connected with a class conflict, which implied that every society (excluding the future, communist one) is divided into antagonistic classes, the representatives of which are hostile towards one another. Therefore, there is no place for a general community or solidarity above the classes. Meanwhile, Tischner clearly states:

Dialogue means that people have come out from their undergrounds, have come closer to each other, have started exchanging words. The beginning of dialogue, emerging from a hiding place, is already a significant event. One needs to reach out, cross the threshold, offer one’s hand, find a common place for conversation. This place will not be a hiding place anymore, in which man remains alone with his fear, but a place of meeting, the beginning of some community, perhaps the foundation for a home.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *The Ethics of Solidarity* was being published in *Tygodnik Powszechny* from October 1980 till April 1981. As a separate book, it was published in August 1981 by Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak. [...] That publication became the basis for a great many underground literature editions (since December 1981), as well as translations to foreign languages: Italian (1981), German (1982), Flemish (1982), French (1983), Spanish (1983), Swedish (1984), English (1984), Czech (1985), Slovakian (1998). Bonowicz, Publisher’s note, 286–87.

<sup>14</sup> Tischner, *The Ethics of Solidarity*, 41, [www.tischner.org.pl/Content/Images/tischner\\_3\\_ethics.pdf](http://www.tischner.org.pl/Content/Images/tischner_3_ethics.pdf) (accessed 30.03.2017).

And even more explicitly:

A solidarity born of the pages and the spirit of the Gospels does not need an enemy or an opponent to consolidate and develop. It is directed toward everyone and not against anyone. [...] We want to be a unified nation, but not unified by fear. We want to be united by our simplest human obligations.<sup>15</sup>

We should bear in mind that although the calling to unifying solidarity was aimed at all people, not all people were ecstatic about it. There were and there still are people who had the Marxist model of antagonistic society deep in their minds and they cannot think in a different way than in the category of a radical division: we and our opponents. These people carry an insurmountable fear, distrust, and suspicion, and they infect others with their disrelish, constructing new walls and digging new hideouts. A peculiar type of impossibility to detach themselves from the sad and self-destructive heritage—not only the Marxism borrowed from a foreign culture, but also own, native, socially hardly less destructive Sarmatism.

Stanisław Lem, already at the brink of 1990, remarked: “Fellow countrymen did not cease to be themselves and after the dear to my heart decease of the communist party they are on the outs with one another and have condemnable quarrels,” and on Palm Sunday 1991 he wrote:

Our nation, I state with full seriousness, is to such an extent ugly, that it allows a herd of sheep to lead them, however, they [...] should thank God for what we got from the Providence [...]. Jarosław Kaczyński tried to encourage the nation to overthrow the lower house of the Polish Parliament, President is, at a moment like that, also able to slam his fist down on the table with a thump. I doubt it is possible, however, this passion for destruction and destabilization suggests that ‘We Want God’ is not true, it is rather we want Satan and his children.<sup>16</sup>

Przemysław Czapliński, describing the situation in the Polish public life space of the early 1990s, observes a strong impetus towards restoration and cementing of the well known in the Polish history, both then and now bringing not much good to us, idea of Sarmatism:

In the dispute of modernization with tradition [...] together with the war over the past such a conflict reappeared. [...] Traditional culture—old Polish, antimodern—has in such a depiction a great many trumps: as a tremendous

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>16</sup> Letters of Stanisław Lem to Zofia and Władysław Bartoszewski, in Władysław Bartoszewski, Michał Komar, *Prawda leży tam, gdzie leży* (Warszawa: Grupa Wydawnicza PWN, 2016), 36–37.



national simulacrum includes a clear, approved by the history project *me*; contrary to the deregulation of culture and uncertainty, which the accelerating history carries, the Sarmatism makes it possible to find ones roots, reaching far to the past; it is a donor of explicit rules of achieving respect; positions man in the world of transcendental certainty, giving God and making him a being, which manifests itself in the community of ceremony; makes it possible to feel pride connected with the affiliation to a community.<sup>17</sup>

