

Józef Tischner

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THE POLISH CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE 20TH CENTURY

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CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY
IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Józef Tischner

Edited by
Jarosław Jagiełło

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I.

JÓZEF TISCHNER:
PERSON AND WORK

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BIOGRAPHY

I was born in Stary Sącz on 12 March 1931. My father Józef and my mother Weronika, née Chowaniec, taught school in Łopuszna, Nowy Targ County. In 1937 I began attending primary school. At the beginning of the war we were transferred first to Chabówka, then to Raba Wyżna, and finally, in 1942, to Rogoźnik, Nowy Targ County. I attended the primary school first in Raba Wyżna, then in Rogoźnik, Czarny Dunajec and Nowy Targ. At the same time, I clandestinely covered the curriculum of the first grade of middle school, so that after the national liberation I could be promoted to the 2nd grade of the middle school in Nowy Targ. It was there that I first finished middle school, and then, in 1949, a comprehensive secondary school. In the same year I began my studies at the Faculty of Law at the Jagiellonian University.

My parents still work as teachers, and since the national liberation they have been living along with my brother Kazimierz in Łopuszna; my other brother, Marian, is attending a comprehensive secondary school in Nowy Targ.¹

The above words were penned by Józef Tischner as he wrote about his early years in a letter of application to the Metropolitan Seminary in Krakow. It was 19 June 1950; the author had already left a difficult childhood behind him but an even more challenging period of adolescence lay ahead of him. When he was thirteen, he began keeping a journal,² thanks to which we can learn that Łopuszna,

¹ *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 9 July 2000, no. 28(2661), p. 2.

² The young Tischner's journal notes were published in: J. Tischner, *Dziennik 1944–1949. Niewielkie pomieszczenie klepek* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2014).

which came to be so intrinsically associated with him years later, only came third as his family's abode. His fondest memories from this period were his trips to Stary Sącz and Jurgów. It was there that he was exposed to the first impressions of the outside world, either seen from a train window or a horse-drawn wagon. However, his carefree childhood was brought to an end by the Second World War. A passage in his journal reads: "Suddenly the war broke out, but I didn't know what it meant. We were in Łopuszna then and great fear descended; everyone fled to the mountains, and so we took shelter there as well, but it was hard to tell who we were hiding from."³ Via Raba Wyżna, the whole family reached Rogoźnik, from where the young Józef would later travel to Nowy Targ to continue his school education. Around that time, an event took place which arguably only bore fruit years later, in his texts about the motherland and the ongoing disputes in Poland. "Now, unlike the previous year, we did not have an easy time of it on our way; we were accosted by some children from Kowaniec, who were pelting us with stones. It was very mean of the Kowaniec boys; after all both us and them were Polish, so how could a scuffle break out between Poles?"⁴

The early years of Tischner's life as described in his notes contain another important element which serves as meaningful proof of his maturity and honesty. In an entry dated 3 February 1946, Tischner writes that on the occasion of his mother's name day it was fitting that some "solemn words"⁵ were said, and a present bought. But "father said he could not give me any cash until I settled the accounts; he thinks I'm blowing the money on something. He couldn't be more mistaken."⁶ Trivial as it might seem, not only does this event testify to the teenage boy's sensitivity, but above all, it shows someone who is entirely independent in his thinking and capable of the sensible

By providing a brief outline of Tischner's life, I deliberately refer for the most part to this publication in order to show the process of the formation of this future philosopher and priest. Although written in simple language, *Dziennik* is an invaluable source of knowledge about the author. Perforce, the presented biography does not offer purely factual material, but rather attempts to capture some of the inspirations and trajectory of his life.

³ J. Tischner, *Dziennik 1944–1949. Niewielkie pomieszanie klepek*, p. 3.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

perception of the world. These characteristics were to come to the fore in full force once Tischner became a public figure.

The development of his personality was also influenced by the events in the turbulent surroundings of the day. This can be clearly seen in an entry of 22 February 1947, which mentions the death of Józef Kuraś, an *Armia Krajowa* (Home Army) and *Bataliony Chłopskie* (Peasant Battalions) soldier whose *nom de guerre* was “Fire.” He had died on that day, after an attempted suicide, having been betrayed by his former brothers in arms. This fact inspired some serious reflection in Tischner. “It is clear that neither England nor America are thinking of actively intervening on Poland’s behalf, and without substantial assistance from the outside, the guerrilla forces cannot operate. Anders is neither thinking of such intervention, nor can he support it; besides, both in ours and our allies’ eyes he appears to have brought discredit upon himself.”⁷ The following passage, which is related to the above, brings a very important thought: “At any rate, now is the time for work, not battles, as they can benefit Poland in no way.”⁸ One can conjecture that, years later, such a reflection was to give rise to Tischner’s own and original philosophy of work. Another significant thread that also sheds some light on his budding personality can be found in the note dated 26 March 1947. In it, the author takes a closer look at himself: “It seems to me that I am striving for too much and reaching too high, that I am pushing my spark among the stars of great people, leaders of the nation, while in the process I am becoming oblivious to reality, the ordinary, intermediate level that I should pass through.”⁹ He goes on to openly note that he thinks quite highly of himself, he trusts in his talent and abilities. But it does not end there: he receives manifold praise, and those around him regard him with recognition and admiration. This is not an easy experience for him and he is far from falling into self-admiration, even though he wonders why “he doesn’t shut his ears to these words or quench the budding pride in his heart.”¹⁰ This remarkable entry concludes with a solemn pledge which he makes to himself: “I therefore determine, even though I have made such resolutions in my heart of

⁷ Ibidem, p. 69.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 85

¹⁰ Ibidem.

hearts a couple of times, to get down to work, and organic work for that matter, while nipping any pride and exaggeration in the bud! So help me God!”¹¹

It is worth drawing attention to yet another memory which can be seen as a crowning one in his childhood, this time dated 28 March 1947. It is connected with a retreat-related confession during which a confessor was reported to have said that “he himself did not know how much he or the Church could expect from me. He said that I was supposed to commendably carry out my school mission. I was stunned by this. I and some mission. Later on, I kept meditating upon his words at the altar.”¹²

Tischner’s adolescent years were filled with budding emotion and feelings. Evidently, it was a period in which this young man engaged in a battle with himself, was maturing inwardly and subjecting the nagging dilemmas to the judgement of reason. His first true philosophical question was beginning to take shape and the inspiration had been provided by a schoolmate, who addressed the question of “whether a feeling could be subordinated to will” in an essay.¹³ The question of the meaning of life came to be voiced as well, and was resolved with the following statement: “Got it! Serve God! Serve the mother country for the good of the people! So I am supposed to live for my fellow beings and sacrifice myself for them.”¹⁴

This brief sketch of the young Józef Tischner, intended to highlight the feelings and reflections that were to mould the later mature thinker and avid priest, may be concluded with another entry dated 16 November 1947. It bears the pronounced hallmark of a budding philosopher—on the one hand displaying thoughtful criticism, while on the other, an already marked inclination towards a philosophy of drama:

Someone—and maybe when I was a youth—developed in me some strangely critical feelings that won’t even stop at religion. Sometimes I am overcome by moments, although short ones, when I ask whether God exists. When I ponder nature, the universe, the surroundings, I can see Him at every turn, but in human

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibidem, p. 87.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 99.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 117.

life I find it hard to discern Him. In it, I can only see negation of His existence.¹⁵

And then he makes an open declaration, framing a kind of manifesto: “So I am supposed to be a philosopher. I should rather think that I will heavily rely on literature; I will be a man of letters/philosopher.”¹⁶

The manner in which the thought of becoming a priest was crystallised in Tischner’s mind is a different issue, and one which merits a more thorough analysis. His *Journals* point to several crucial threads. A religious upbringing as well as the presence of catechists in his life are of significant relevance to his future path in life. Apparently, he wanted to be a righteous man who adhered to some ethical standards, which comes to be expressed in the moral dilemmas ringing in his heart and his attitude to his kith and kin. At the same time, he wasn’t prepared to settle for simple solutions or recommendations. That is one of the reasons why he views Christianity, and more specifically Catholicism, as a religion that is indispensable to his mother country’s development, yet he does not hesitate to state that the Church “is to accept the Marxist way of social reform, even though it might toss in the foundation of the Greatest Commandment, and negate the revolution and other a-Christian elements.”¹⁷ Against this background, the thought of the priesthood took shape with great difficulty; it was not an effect of a natural course of things, and even seems to go against the grain of his surrounding influences. He writes: “I often ask myself what is the thing that makes me stick with Catholicism. For a long time, I wasn’t able to find the answer. And it was for a very long time. Now I have come to the conclusion that there is something to this Catholicism.”¹⁸ It is hard to find Tischner’s unambiguous declaration of a choice of a path in life in the *Journals*, especially because he does not know “whether a priest is more of a man of action and fight, or a coward running away from life realism and hiding in metaphysics.”¹⁹ He was clearly fighting an internal

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 180.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 243.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 313.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 289.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 295.

battle, one which came to be poignantly expressed in a passage of 28 May 1949, which reads as follows: “I would like to be elected, and not left to be called upon. I surrender myself to your will, my Lord. I am obedient to every voice that comes from There;”²⁰ and another vehement one: “I hate the clergy for the evil that is rearing its ugly head among their ranks, but I respect the upper echelons of authority. I hate the psychosis rampant among the seminarians. I hate a lot of things from the past of the Church, but I believe in the Gospel, the Holy Scriptures and God. But above all I believe in Love!”²¹

Still, Tischner decided to begin his studies at the Krakow Seminary. This place, which was “repulsive in its appearance, preconciliar, caustic and cold—hard to believe that anyone could stand being there,”²² allowed him to meet both some of his peers and important lecturers who supported him on the path to spiritual and intellectual development. Of particular note here were such names as Stanisław Stomma, Adam Vetulani, as well as Aleksy Klawek, Kazimierz Kłósak, Marian Michalski, Ignacy Różycki and Jan Pietraszko, who “was never a scientist, but could keep many enraptured by his evangelical thinking and great sensitivity to human dignity,”²³ and last but not least—Karol Wojtyła, who had only just begun his lectures on social ethics for seminarians. Tischner’s early interest in philosophy became more systematised when, as a clerical student, he began attending Rev. Kłósak’s philosophy seminar. It was here that he became acquainted with Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier (1851–1926), a French philosopher and theologian, who not only was a representative of neo-Thomism, but—more importantly for further development of Tischner’s thought—an advocate of the confrontation of this movement with exact sciences and Immanuel Kant’s philosophy. On 26 June 1955, along with fifteen other deacons, Józef Tischner graduated from the seminary and was ordained a priest.

As a result of the difficulties made by state authorities in relation with Tischner being accepted for a position of a parish curate, and with support from Rev. Kłósak, he was directed to continue studies

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 309.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 314.

²² A. Michnik, J. Tischner, J. Żakowski, *Między Panem a Plebanem* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1995), p. 21.

²³ Ibidem, p. 38.

in philosophy at the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw. Wojciech Bonowicz, his biographer, cites a recollection of one of the students, which shows the already significant magnitude of Tischner's personality.

Without doubt, he was a top student, but he was not *primus inter pares*. We all felt he had quite an edge over us, and that was not just an intellectual edge... I remember one situation. We were having an exam in the afternoon and like a flock of sheep we arrived as early as possible to enter our names on the list in top positions. But Józef showed up just before 2 p.m. and so he was the eighth or the ninth on the list. He came up to the list, tore it down, then took out a new piece of paper, pinned it up and wrote: Rev. Józef Tischner. He stepped aside and was standing there looking at us, meekly and without the slightest protest, come and sign our names underneath his.²⁴

The years spent at the Academy of Catholic Theology were dedicated to an in-depth study of contemporary Thomist thought (e.g. Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain), phenomenology and existentialism, as well as logic (as Tischner sought inspiration from lectures at the University of Warsaw) and psychology, the lectures being given by Kazimierz Dąbrowski. As a result of political turbulence caused by the tragic events of June 1956 in Poznań, as well as the growing repression of the Church by the communist authorities, his Warsaw studies were discontinued and Tischner returned to southern Poland to take up the position of catechist in the Chrzanów parish. In the same year he managed to resume his studies, but this time at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. On 19 April 1963 a graduation ceremony for his doctoral dissertation entitled *The Transcendental "I" in Edmund Husserl's Philosophy*, written under the supervision of Roman Ingarden, took place.

Around that time Józef Tischner was becoming an increasingly renowned and highly valued preacher. He began delivering sermons at St Anna's Church; the sermons were characterised by a significant change. "A change of attitude—a gradual departure from the model of speaking to someone and a shift towards speaking with someone, opening up to that which the listener brings"²⁵—was something that

²⁴ W. Bonowicz, *Tischner* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2001), p. 151.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 193.

was not only to result in later studies on Paul Ricoeur's thought, but was above all to shape his thinking about religion, or, better yet, man's religiousness. It is not something that is unearthed in man's nature, nor a remedy for human ills, but rather something that has a chance to appear as a result of a bond, reciprocity. Therefore, the character of religiousness is not constrained, the conclusion being that it cannot be a result of fear of condemnation. Years later, pursuing these original intuitions would come to be expressed in Tischner's meditations on Abraham.