All these features pertinently emphasized and described by an investigator in the Polish culture, put on an illusory show of stability. They pinpoint reasons, which are supposed to persuade us to develop in ourselves a feeling of national pride and be delighted with a conviction that we, the inheritors of the legendary tribe of Sarmatians, are worth more than other neighboring nations and more than those among us who were seduced by the pernicious charms of modernity. In reality, however, these are not symptoms which would unambiguously classify the proponents of the reinstatement of the sarmatian tradition as “people from hideouts,” whom Józef Tischner subjected to a critical analysis in his essay which bears such a title. The author of the essay remarks:

Sometimes something bad happens to the human hope. [...] Man, instead of following his own way, feels obliged to seek somewhere in the space a hideout for himself. In this hideout he looks for shelter against the world and against other people. The future does not promise man anything big, the memory puts forward, in front of his eyes, the defeats he suffered, the space does not invite to any movement. [...] Man in the hideout believes that he carries some treasury in himself. His tries to hide this treasury somewhere deep. He himself stands next to the hiding place and keeps vigil. The place he stands in, he surrounds with a wall of fear. He becomes suspicious about all people who try to near it, he believes they come to rob him and destroy.<sup>18</sup>

The more such a great and undeserved gift of the Providence for Poland and the world was that short period of time at the decline of the epoch of the so called real socialism, when we could leave our hideouts, overcome divisions and unify in the building of an authentic, however, anything but unanimous, community. That moment, so exceptionally prolific for the latest history of Poland and Central Europe, was noticed and subjected to analysis in *The Ethics of Solidarity* by Józef Tischner.

Aiming at conducting a short evaluation of this work and its reception, let us first look at its structure. The goal of the author—as he himself remarked—

<sup>17</sup> Czaplinski, *Resztki nowoczesności* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011), 105–106.

<sup>18</sup> Józef Tischner, “Ludzie z kryjówek,” Kraków: Znak, 1978 nr 283; reprint: *Myślenie według wartości* (Kraków: Znak, 1982), 415–16.



was to “clear several elementary concepts, and at the same time show what they mean in a new context. [...] I wanted to describe it by employing my phenomenological method.”<sup>19</sup> However, the result of this work surpassed the author’s expectations. Wojciech Bonowicz claims:

The Ethics of Solidarity by Rev. J. Tischner is an absolutely exceptional text in the Polish philosophical literature. Not a single different composition, different work or short work, written by a Polish philosopher, has ever achieved such an enormous social response. *The Ethics of Solidarity* managed to find readers in all social groups—readers characterized by various levels of education, representing various outlook on life.<sup>20</sup>

Why did it happen? In the discussed text, through a layer of more or less successful analyses of subsequent social life phenomena (as, e.g., work, ruling, managing, and upbringing) a deeper bottom becomes noticeable: a promise of fulfilling dreams that had been accruing for a longer period of time, however, so far believed to be indestructible and impossible to realize. These were dreams about regaining the feeling of dignity, self-respect and an internal harmony between the requirements of conscience and the everyday life choices. Tischner wrote: “What we are experiencing is not only a social or economic event, but, above all, an ethical one. The matter impinges on human dignity. The dignity of man is founded on his conscience. The deepest solidarity is the solidarity of consciences.”<sup>21</sup> In a different section: “The foundation and source of solidarity is what everyone is truly concerned with in life.”<sup>22</sup>

This common movement of waking conscience and regaining one’s face, which Rev. Tischner so suggestively exposed and described, constitutes a radical contrast to the then lifestyle of Polish people throughout the entire period of the communists’ rule—life in a permanent self-hypocrisy. Long years of existing in a quite difficult survival school, which was the everyday reality of real socialism, trained the citizens of people’s democracy countries in a difficult, however, useful art of self-persuasion—leading themselves to believe that in the situation of rationed freedom it is important to create for personal use “rationed conscience,” capable of a silent consent to cunctious activities, sometimes to humiliating compromises, and sometimes to place own particular matters above moral and decency principles. Many people could have believed that owing to this “conscience gymnastics” they found a satisfactory *modus vivendi*, in which they feel fulfilled. However, the illusiveness and falsehood of that attitude was unveiled when a new language appeared in the cultural communication. It was

<sup>19</sup> Karoń-Ostrowska, Tischner, *Spotkanie*, 99.

<sup>20</sup> Bonowicz, Publisher’s note, 285.

<sup>21</sup> Tischner, *The Ethics of Solidarity*, 38.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

employed by poets, prosaist, and philosophers, who used to publish in the so called underground and the one who did that in the loudest and most entrancing way was John Paul II in his words addressed to his compatriots during his memorable, first pilgrimage to Poland in June 1979. It was not possible to be indifferent to that voice. Tischner wrote:

When solidarity is born, this awareness is awakened, then speech and word appear—and at that time what was hidden also comes out into the open. [...] People are casting aside their masks, they are coming out of their undergrounds, they are showing their true faces. Out from under the dust and out of the oblivion their consciences are coming to light. Today we are such as we really are. [...] It makes no sense to play someone else's role. Everyone wants to be called by his own name.<sup>23</sup>

In twenty short merely a few page-long sketches that *The Ethics of Solidarity* cycle consists of, Józef Tischner included a surprisingly coherent and consistent program of a mutual, national fight against the most important, according to the author of the cycle, social pathologies characteristic for the decadent period of socialism. The construction of the deduction irresistibly, and maybe also not accidentally, suggests the Great Novena, preceding the celebrations of the millennium of Poland's Baptism, announced and led by Primate of Poland Stefan Wyszyński in the years 1957–1966. Almost exactly 25 years before the Polish “era of Solidarity” the spiritual leader of the Polish nation, referred to as the Primate of the Century, also arrived at a conclusion that a viable opportunity to improve the quality of life of social masses is not a gullible realization of socialist development postulates, but a ruthless fight against national defects connected with a radical moral revival. The path to it, according to Primate Wyszyński, was to be a collective reformation and consolidation of all moral powers of the population around the act of trusting Poland to the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>24</sup> An inter-

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 37–38.

<sup>24</sup> Maria Okońska explains: “The program of the Great Novena consisted in introducing the particular vows of the Great National Vows into life. [...] Every year of the Great Novena commenced on a Sunday after May 3 with a renewal of [Luminous Mount] Jasna Góra Vows in all Polish parishes. Regardless of that renewal, on every anniversary of taking the vows, namely on August 26, they were renewed very ceremoniously at Luminous Mount by the Primate of Poland and the episcopate. That custom is still practiced and even now August 26 is the day of renewal of Luminous Mount Great National Vows.” Maria Okońska, *Wszystko postawił na Maryję* (Warszawa: OW ADAM, 2007), <http://raport.jasnagora.pl/2015/10/wielka-nowenna-przed-milennium-chrztu-polski-1957-1966/> (accessed 24.03.2017). The callings for the subsequent years of the Novena were: “Faithfulness to God, the Cross, the Gospel, the Church and her Shepherds,” “Nation Faithful to the Grace”; “Life is the Light of People”; “Matrimony—Great Sacrament in the Church”; “Family Strong with God”; “Youth Faithful to Christ”; “New Man in Christ”; “Protect the Entire Nation” (cf. *ibid.*).

esting research problem, unfortunately exceeding the framework of this sketch, would be to compare the list of “deadly sins” of the Polish society, included in the program of the Great Novena and the Jasna Góra [Luminous Mount] Vows, written in the years 1955–1956, with the one prepared in the years 1980–1981 by Józef Tischner.