There is another important fact in his life that merits a mention at this point. His stay in Krakow, and especially his pursuit of preaching and philosophy, and drive to go deeper and deeper into the essence of Christianity, bore some fruits in the form of collaboration with the circles of *Znak* and *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Significantly, his first text to be published was turned down by the editorial board. Therefore, Tischner's first article appeared in the January issue of *Więź* in 1960; it was an attempt at presenting the results of a survey conducted among the Chrzanów parishioners. The conclusion included words that were to reappear many a time in Tischner's future work. "There may be identical arguments for the existence of God. But there are no two identical paths leading to the recognition of this existence. And no language speaking about types and ordering things according to similarities should obscure this primal individuality."²⁶

The years which followed were filled with pastoral and academic work. Around that time, Tischner devoted a lot of attention to studies of the works of Martin Heidegger, whose thought would in the future influence his own philosophy. In the second half of the 1960s he moved to Leuven to work at the Husserl Archives. Upon his return he began working on his habilitation dissertation which earned him the title in 1974. His most significant analyses concentrated around the development of the concept of the axiological "I" and around something that might be termed a treatise on the condition of contemporary philosophy. It is noteworthy that the diagnosis he made stemmed precisely from his own philosophical concept, and was not hanging in the air, which made his efforts all the more praiseworthy. This

²⁶ J. Tischner, "Zagadnienie istnienia Boga w świadomości współczesnego katolika (Przyczynek do badań nad strukturą polskiego 'katolicyzmu powiatowego')," *Więź*, no. 1(21) (1960), p. 75.

period brought forth some particularly remarkable texts: *The Decline of Thomist Christianity*,²⁷ *Axiological Impressions*,²⁸ *In Search of the Essence of Freedom*.²⁹ Of particular note is also a thread which he pursued in parallel, concerned with the so-called philosophy of work, and introduced in Poland by Stanisław Brzozowski.³⁰ The polemics he undertook with Marxism and its conception of work was to bear fruit in the form of meaningful discussion of the ethics of solidarity some years later.

Following the historic events of August 1980, Tischner became involved with the “Solidarity” movement, the climax of his involvement being a homily preached to the union leaders on 18 October 1980 at the Wawel cathedral. One year later he made a guest appearance at the 1st National Convention of NSZZ “Solidarność” Delegates in Gdańsk. On the occasion he also preached a homily and the remarkable thing was that “the delegates decided to accept the sermon text as the official document of the Convention, because no other text captured the ethos of the Polish worker and work as lucidly as it did.”³¹ In 1982 he became the chaplain of the Podhale Inhabitants Association, which was related to the initiation of a series of Holy Masses celebrated for the mother country at the Mount Turbacz chapel every August.

And yet, in this hectic period he did not give up scholarly work. He co-created the Faculty of Philosophy at the Pontifical Academy of Theology (PAT), which became an independent research and teaching unit in 1981. Tischner became the faculty dean and as of 1985 he was an associate professor at the Academy. He refused to accept the position of rector of PAT, explaining that he wanted to continue both scientific and pastoral work. It should also be noted that along with Hans-Georg Gadamer and Krzysztof Michalski, he founded the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. Not only did this research center become a crucial element in the intellectual life of Austria’s capital city, but it still plays a role of an intermediary in the intellectual

²⁷ Idem, “Schyłek chrześcijaństwa tomistycznego,” *Znak*, no. 1(187) (1970), pp. 1–20.

²⁸ Idem, “Impresje aksjologiczne,” *Znak*, no. 2–3(188–189) (1970), pp. 204–220.

²⁹ Idem, “W poszukiwaniu istoty wolności,” *Znak*, no. 7–8(193–194) (1970), pp. 821–838.

³⁰ Idem, “Refleksje o etyce pracy,” *Znak*, nr 6(216) (1972), pp. 848–863.

³¹ “I Krajowy Zjazd Delegatów NSZZ ‘Solidarność’,” http://www.solidarnosc.org.pl/wszechnica/page_id=174/index.html (accessed: 20.09.2019).

debate between Eastern and Western Europe. Its mission statement reads: “More than 25 years after the fall of the iron curtain this goal is still crucially important, because the old and the new borders between the East and the West still shape persuasions, attitudes and institutions.”³²

The year 1990 can be viewed as a symbolic one in Józef Tischner’s life. That year saw the publication of the first edition of *The Philosophy of Drama*, which appears to prominently feature in his lifework; the backdrop for this concept was the political and social change taking place in Poland, one on which the author took a robust stance and which some viewed as controversial. This could already be discerned in the first months of the political transformation, when in the wake of the presidential elections, the thinker mentioned the notion of *homo sovieticus* during a TV talk. This figure was one which he felt explained the condition of a society which had only just shaken off totalitarian rule. He was met with the harshest criticism when he expressed his sympathies connected with one side of the political scene occupied by the Freedom Union and the Liberal Democratic Congress. He also bemoaned the processes taking place in the Polish Church: the increasing fear of freedom, preaching an “ill gospel” from the church pulpit, using a divisive rather than integrative language; he engaged in a dispute with what he saw as growing integrism. His stance on such tendencies was explicitly negative, as a result of which he was viewed as *persona non grata* or even as a harmful figure.

In 1997 the first symptoms of a serious complaint appeared. The diagnosis soon turned out to be tragic. Ever since that moment he battled against laryngeal cancer. On 10 August 1997 he celebrated his last Holy Mass on Turbacz. The following years were filled with a dramatic struggle against the fatal disease. He died on 28 June 2000, two days after the 45th anniversary of his ordination.

³² Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen, “The Institute,” <http://www.iwm.at/the-institute/> (accessed: 20.09.2019).

2.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EPOCH

It is well-nigh impossible to describe, in just a few pages yet in an exhaustive manner, the times which served as the backdrop for Rev. Józef Tischner's life. Even though he lived for "only" 69 years, his lifetime was marked by extremely tempestuous years filled with radical and dramatic historical changes. What is more: a willing reader can easily find an abundance of specialist literature full of detailed data on facts, events and people who either triggered them or were influenced by them. And thus, for the sake of methodological fairness, it should be stressed that the following analysis by no means deserves to be treated as a comprehensive or fully faithful account of the spirit of those years. With these reservations in mind, as the task is undertaken, an explanation is due whereby account will be taken of those facts which in some specific way affected Tischner, or ones that he was not indifferent to, as well as those individuals that to a significant degree left an imprint on his life and achievements.

The years 1931–2000 which mark Józef Tischner's lifetime can be divided into several periods with clear-cut turning points. The first one was obviously the Second World War, which was followed by a period where a totalitarian regime held sway in Poland—communism; then came the special time marked by the activity of the Independent Self-governing Labor Union "Solidarity" and the martial law; he lived the last eleven years of his life in a free Poland, witnessing the beginnings of democracy. These four periods will serve as landmarks in the description of the era in which Tischner lived.