Tischner’s list is undoubtedly broader, however, some of the items from the original list are duplicated (among others: disregarding Christian and native customs, neglecting the upbringing of children, hatred, violence, exploitation, selfishness, reluctance to share with others, indifference towards those suffering from hunger, those who are homeless and those who mourn<sup>25</sup>). The distribution of accents is also slightly different. First and foremost, Stefan Wyszyński puts the emphasis on the necessity to fight with particular human vices and weaknesses, such as alcoholism, licentiousness or lack of respect of work. Tischner indicates, first and foremost, towards these incorrectnesses, which we can ascribe to the influence of a “social sin” in such a meaning which John Paul II describes in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*:

The [...] meaning of social sin refers to the relationships between the various human communities. These relationships are not always in accordance with the plan of God, who intends that there be justice in the world and freedom and peace between individuals, groups and peoples. Thus the class struggle, whoever the person who leads it or on occasion seeks to give it a theoretical justification, is a social evil. Likewise obstinate confrontation between blocs of nations, between one nation and another, between different groups within the same nation all this too is a social evil.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, it seems that both great spiritual guides of the Polish nation had a different attitude towards the issue of the renewal of the society. Wyszyński assumed that the system norms and the restrictions that stem from them can be gradually, evolutionarily modified under the *sine qua non* condition that the society in its masses will mature morally and by living every day in the spirit of the Gospel, will at the same time neutralize the unfavorable activities from the side of the artificially imposed and maintained, owing to a strong violence apparatus, domination of the communist ideology. Tischner, knowing that the program did not yield the predicted results, adopts different approaches: first we have to repair the sick system and the malfunctioning structures that paralyze the good will of the citizens and bring about wasting of the incommensurately enormous

<sup>25</sup> See the text of Jasna Góra Great Nation Vows, written by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński: <http://www.wyszynski.psur.pl/sluby.php> (accessed 24.03.2017).

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, pt 16, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_02121984\\_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html) (accessed 24.03.2017).

effort of the working people, only later—and at the best simultaneously—we can think about moral reformation and perfecting of particular people.

The formal structure of the particular installments of the cycle is subject to that assumption. Let us illustrate it with the example of the fourth chapter of *The Ethics of Solidarity*, dedicated to work. Part of the chapter is dedicated to revealing what is bad and what is improper in the described fragment of the social reality, the second part refers us to a positive vision as a desired objective of the reformatory aspirations. Let us, first and foremost, highlight what shortcoming the author notices with the reference to the phenomenon of work:

Work that brings withering, sickness and death instead of life is sick work or simply ceases to be work. Work is sick or ceases to be work when the natural burden of work, the struggle of man with material, is multiplied by another man, a counterfeit coworker. In similar situations, it is usual to speak about the exploitation of man by another man.<sup>27</sup>

And little bit farther:

Not only speech can be called “true,” but also work. [...] True speech is a speech true to things, a speech that really serves life and both grows out of communication and maintains it. [...] In order to work and collaborate, people must ‘be in the truth’ for each other—no one is allowed to lie through work to one’s neighbor, because then, work would be like mumbling. Work as a lie—this is exploitation. The beginning of the awareness of exploitation is like the pain felt after a lie.<sup>28</sup>

The period when these words were written down was when the political censorship was still restraining the freedom of public comments. In such a situation it was not possible to speak in a clearer way.<sup>29</sup> However, there was not a need like that, since the Polish reader of that epoch was perfectly trained in the art of reading “between the lines” and unassisted guessing of the content which the author included *implicite* in the form of hints and allusions. What Tischner really thought about the Polish work sickness and its system reasons, we can, without any effort, get to know by reading his different texts, which were either created later or circulated in copies, or also in the form of the unofficial underground versions.<sup>30</sup> However, for the readers of *Tygodnik Powszechny* it was already clear that the responsibility for the pathology of people’s work predominantly rests upon, the officers of the political system, the leading principle

<sup>27</sup> Tischner, *The Ethics of Solidarity*, 45.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Michał Głowiński, *Zła mowa* (Warszawa: Wielka Litera, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> See a broad selection of Tischner’s texts on philosophy and work ethics in: Józef Tischner, *Polska jest Ojczyzną. W kręgu filozofii pracy* (Paris: Editions du Dialogue, 1985).

of which was to bring under control all spheres of public life—also the system of work organization—to *stricte* political objectives. It caused more and more frequent situations when decision of a really enormous range, connected with planning large investments and engagement of a great work force, were used exclusively or almost exclusively for objectives related to propaganda, defying the fundamental principles of economics, and also without taking into consideration the norms of the work ethos. Additionally, it is important to take into consideration a great multitude of people, who—employed on state positions and remunerated from the country budget—carried out work which was either simulated, which did not serve anyone, or anything apart from strengthening, to a bigger extent, the more and more questionable prestige of state and party offices and institutions, or even did harm to people by executing disgusting tasks of paid informants, implementers of secretly commissioned acts of violence, etc. It all was a commonly known aspect of the way the system functioned, a system which still remained in the Polish People's Republic and to which an ever growing number of Poles wanted to put an end.

Tischner faces these dreams about a radical change, which seemed to be unfeasible and unrealizable after so many years of unceasing triumphs of the unpopular authorities, after so many attempts of rebellion and reform of the system, with his seemingly modest analyses, however, in reality carrying a huge load of wisdom and hope. The formal construction of the subsequent installments of *The Ethics of Solidarity* cycle is similar and repeating. As we have already said it stems from a trivially easy, however, extremely expressive scheme, which consists in a contrast juxtaposition of two realities: the first—how it is and the second—how it should be. Let us refer once again to an example taken from the chapter on work. Tischner asks in the first place: how does our work look like? And he answers: it is the source of exploitation, prodigality, falsehood, and constraint. And he proceeds to a deliberation on what work should be like and answers:

Work is a particular form of conversation. In an ordinary conversation, people exchange words with each other, that is, various sounds permeated with meaning. [...] As a consequence of the exchange of meaningful sounds, words, an understanding is generated between people. Working people act in a similar way. The objects of their exchange, however, are not usually words (although that happens too), but the products of work which are similar in their constitution to words.<sup>31</sup>

Each conversation conceals within itself some kind of wisdom. Work has a particular, *sui generis*, inner wisdom. This wisdom imposes demands on people, it defines for them suitable standards. Each person must know what he should do so that an organic whole grows out of fragmentary work.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Tischner, *The Ethics of Solidarity*, 44.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

At the same time, the particular fragments of the collective portrait of the Polish social arena of the late 1970s and early 1980s are spanned by an important connecting element, without which the entire story would only be yet another utopia or even a literary fiction. This element is indication towards a mechanism, which enables a transfer between “is” and “should be.” The significance of a short, however, a meaningful Tischner’s work is explicit and in its force persuasively strongly resembles a fragment of the Book of Genesis as interpreted by John Steinbeck. The fragment in question is verse 7 in the 4th chapter of the Book of Genesis in which God while talking to Cain, suggests the possibility of man’s dominion over sin: “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.” In his story entitled *East of Eden* Steinbeck displays the size of man’s freedom, man whom God created capable of dominating over sin using his will.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Tischner, like a refrain, repeats chapter after chapter: we are deeply embedded in the structures of sin. These were created partially because of the defects of an irrational system, subordination to a false ideology of state and its people management, and partially due to our own, personal vices, weaknesses, and bad habits. However, we are not slaves of a faulty system; nor are we slaves of our own sins. In both cases we are capable of exercising control. The question that remains is how to do it. It is exactly in this point, as it seems, that the real significance of Tischner’s project is rooted.

Since the fundamental idea of having control over the sources of evil and “striking out to moral independence”<sup>34</sup> refers to the, defined from the very first words of the cycle, solidarity of conscience.<sup>35</sup> It is how Wiesław Bożejewicz described this problem:

<sup>33</sup> In the 24th chapter of the story an old Chinese—Lee tells a story about the result of his long-lasting studies on the appropriate interpretation of God’s conversation with Cain in the Book of Genesis, and says: “The King James version says this—it is when Jehovah has asked Cain why he is angry. Jehovah says, ‘If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and *thou shalt* rule over him.’ It was the ‘thou shalt’ that struck me, because it was a promise that Cain would conquer sin. [...] Then I got a copy of the American Standard Bible. [...] And it was different in this passage. It says, ‘*Do thou* rule over him.’ [...] This is not a promise, it is an order. And I began to stew about it. I wondered what the original word of the original writer had been that these very different translations could be make [...] it seemed to me that the man who could conceive this great story would know exactly what he wanted to say and there would be no confusion in his statement. [...] And this was: ‘Thou mayest.’ ‘Thou mayest rule over sin.’ [...] the Hebrew word, the word *timshel*—‘Thou mayest’—that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open.” John Steinbeck, *East of Eden* (London: Mandarin, 1995), 336–38.