Undoubtedly, the cruelties and atrocities of the Second World War were also present in Podhale. Of note are two wartime circumstances which informed the specific nature of the war in this region. The first one was the Germanisation campaign in the Nowy Targ county called “Goralenvolk.” It was connected with Waclaw Krzeptowski, a native highlander and well-known peasant activist. To the amazement of the locals “he was the one to establish first contact with the new authorities a few weeks after Poland had been occupied by *Wehrmacht*. It may already have been then that he suggested that the highlanders be politically separated from the rest of the Polish nation.”¹ On 7 November 1939, as the representative of the highlanders, he met and greeted Hans Frank upon his entry into the city of Krakow; the latter paid a return visit to him five days later. “In an address delivered to the Podhale inhabitants, the governor stressed that ‘the government of the German *Reich* had always cared for the good of its minorities’ and that ‘the times of the persecution of the highlanders were over.’”² In June 1940, on the occasion of the census being taken, “the census papers, next to the Polish, Jewish and Ukrainian sections included a column headed ‘highlanders.’”³ Anyone who chose Polish or Jewish as their nationality was threatened with displacement. Tischner reminisces: “In all of our Podhale village, which was inhabited by highlanders alone, there was only one or maybe two who entered their names on the *Goralenvolk* list.”⁴ In 1941, the so-called Highlanders Committee was established, but its activity was strictly controlled by the Germans. In some places the German *Kennkarte* identity documents marked with the letter “G” (for the initial of the *Goral* ethnicity) were accepted by considerable numbers of inhabitants, which gave rise to some reaction on the part of the Polish underground resistance movement. Tischner himself mentions death of Franciszek Latocha, one of Krzeptowski’s associates. With the benefit of hindsight, it turned out that “during the Second World War the *Goralenvolk* accounted for the largest form of collaboration on the Polish territory. It struck a blow to the unity of the Polish society as it strove to tear one of the local cultural groups away from it.”⁵

¹ D. Markowski, “Goralenvolk – anatomia zdrady,” *Mówią Wieki*, no. 1 (2010), p. 22.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ A. Michnik, J. Tischner, J. Żakowski, *Między Panem a Plebanem*, p. 10.

⁵ D. Markowski, *Goralenvolk – anatomia zdrady*, p. 26.

The other story treats of Józef Kuraś (1915–1947), a Home Army and Peasant Battalion soldier. During the war, he wanted to avoid being deported to the German *Reich* and so he got a job as a forestry worker. He joined a local patrol of the Union of Armed Struggle, adopting the *nom de guerre* “Eagle.” In 1943 a striking event fraught with consequences took place: Kuraś shot two plain clothes police officers, suspecting that they were informants for the German military. In retaliation, Gestapo murdered his 73-year-old father, his wife and his 2-year-old son, as well as burning down his family house. Following this tragedy, Kuraś changed his *nom de guerre* to “Fire” and together with a group of trusted companions joined a partisan company of the Home Army. Historians note that as a result of the circumstances related to the guerrilla unit being surrounded by the Germans, who had been provoked by Kuraś himself, he was reported to have deserted, for which he got a death sentence. Then he made contact with the authorities of the People’s Party and in October the same year was sworn in as a commander of a firing squad. In 1944 a government representative in the Nowy Targ County ordered that the People’s Party suspend official contact with “Fire,” because his conflict with the Home Army had not been resolved. He was alleged to be collaborating with Soviet guerrillas, and more precisely with NKVD captain Lyudmila Gordiyenko, as well as having subordinated his people to a People’s Army unit. This collaboration was supposed to have helped him assault and rob Podhale and Pieniny inhabitants. “Fire” was killed in an ambush on 22 February 1947. Today, opinions about him still differ widely and are ambiguous. One of the Home Army soldiers, Julian Tomecki, whose *nom de guerre* was “Birch,” reminisces: “The activity engaged in by “Fire” was not so much the intentional and heroic fight for Polish and national goals, as the mindless and murderous action of a chancer. Even the most renowned murderer will forever be nothing but a murderer. No one can erase the stigma of a murderer, and criminal acts cannot be hidden behind the most expensive plaque in the holiest church.”⁶ However, Dr Maciej Korkuć, an employee of the Krakow branch office of the Institute of National Remembrance claims as follows: “As for “Fire’s” motivation, there is no doubt about that.

⁶ “Prawda o Józefie Kurasiu ‘Ogniu,’” <http://partyzanciakpodhale.pl/kto-na-tym-korzysta/105-kto-na-tym-korzysta/196-julian-tomecki-prawda-oogniu> (accessed: 20.08.2019).

He fought not for his own gain, but for independence and a free Poland. All his life he was dedicated to the people's cause."⁷ Tischner himself speaks well of "Fire," which can be particularly seen on the pages recording his conversation with Adam Michnik and Jacek Żakowski: "He was a legend of all Podhale and my childhood,"⁸ further we read: "There may have been some cut-throats, but that is hard to avoid."⁹

The post-war period was marked by communism, which was steadily growing in strength. Tischner was a keen observer of the ongoing processes and was to provide an accurate diagnosis of the effects caused by totalitarianism. Some facts affecting the maturing philosopher and priest are worth mentioning here. As historians acknowledge, the first postwar years did not see too many restrictions imposed on the Church. However, the situation changed radically in 1947, when the communists decided to organize a group of priests supportive of the authorities. The idea was introduced by Hilary Minc, a member of the Security Commission of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, which was a section supervising the repression apparatus: he proposed "organizing among priests an initiative group which would not only declare loyalty, but also oppose the priests manifesting objection to the new order."¹⁰ At first, forty five patriot priests—for that is how they were referred to—took part in a convention bringing together veteran organizations, which gave rise to the establishment of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy. In a public address, one of them "criticized the episcopate for not establishing permanent chaplaincy services for the Recovered Territories, and, as a sideswipe, the Vatican for doing harm to the interests of Poland. In conclusion, a servile cable was sent to Stalin."¹¹ Tischner was very explicit in his judgement of the participants of the movement, stating that "surely they were already on the other side of the line of treason."¹² This harsh judgement had some basis, because

⁷ "Józef Kuraś 'Ogień'," <http://dzieje.pl/artykulyhistoryczne/jozef-kuras-ogien-tragiczny-bohater> (accessed: 20.08.2019).

⁸ A. Michnik, J. Tischner, J. Żakowski, *Między Panem a Plebanem*, p. 11.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ "Kościół pod wezwaniem Bolesława Bieruta. Kim byli księża-patrioci?" <http://www.polskatimes.pl/artukul/3705314,kosciol-pod-wezwaniem-boleslawabieruta-kim-byliksiezapatrioci-nasza-historia,id,t.html> (accessed: 20.08. 2019).

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² A. Michnik, J. Tischner, J. Żakowski, *Między Panem a Plebanem*, p. 31.

the issue of the patriot priests was connected with some other painful events at that time. Tischner explained: “The times left quite a depressing picture of our nation in my memory. That was mainly a picture of May Day rallies.”¹³ As communism appeared to be growing in strength, the persecution of the Church intensified as well. It is enough to mention the trial of Kielce Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek, who was charged with espionage for the US and activity detrimental to the Soviet Union; the internment of Primate Stefan Wyszyński for not condemning the convicted bishop Kaczmarek and for objecting to the interference of the authorities in the internal matters of the Church; the trial of the Krakow Curia employees as a result of which “Rev. Józef Lelito, Edward Chachlica and Michał Kowalik were sentenced to death, Rev. Szymonek received a life sentence, Rev. Brzycki—15 years’ imprisonment, Rev. Pochopień—8 years’ imprisonment, and Stefania Rospond—6 years’ imprisonment. The death sentences were not executed and, by virtue of the decision of the Polish Council of State of 18 August 1953, they were changed to life imprisonment;”¹⁴ the banning of another 1953 issue of “Tygodnik Powszechny”, which was supposed to come out after Stalin’s death, and the closing down of the Faculty of Theology (est. 1937) at the Jagiellonian University in 1954.