<sup>34</sup> This statement refers to the title of a well-known and popular book in Poland by Józef Pawlikowski, *Can the Poles Strike out to Independence?* (Warszawa: Wyd. J. N. Leszczyński, 1831).

<sup>35</sup> In the first chapter of *The Ethics of Solidarity* we read: “We are living in an extraordinary moment right now. People are casting aside their masks [...]. Out from under the dust and out of

A person who has sensitive conscience feels the need [...] to sympathize with those who suffer. In the community dimension he drafts, through his choice and deed, the ethics of solidarity. Tischner unambiguously stated that the ethics of solidarity is the ethics of conscience. For him the ethics of conscience constituted an extraordinary message. A crucial element for its definition is the fact that it is placed above the ethical system. Since the very ethical system is capable of omitting something in its consideration, and the conscience, which is something primary in the nature of man, will take it into account and in a proper way will take a stance on it. [...] Owing to that “Solidarity,” [which] appeared in the space of the contemporary history of Poland with the purpose of reconstructing the community life, [...] established exceptional relations with those who suffered and were injured by the system. In its nature solidarity is for those who were injured by other people and who suffer from suffering which is possible to be avoided, which is accidental and useless. “Solidarity” enters an area of unfair politics, fills the space in which there were not any norms that would be ethically healthy. Enters as an idea an area ruled by the law of the heart. It reaches everywhere where the line of the meeting of a man with another man is marked by harm and injustice. Only fair politics, which serves the good of the other man, delineated by the bond of consciences solidarity, gives hope for the reconstruction of morally healthy interpersonal relation.<sup>36</sup>

As it was pertinently noticed by the quoted commentator of Tischner’s thought, the philosopher from Cracow in his project of a radical renewal of the collective spirit of national community refers directly to the primary, rudimental idea of politics as a practical realization of the social ethics principles,<sup>37</sup> however, not to the first in the row, but the one which ought to be cultivated “starting from the social ethos,” in the area defined by three elementary concepts: hope, freedom, sacrifice, in the drive towards the identification and realization of the basic values that shape the social ethos of a given human community. “We acknowledge that the core of ethical awareness is evaluation according to values and ideals. We aim at extracting these values, clarify the way we perceive ideals and by using them undertake to evaluate the entire spheres of social events”—Tischner wrote in a text from 1980.<sup>38</sup> These words can be understood as a self-commentary to *the Ethics of Solidarity*. If, owing to a collective effort of the entire nation, it was possible to realize the scenario that consisted in, to begin with,

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the oblivion their consciences are coming to light. [...] we thank for our contemporary solidarity of consciences.” Tischner, *The Ethics of Solidarity*, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Wiesław Bożejewicz, *Tischner. Poglądy filozoficzno-antropologiczne* (Warszawa: „Łoś-graf”, 2006), 125–26 [Trans. Szymon Bukal].

<sup>37</sup> See: *ibid.*, 132.

<sup>38</sup> Tischner, “Myślenie o etosie społecznym,” *Znak*, Kraków 1980 nr 309. Quoted from the reprint: Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, 456.



constructing an in-depth analysis of the social ethos, included *implicite* in the real life of Poles, in their hopes and expectations, disappointments and defeats, subsequently in building a common, collective conviction that “the authorities, if they want to be responsible for the shape of history, have to [...] let people be themselves” and that “only moral authority together with ethical democracy is capable of guaranteeing personal development to man and the community—civilization progress,”<sup>39</sup> and finally a solidary and peaceful rebuilding of the ruling system in order to make sure that it effectively fulfills the above-mentioned assumptions, then the process of the transformation of reality animated by the idea of ethics of solidarity would achieve its objective and end. The time during which the subsequent fragments of Józef Tischner’s work appeared—a time full of hope and optimism, full of hope in the common good will and collective feeling of duty—was conducive to the thinking which implied that such a scenario not only is desirable but also possible; not only theoretically and in vaguely defined future, but also exactly here and now, under our eyes and owing to solidary work of our hands, minds, and consciences.

Today, from the perspective of over three decades which separate us from the Solidarity breakthrough, we already know that this beautiful vision of political practice, built from scratch on respect towards the principles of ethics, referring us to the system of values which the traditional Polish social ethos consists of, and at the same time kindly open to different value systems, ready for dialog and agreement, turned out to be another fiction. There was too much disrelish and envy in the Polish society at the end of the 20th century, there were too many circles which did not want to create a thoroughly modern and pluralistic country, in which people and groups of people who represent an entire spectrum of various stances and outlooks—starting from ultraconservative and finishing with radically liberal—would find their rightful place and space for free development. Maybe there was also a lack of a tradition of building the community in the spirit of mutual respect and acceptance of differences, inescapably existing in a society of a few dozen million.

Dawna Markova, in her book dedicated to harmful stereotypes in the educational practice and system of education, notices:

One of the biggest miseducations we suffer from is the assumption that all human beings use the same process for thinking. Obviously, we all think different thoughts. Not so obviously, we all have unique ways of thinking those thoughts. In school, little attention is given to *how* children think. It’s usually assumed that everyone’s mind operates in the same way as the teacher’s does. In fact, there are six possible ways that we can ‘think.’<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Bożejewicz, *Tischner*, 131–32.

<sup>40</sup> Dawna Markova and Ann Powell, *How Your Child is Smart: A Life-Changing Approach to Learning* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press 1992), 34.

Analogically, the conviction that all people have the same beliefs and accept the same values that we do—especially in societies with an insignificant experience of living in a democratic system—is quite common. In the intervening period, although the common feature of all people is both reasoning and valuing, it remains a fact that we are free when it comes to values, and our axiological preferences do not have to be identical. Józef Tischner writes about it:

We, people, are unceasingly in some motion: we head towards something, we run away from something, we desire something and we are afraid of something, we cherish hope and we are threatened with some despair, we love somebody and we cannot love somebody else, we experience joyfulness and grief. That is how we are cast into the necessity of a ceaseless “placing something above something else,” necessity of “preferring.” As Jerzy Liebert used to say: “Having made my choice for ever, every day I still have to choose.” We are incapable of precisely defining the rules, according to which we establish our tendency to place something above something else, however, we live owing to the fact we know how to do it. [...] In our reasoning according to value there is a characteristic motive—motive of freedom.<sup>41</sup>

Not all are, however, willing to approve the freedom to choose value and criteria of their preferences, and even more—agree with the practical consequences of making various choices within the area of one social organism. Michał Paweł Markowski, when defining a map of divisions shattering the Polish society in the post-communism era into hostile, fighting one another factions, ascribed the main fault to the simplifications in the understanding of the relation between reality and the sphere of people’s convictions (also the axiological ones) about it. According to Markowski, it is too often that in the Polish public life there appears a person who “looks on the world from a transcendent perspective, exceeding any particular entanglements [and] immediately sets up—according to him completely justified—pretensions to speak on behalf of the Truth, Reality (and God knows what else), and to decide how things—by itself—work.” Such a stance—the philosopher from Cracow continues—“leads to closing of the area of public discourse. What unarguably exists, is not subject to any discussion. And what is not subject to any discussion is excluded from the area of social negotiations. It has to be taken on trust. The things that we take on trust, on the other hand, are susceptible to manipulation.”<sup>42</sup> In this way, what appears in the place of a constructive social dialog is dispute and conflict, which take on greater size and more severe forms if the outlook on life of the parties to the conflict is more closed and restricted.

<sup>41</sup> Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, 484–85. [Trans. Szymon Bukal].

<sup>42</sup> Michał Paweł Markowski, “Spór o rzeczywistość,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Kraków 2008, nr 31, 22–23.