The riots that erupted in June and October 1956 were also important events of this period. They stemmed from the Joseph Stalin Metalworks in Poznań. Although the outbreak of the labor unrest was caused by economic and social factors, there soon appeared a strong, explicitly political undercurrent.”¹⁵ The 28 June brought some tragic incidents which “claimed as many as 73 lives and left several hundred individuals wounded.”¹⁶ As a result, there was growing friction among the party authorities. In the country, “columns of the Soviet troops stationed in Poland were drawing towards the interior. At the same time the units of the Polish Army under the command of Konstantin Rokossovsky, Soviet marshal and Poland’s Defense Minister, were

¹³ Ibidem, p. 61.

¹⁴ “Proces kurii krakowskiej – (ksiądz Lelito i działacze podziemia narodowego),” <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/edukacja-1/wystawy/13676,Proces-kurii-krakowskiej-ksiazdz-Lelito-i-dzialacze-podziemianarodowego.html> (accessed: 20.08.2019).

¹⁵ J. Eisler, „*Polskie miesiące*” czyli kryzys(y) w PRL (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008), p. 20.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 24.

on the move.”¹⁷ On 20 October, Władysław Gomułka came to power in Poland, as a result of which the strong public feeling abated for a brief lapse. Józef Tischner witnessed those events: “I was present in the Parade Square¹⁸ when Gomułka spoke, I saw people who were earnestly convinced that something evil had come to an end.”¹⁹

As it transpired, all the following painful events of 1968, 1970 and 1976, along with the hopes that were aroused, came to nothing. In the 1960s and 1970s an economic and political crisis was rampant in Poland. The social group that was particularly beleaguered by the effects of the burgeoning crisis was laborers. The intelligentsia set about building the first structures of organized opposition. At first, the communication between the two groups proved to be difficult. This problem was addressed by Tischner in the following words: “The workers are not revolting under the influence of literature, nor are they striking having watched *Dziady*, but they have become sensitive to exploitation.”²⁰ The increasing awareness of the futility of the work done and the growing feeling of injustice resulted in mass protests in August 1980. The election of Karol Wojtyła to the papacy on 16 October 1978 was an important landmark on this path.

The first signs of unrest in 1980 appeared the moment the decision to raise food prices was announced. The production plants in Mielec, Tarnobrzeg, Poznań and Lublin were out on strike. The decision to proclaim a strike at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk marked a watershed moment. It was made following “the spread of the news about the 7 August 1980 dismissal of Anna Walentynowicz, a gantry crane operator at the Gdańsk Shipyard and an activist of the Free Trade Unions (WZZ), who was 5 months short of retirement age.”²¹ As the strike got underway, 21 demands were formulated; apart from the ones concerned with wages, there were also political and social ones—first and foremost, the strikers demanded that free trade unions be established. The strikes, attended by both laborers and

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 26.

¹⁸ The square was filled with several hundred people manifesting their support for Gomułka. He gave a speech, calling for peace and arguing that Poland was a sovereign country. He also condemned the time of “errors and perversions.”

¹⁹ A. Michnik, J. Tischner, J. Żakowski, *Między Panem a Plebanem*, p. 61.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 198.

²¹ *O Polskę wolną! O Polskę solidarną!*, ed. W. Polak, S. Skarbińska, V. Kmiecik (Gdańsk: Tatastudio, 2011), p. 10.

the intelligentsia, led to the signing of agreements, first in Szczecin, then in Gdańsk, Jastrzębie-Zdrój and Katowice, as well as the establishment of the Independent Self-governing Labor Union “Solidarity” (NSZZ Solidarność).” A thread of sympathy and collaboration was soon established between the people involved with the NSZZ and Tischner. As early as 19 October 1980 he preached a sermon during a mass celebrated at the Wawel cathedral, in which he framed the spiritual and ethical foundations for the movement.

The word “solidarity” encapsulates our anxious hopes, inspires us to fortitude and thinking, binds together people who were standing apart from one another yesterday. ... The word “solidarity” has joined other, most Polish words to impart new shape to our days. There are several words like this: “freedom,” “independence,” “human dignity”—and today “solidarity.” ... Solidarity does not need an enemy or an opponent to grow in strength and develop. It turns towards everybody and against nobody. ... Some cleaning needs to be done around the house. Exactly that which needs to be done unites people and inspires to action. It unites people in a deeper and more durable manner than fear of the enemy. We want to be a united nation, but not united by fear. We want to be united by our simplest human obligation. We are going through very special moments today. People are casting away their masks, they are coming out of their hideouts, they are showing their true faces. ... Today we are the way we really are. ... What we are going through is an event of not only a social or economic nature, but above all of a spiritual nature.²²

An important event of that time was the 1st National Convention of NSZZ “Solidarność” Delegates, which was attended by Tischner as well. Two months later, on 13 December 1980, the communist authorities imposed martial law in Poland. Even though this time has been described in many specialist dissertations, it still holds secrets and arouses emotion. There is no doubt that the economy was ruined; the ineptitude of the authorities was compounded by sanctions imposed by the West. The creeping crisis, as well as political changes in the Soviet Union, were the factors inducing the authorities to make gradual concessions to the opposition. This did not however mean

²² “Ks. Józef Tischner. Sumienie ‘Solidarności’,” http://www.ecs.gda.pl/title,Sumienie_Solidarnosci,pid,888.html (accessed: 20.08.2019).

that the terror against the society and the Church ceased, the meaningful example of which was the killing of Rev. Jerzy Popiełuszko by the Security Service officers on 19 October 1984.

In April and May 1988 more strikes were staged; they ended in failure as a result of severe repression of the protesters. On the night of the 4 May, the ZOMO (Motorised Reserves of the Citizens' Militia) troops used petards and tear gas grenades to force their way into the Vladimir Lenin Steelworks in Krakow and effect a brutal pacification. On 10 May, in Gdańsk, in the wake of failed negotiations, the Strike Committee informed the protesters of the decision to abort the strike. The sight of a silent march of several thousand people made history. "The first row was composed of, inter alia, Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Alojzy Szablewski, the chairman of the Strike Committee, walking arm in arm."²³ This moment made the authorities realize that it was no longer possible to control the surge of discontent. The 6 February 1989 saw the beginning of the Round Table Talks, during which the counter-partners of the communists were the opposition representatives who had been persecuted over the years. On the 4 June an election was held and the opposition won by a landslide.