The transience of the period of nationwide harmony and persistence, and depth of divisions within our society has to be treated as a bitter, however real lesson. Owing to learning it today, we know more about ourselves than in the early 1980s. We have already managed to understand that the truth which was revealed before our astounded and fascinated eyes, in the times when *The Ethics of Solidarity* was being created, was only a short-lived reflection of our suddenly released dreams. For a short while we believed that we really are the people we really wanted to be: solidary, great-hearted, merciful, forgiving, patient, understanding... many more epithets like that we are able to extract from *The Ethics of Solidarity* and other, numerous manifestos and public commentaries in that time. For some period of time we really wanted to be like that, but as the years passed the truth of the dreams unrelentingly was superseded by the mundane *tout court* truth.

Our biggest achievement after dropping our masks turned out to be attachment to personal genuineness and authenticity. Today, 35 years after the first publication of the *Ethics of Solidarity*, we can repeat beyond a shadow of a doubt: “We are as we really are. Everyone wants to be called by his own name.” However, the contemporary truth about us is much less impressive than the one we can find in Tischner’s book. We are deeply divided, distrustful, dissatisfied with all that we have achieved and are all the time ready to fight with the real or made up enemy, without whom we could not live. Despite that it would be absurdity to think that we have not achieved anything or saved from these wonderful times of waking up of the collective subjectivity of the nation. Indeed, we have achieved a lot: we secured ourselves the right to be ourselves—people we really are. The fact that we are not perfect, that there are a lot of ugly vices, insurmountable complexes and trauma that is still to overcome, does not negate the achievements of the generation, which in its everyday confrontation with the world of total falsehood built the ethos of solidarity.

*Translated by Szymon Bukal*

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Krzysztof Wieczorek

## L'éthique de solidarité de Józef Tischner

### Résumé

Au seuil de la décennie du grand tournant de système qui a abouti à la chute du communisme en Europe centrale, Józef Tischner, philosophe polonais, théologien et éthique, a publié un cycle d'essais englobant un projet de l'éthique sociale. C'était un projet clair et concret, consciemment adapté au temps difficile de la lutte politique acharnée et du conflit de valeurs, adressé à toutes les personnes de bonne volonté, indépendamment de leurs points de vue et leur appartenance politique. Tischner met l'accent en particulier sur les valeurs prosociales, telles que la solidarité, le soutien mutuel, le respect pour ceux qui pensent autrement, l'aspiration à l'unité de la société et à l'accord au-dessus des divisions basé sur un fondement axiologique. L'auteur du texte s'interroge à quel degré l'éthique de solidarité de Tischner a été introduite dans la pratique de la vie sociale polonaise directement après son annonce et à quel degré ses revendications restent actuelles et inspirent à l'époque contemporaine, où l'on se trouve en effet dans une nouvelle situation sociopolitique.

Mots clés : éthique, solidarité, analyse phénoménologique, maturité morale, dialogue.

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## L'etica della solidarietà secondo Józef Tischner

### Sommario

Alle soglie della decade della grande svolta di sistema che portò alla caduta del comunismo nell'Europa Centrale, il filosofo polacco, teologo ed etico Józef Tischner pubblicò un ciclo di saggi contenenti un progetto di etica sociale. Era un progetto chiaro e concreto, adattato consapevolmente al periodo difficile della dura lotta politica e del conflitto dei valori, rivolto a tutti gli uomini di buona volontà indipendentemente dalle vedute e dall'appartenenza politica. Tischner pone l'accento soprattutto sui valori prosociali quali la solidarietà, l'aiuto reciproco, il rispetto per coloro che hanno opinioni divergenti, l'aspirazione all'unità della società e all'armonia al di sopra delle divisioni, basata sul fondamento assiologico. L'autore del testo riflette sul quesito della misura in cui l'etica della solidarietà di Tischner sia stata introdotta nella pratica della vita sociale polacca subito dopo la sua proclamazione e di quanto i suoi postulati rimangano attuali ed ispiranti oggi, in una situazione socio-politica essenzialmente nuova.

Parole chiave: etica, solidarietà, analisi fenomenologica, maturità morale, dialogo