One might venture a proposition whereby the 1990s, which marked the last decade of Rev. Józef Tischner's life, were—apart from the instituted reforms and the development of a new, post-communist reality—also a time in which a new, highly disturbing tendency began to develop. The pivotal point in one of the major disputes was the role of the Church in the post-communist times. Thus emerged a question which played hard on Tischner's mind: "And maybe the role of the Church as the voice of the nation entraps it, holds it hostage to public expectation and sentiment, and leads to new ideologization of its message."²⁴ This was inextricably linked with the issue of dialogue between the Church and individuals far from its pastoral ministry, which in some circles entailed growing aversion to people of other nationalities, and particularly those of Jewish descent. Thus, something which had been viewed as an obvious thing, namely the presence of politics in the Church teaching, now became one of the fundamental and controversial issues. Hence the heated debate (in which Tischner

²³ "31 lat temu kraj objęła wiosenna fala strajków," <http://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/wiosenna-fala-strajkow-w-1988-r> (accessed: 20.08.2019).

²⁴ W. Bonowicz, *Tischner*, p. 404.

adopted a firm stance) concerned the following question: what if the Church favored politics over ethics in its teaching?²⁵ The diagnoses made by Tischner at that time are obviously open to judgement but it appears that, especially in hindsight, they were uncommonly accurate. “What I found most painful was not the things that the Church said, but the ones it did not say.” To wit, the whole dimension of religion that I learnt from Pietraszko was missing. Because a religion can often perform many social functions, but it can only do so when it is in fact a religion, and not a doctrine or a political party program.”²⁶

Another aspect of the disputes popularly engaged in, which cannot be passed over in silence is the fact that those years brought into relief the strife that had been festering among the “Solidarity” ranks themselves since August 1980. It was concerned with the relation between the working classes and the so-called intelligentsia, as well as with the role played by its leader, Lech Wałęsa, in those historic transformations. “Many Catholics, and especially politicians would stress and reinforce the break-up of the society. Both in the corridors of power and among the grass roots wars began to be waged, regretably with priests participating.”²⁷ These conflicts climaxed with such events as the 1990 presidential election, which was preceded by a stormy campaign, the 1993 government collapse, and, last but not least, the defeat of the incumbent president in the 1995 election.

It is worth mentioning one more element in order to have a more detailed panorama of the 1990s in Poland. In the eyes of the majority of the society, the radical economic transformation that was carried out at that time, along with all its attendant hardships, was in stark contrast to the success of the so-called post-communists, that is the heirs of the bygone regime. And the success in question was to be seen not only in politics, but above all in the world of business. “As a result, there was growing political support of the people advocating the necessity for a radical break-off.”²⁸ The question emerged as to whether

²⁵ This question had a particularly significant ring to it, given the newly-established Catholic “Radio Maryja” in Toruń.

²⁶ W. Bonowicz, *Tischner*, p. 561.

²⁷ A. Michnik, J. Tischner, J. Żakowski, *Między Panem a Plebanem*, p. 560.

²⁸ P. Borowiec, *Czas polityczny po rewolucji. Czas w polskim dyskursie politycznym po 1989 roku* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2013), p. 508.

the very process of the political change was a result of some arrangement or scheme masterminded by the elites; undoubtedly, over the years, this question has led to ever deeper divisions and quarrels. One cannot help noticing that Józef Tischner died when those processes were only getting into a full swing, with later years seeing them play out with a vengeance.

The period in which Rev. Józef Tischner lived was a time of momentous and tragic events, transitions and processes. In a sense, for him that period had both a dramatic beginning and a dramatic ending. There is no doubt that it shaped Tischner but, on the other hand, it was Tischner himself who did so to some extent. After all these years, the philosopher's words: "The way I see it is that it's going to be quite a long time before we can finally see our normal Poland"²⁹ still have the ring of symbolism.

²⁹ A. Michnik, J. Tischner, J. Żakowski, *Między Panem a Plebanem*, p. 649.

INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION OF JÓZEF TISCHNER'S PHILOSOPHY

Józef Tischner is not infrequently regarded by commentators and researchers of his output as more of an essayist rather than a philosopher *par excellence*. Leaving the detailed justification of this claim aside given the limited compass of the paper, let us take note of the resultant ramification. The idea behind the following description of his output is as follows: an attempt at a synthetic look at the things Tischner thought and wrote about, as well as the manner in which he did that; bringing out the characteristic elements of the method he applied; and last but not least, pointing to the goal he wanted to achieve by writing a considerable number of texts. Still, the remark contained in the first sentence is a reminder that different methods are employed by an essayist and a philosopher, though they may be aiming at the same target. But it does not end here: in both the spheres of consideration, reflection can take on various characters, beginning with the ones manifesting themselves in subtle nuances, and ending with the ones in mutual opposition. One thing is obvious: the essayist and the philosopher—and by extension their methods—do not have to cancel each other out. And if we take into account the reasoning style of Heidegger, Ricoeur or Lévinas, they complement each other.

Asking about the philosophy of Józef Tischner is in fact asking about the method he employed. In other words, it is a question about the strategy for thinking about that which is crucial, fundamental and primary about it.

If we consider the root of the Greek word ‘method’ (μετά χροδός), means “down the street” or “along the road.” The crucial thing is that we do not mean here “wandering” from place to place. If so, then we are dealing with a very specific situation. There is someone who is moving from one place to another; there is the space between one point and the other point, and the space thus becomes a kind of my place, something that at the given moment appears to be only given to me. Unchanging and made up of objective conditions and circumstances, it becomes something that makes my onward movement possible. Walking down the road is about moving from the starting point to the end point, and the former from the latter is separated by a number of intermediate points, each one resulting from the previous one and leading to the next one. If so, then one is right to ask: is any one of them more important than the others; is there any one that is constitutive for the others? Let us advance a thesis which, given a lack of possibility, cannot be at this moment proven, whereby the starting point, the point of departure is the point in question, because there can be no onward movement without starting off from point one.

What is this starting point which is peculiar to Józef Tischner? What is the thing that focuses the whole of his consideration, and that imparts his distinctive features? It is not enough to point to the philosophers who inspire him, the ones whom he knows well and can comment on pertinently. Let me, therefore, single out one element that appears to be of great significance. It is about pointing out, or bringing out the warp of a word and its inherent power, the weight of sense it has. And so the philosopher’s work is based on a word, on discerning the fact that it is not only a sound or a vehicle for communication, but in itself it lives by its intrinsic content. Such a perception appears to allude to Paul Ricoeur, who—referring to Pierre Janet—points to the distinction between a cry and a word. “A cry becomes a word the moment it ceases to do and causes something to be done.”¹ For Tischner, a word lives, that is it is not for itself, it is not offered for contemplation; it rather enables being and gives freedom. This thought requires elaboration.

What is meant by this is not the careful character of a word, its painstakingly crafted precision, or compliance with the principles of

¹ P. Ricoeur, “Praca i słowo,” in: idem, *Podług nadziei. Odczyty, szkice i studia*, trans. S. Cichowicz et al. (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1991), p. 89.

logic. The careful character of a word that is meant here is the one that enables the surrounding reality to happen. This attitude is first and foremost noticeable in the sermons preached and the retreats led by Tischner. He begins one of his sermons thusly: "In this unusual place which dates back to the beginnings of Poland and difficult times of Christianity; in this the place of work and prayer, a basic question comes to mind: is all this still relevant?"² Everything that the reader comes across in the following pages is about a word coming into existence—a word which does not exert pressure or compulsion. Remarkably, a spoken word is not supposed to pressurize the listener or compel him to anything. Rather: it is to take root, or settle in him. In Tischner's writings on philosophy or the essence of religion, this tendency is rather obscure, although paradoxically visible; a passage treating of "care" contained in *Studies of the Philosophy of Consciousness*,³ or practically the whole of *The Philosophy of Drama* or *The Controversy over the Existence of Man* may serve here as examples. The introduction to *The Controversy...* reads: "Once again I wanted to expose the areas of good in which man's humanity that matures in drama takes its roots."⁴ The very formal beauty or the vividness of this description are hardly the only striking things here; Tischner does not so much show as actually bring out the content, not before but together with the reader.

Tischner takes a close look at that which surrounds him; he does that as a thoroughly sensitive man. For him, the category of sensitivity is not an emotional sensation, a touching moment or even a special kind of sensitivity to some outside stimulus. It is rather about something that can be defined as insightfulness of looking. With this as a foundation, Tischner wants to identify and describe what he can see. At the age of sixteen, he made the following entry in his journal: "The way I have become cognizant of God is that I personified Him in the form of light, and human souls in the form of little flames. Between the Light and the Flames golden threads stretch, connecting the soul with God. I could not see flesh or earth, just spirit."⁵ Obviously, this

² J. Tischner, *Miłość nieomiłowana* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Sławomira Grotmirskiego, 1993), p. 5.

³ Cf. Idem, *Studia z filozofii świadomości* (Kraków: Instytut Myśli Józefa Tischnera, 2006), pp. 303–306.

⁴ Idem, *Spór o istnienie człowieka* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1998), p. 8.

⁵ Idem, *Dziennik 1944–1949. Niewielkie pomieszanie klepek* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2014), p. 180.

passage is not a note of mystical experiences. It is a reflection connected with a school lesson which he attended and which was devoted to the evidence for God's existence. Both identification and an attempt at description with thought-provoking words, which are so typical of anyone who wants to pursue philosophy, function in Tischner's writings in a singular way. As he admits, he began learning philosophy "mainly from Thomism. It was the kind of Thomism that we could afford back then."⁶

For Tischner's philosophy to be understood, it is crucial to ask about what is to be identified and how it is to be described. Furthermore, this issue sounds in Tischner's writings very resolute and unequivocal. It is not enough to ask what to learn, but rather what *should* be learnt, or what *must not* be learnt.

Tischner is aware that the surrounding world can be learnt. Even a person with only a superficial knowledge of his *oeuvre* knows that his grasp of the intricacies of philosophy is impressive. Still, he is aware that in fact there is only one subject that makes pursuing philosophy worthwhile. "And then (after the studies of Thomism) came the encounter with a specific human being."⁷ Again, this encounter has a special function. Let us ask: who is the man encountered by the Polish philosopher? This goes somewhat against the grain of what we can read in the *Journal*, but he has both a body and a soul. The body is inseparable; there is no escaping, omitting or invalidating it. The important thing is that it is not alien to the soul. Tischner can clearly see that the entire man, including the soul and the body, has found himself in a specific situation. One cannot help but think about him within this context, because otherwise such deliberation would be futile and fruitless. He is not a "historical man;" not in the sense in which Samuel Beckett uses the term—it is not humanity, a body of individuals marching down through history. It is the individual within the world, flung inside it, together with all its attendant consequences. However, in Tischner's opinion, we are living in times when individuals are faced with common misery; every man's lot has become enmeshed in wretchedness: "the contemporary man has entered a period of severe crisis of his hope."⁸

⁶ Idem, "Czym jest filozofia, którą uprawiam?" in: idem, *Myslenie według wartości* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2000), p. 6.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

The crisis affects a variety of fields, and it can be described on many different planes. Let us leave this issue aside. The important thing is its origins, the place in which it has its beginnings. Arguably as never before, man has come to face the system which illegitimately wanted to claim all the areas of life bar none. The experience of the war and then communism is not a mere occurrence, something that happened at some point in history. It is a mechanism aimed at annihilating man as such, not only in his corporeal, but also spiritual dimension. And yet, the thing worth emphasizing is that no one is innocent. We are dealing with a situation in which man is making a voyage of discovery revealing probably as-yet-unknown territory portraying his internal structure. The evil nature of the system does not come from nowhere; it has a specific author. On the one hand, there is the one who cherishes hope, and he who holds it out "can see in front of himself open space crisscrossed with roads that call for movement;"⁹ on the other hand, there is the one who is always complicit in evil. The crisis of hope is not only about hope being taken away from man, but also about him "annihilating himself by becoming a player in the game."¹⁰ What then does Tischner notice as he recognizes reality? There is only one answer: man, but not his being, and not even his lot. The point is to see "that out of the depths of his game longing for that which is really good emerges, and through freedom the longing is searching for space."¹¹

It is no wonder then that such an approach gave rise to the development of another key term: "drama." Tischner notes that the drama, "no matter what might be said, points to man's life;"¹² further on we find some vital clarification. Drama is not a complex of convoluted interhuman references, nor an experience that surfaces in an individual as a result of some or other experiences. That which goes on in someone, happens in some time given to them. A man regards himself as exactly the one who perceives his own time, next to himself he notices other people, and then the world, which he touches with his own feet. This perspective affords Tischner a possibility of looking at reality

⁹ Idem, "Ludzie z kryjówek," in: idem, *Myslenie według wartości*, p. 412.

¹⁰ Idem, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, p. 64.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 65.

¹² Idem, *Filozofia dramatu. Wprowadzenie* (Paris: Éditions du Dialogue, Société d'Éditions Internationales, 1990), p. 11.

in a different way. The point is not to describe the world, because then it becomes something that is offered for examination, something beyond me, something that I do not touch with my feet. Here am I in the world, I who am afflicted with the crisis of my own hope. Hence, I do not ask what the world is, or what it is like. I ask about myself, becoming aware that “at the beginning of the drama a question arises: who are you? At the end, there are two opposing possibilities: cursed or blessed.”¹³ The characteristic thing is that actually the problem is not resolved. We do not really know what the alternative is, what it points to, how it relates to our lives.

It goes without saying that Tischner does not leave us here. There are two temptations concerned with showing a solution to a man in such a situation. One temptation comes from this world; it is an offering formulated by socialism, Thomism or integrism, which can be termed a temptation from the totalitarian side; the other one inheres in man himself and comes to the fore as *homo sovieticus*. The whole problem can be summed up thus: while putting forth a solution, avoid possible pitfalls; while constructing a philosophy of man, avoid another enslavement.

It can be clearly seen that Józef Tischner pursues a philosophy of man, and virtually all his efforts amount to the understanding of this fundamental issue. What is then the right way of thinking about man? Here we encounter two crucial threads. First, one should ask about the “I” itself, capture it in its origins, and then ask about the other as the one who appears on the horizon of the experienced world. It is noteworthy that it is not right to separate these two orders, even though on the thinking plane it is hard to avoid that. They both closely relate to each other; the one is expressed in and through the other. The Polish philosopher’s thinking follows this path to bring the connection between these two dimensions into sharp relief.

The question about man must be posed in the most radical manner possible. What are we to make of this? Radicalness does not mean here comprehensive knowledge, or an exhaustive theory serving as the only possible explanation. Proper understanding is connected with the fact of me being in the world. The following questions are due: what is the world doing to me? How does it reveal me? “Radical philosophical thinking, that is metaphysical thinking, is not born

¹³ Ibidem, p. 312.

out of amazement at the surrounding world, which is the view held by Aristotelians. Nor does it ask why there is something rather than nothing.”¹⁴ Being is—can this fact direct man to the truth about himself? Tischner is clearly skeptical about this. The time of crisis, which was mentioned above, is nothing else but a crisis of values, and it “contains something that should not be there,”¹⁵ some kind of primary wobble, misrepresentation. What needs to be unearthed in man is the foundation, the primary disposition, something that will enable him to discern values. Tischner develops a concept of the axiological “I,” and to capture it he uses a method of phenomenological description, which often features in his analyses. “All the other concepts of I” can be inferred from the axiological “I.”¹⁶ The starting point is to show the process of solidarity with that which is mine, but the process is defined by me; this is the case, because “I” appears to be marked by value; “I experience myself as a special kind of value.”¹⁷ This specialness is caused by the fact that the very “I” is pure and absolute positiveness. One might say that it is given exactly as such and no negative value is opposed to it. No one can imagine themselves as “personified demonicity,”¹⁸ and any possible attempt at this must be a kind of hoax or game. To throw the concept of the axiological “I” into sharp relief, the author also uses metaphorical language; notably, it is another characteristic quality of Tischner’s philosophizing. It surfaces as hunger, thirst, when man experiences either an absence of or a threat to some value. It is also unreal, present outside the context of time and place, evinces a distinct inclination towards the world, becoming realized in a given object. Last but not least, it is individual, one might say that always and irrevocably irreducible to any other “I.” At this point, however, the above-mentioned, essential element appears. The “I” becomes manifest through the other, together with him, through his axiological individuality.¹⁹

¹⁴ Idem, *Myślenie według wartości*, p. 489.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 486.

¹⁶ Idem, “Impresje aksjologiczne,” in: idem, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 1994), p. 163.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 168.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 174.

¹⁹ Cf. Ibidem, p. 178.

In this way we arrive at yet another important concept in Tischner's philosophy. A dialogic relation, or—put differently—an encounter can happen between I and the other man. This category, which shows clear influence of Buber or Lévinas, takes on a new meaning. It is not merely about coming into contact with the other, striking up a conversation or exchanging experiences. It is marked by a critical situation in which we all have found ourselves. This crisis is a shared experience of the tragicality of our lot. Tischner multiplies symbols, developing the thought of those who inspire him. “To encounter means to get to directly see the tragic permeating all the modes of being,”²⁰ which in turn means that the encounter between *me and you* happens in the place where good grapples with evil, where there is a real threat to the former. The problem is that it is impossible to describe, or characterize this situation at the outset. We are condemned exactly to these metaphors and symbols; one might say that in a sense the very beginnings of the encounter find us helpless and naked. We realize that something is happening, but we do not know where it is coming from, on behalf of whom and for what purpose. The only element illuminating the profundity of the encounter is the good that we can choose together. A fundamental gesture on the part of the encounter participants is a mutual permission that they give each other to be, being fully aware that one can leave or betray the other. Here, good and evil are experienced at their very source, where both I and the other can distinctly feel that our encounter “gravitates towards some sacrifice.”²¹

Because of Józef Tischner's profession, his philosophical thinking not infrequently, and perhaps inevitably, enters the domain of religious thinking. It appears to be not so much an addition as an indispensable complement to properly pursued philosophy. In Tischner's opinion, an encounter between two men somehow reflects a relation between a person and God. One could point to the essential difference between one and the other, and there is no limit to possible descriptions. However, let us point out just one that appears to be of great significance. The face manifests itself the moment the other becomes a participant in my drama, when it turns out that my question “who am I?” does not resound in an empty space, that there

²⁰ Idem, *Myślenie według wartości*, p. 483.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 485.

is a witness by my side, someone who experiences it in a similar way. The question asked by the witness appears to be more resounding, to be an appeal directed exactly at me, and no one else. How does God reveal Himself if I do not encounter His face in the world? The biblical “where art thou” directed at Adam lies at the very heart of a religious encounter. As Tischner says, the origins of religion hold the mystery of election. God’s epiphany is not presence out of which “some claim”²² is directed at me—it is pure love, an invitation to reciprocity. It also appears to be the only possibility whereby man can be delivered from the crisis, and the axiological “I” can satisfy the hunger that is eating away at it. In the period when he was already afflicted with the incurable disease, Tischner wrote: “That which picks you and lifts you up is love.”²³ This does not, however, mean that the road that the thinker followed is now thus terminated. We have given some thought to the starting point for his *oeuvre*; we have tried to pick up the trail he followed. What comes at the end of the road? The answer due is: love, and “the word points to man’s creative capabilities, admirable skillfulness at working miracles.”²⁴ The last text penned by the Polish philosopher is very striking: “Have you, dear reader, ever wrestled with your own love? Have you ever felt the helplessness that powerless love can plunge you into?”²⁵

By making man the main object of his analyses—a man relating to another man, but above all to God—by following the path marked out by phenomenology and existentialism, striving to deliver man from troublesome miseries conditioned by totalitarianisms, flawed nature and the mystery of sin, Tischner remains faithful to what he wrote in *The Philosophy of Drama*, where the word “helplessness” appears; in the last text it is replaced with “powerlessness.” But in this case “a mystery of participation” opens up to man. God Himself takes part in it; after all, *religio* means a bond.

²² Idem, *Filozofia dramatu. Wprowadzenie*, p. 13.

²³ Idem, “Miłość,” in: idem, *Miłość nas rozumie. Rok liturgiczny z księdzem Tischnerem* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2000), p. 26.

²⁴ Idem, *Miłość niemiłowana*, p. 56.

²⁵ Idem, “Maleńkość i jej Mocarz,” in: idem, *Miłość nas rozumie*, p. 171.