

Tischner and Metz: Two Understandings of Solidarity*

In 1989, the difficult process of deconstructing the totalitarian system and building a liberal democracy began in the Central and Eastern Europe. It appears that the new democracies defined themselves very soon as democracies of the peripheries. Unfortunately, the fall of communism in that part of Europe did not entail the beginning of a serious discussion concerning the model of communal life to be implemented after the removal of dictatorship. The prevailing opinion was that the new form of government did not require any debate, since there was a complete model to be taken over from the free countries of the West and implemented.

That approach led to a situation where from the great wealth of liberal thought only certain ideas were acknowledged, and that only in a superficial and selective manner. After 1989, the significance of such elements of liberalism as the neutrality of the state in worldview-related matters, the modernization of social life, or pluralism of ethical attitudes was stressed with particular emphasis in many countries of our region. Rarely, however, were any questions asked about the significance of national traditions, the axiological foundations of democracy, or the need to shape communal memory¹.

Such functioning of democracy in post-communist countries is clearly visible in the changing fortunes of the category of solidarity, which played such significant role in preparing the transformation of regimes in this part of Europe. Solidarity as a moral attitude and a valuable civic virtue was popularized mostly in the 1980s, particularly in the context of the great trade union and social movement of „Solidarity“. After 1989, however, this word practically disappeared from the public domain for a number of years, and was rarely used in analyses or descriptions of social, economic, or political life. Particularly in the 1990s, the question about the extent to which post-communist

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¹ Cf. KRASNODĘBSKI, Z.: *Demokracja peryferii*. Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2003, 11-20.

societies were becoming truly just or characterized by solidarity, for instance, was very rarely asked.

After the fall of communism, solidarity largely ceased to be a source of inspiration, or to drive social and political changes. It suddenly appeared that the new freedom did perfectly well without the idea of solidarity². Unfortunately, wherever solidarity was rejected, it was soon replaced by such phenomena as social egotism, a desire for instant profits, exclusion, or new forms of poverty. Was the transformation of political systems in the Eastern and Central Europe doomed to result in the absence or shortage of solidarity?

J. Tischner's Ethics of Solidarity

One of the most important theoreticians of solidarity in our part of Europe is undoubtedly J. Tischner. His *Ethics of Solidarity*, written between the autumn of 1980 and the autumn of 1981, was conceived as a philosophical commentary on the then contemporary events. At that time in Poland, solidarity became a way of fighting without violence. Tischner placed his deliberations on the category of solidarity in the broader context of reflections on values and the dialogic structure of human existence³.

For Tischner, our world is a world of values, in which things and matters are arranged in a hierarchical order. We cannot pin down exactly what right and wrong is, we cannot set precise boundaries – but we now there is a hierarchy. A world without values would not be our world. It is values that make us always strive at something, give us the impulse to always prioritize one thing over another. Consequently, ours is a world of a hierarchical order, and our thinking is of a preferential nature.

According to Tischner, the experience of values is the key to ethics, which is, above all, an attempt at a theory of values. Man exists between the ideal world of powerless values and the world of deeds. In man, powerless values became reality through actions. The primary source of ethical experience is not that of values as such, but of the discovery that another man has appeared beside us. It is not values that come first, but the presence of another person. A meeting with another person is the first source of all axiological experience.

Writing on solidarity between 1980 and 1981, Tischner pointed out that the labour protests taking place at that time largely had an axiological dimension. „What we are witnessing right now“, he stressed, „is not merely

² Cf. TAYLOR, CH.: *Kilka refleksji na temat solidarności*. Kraków: „Znak“, 2000 nr 8, p. 22–34.

³ Cf. TISCHNER, J.: *Myslenie według wartości*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1993.

a social or an economic event, but above all an ethical one. It is about the dignity of man, based on conscience. The most profound solidarity is that of conscience⁴. Tischner was restoring the primary meaning of words such as dignity, family, suffering, work, or education. A reflection on broadly-conceived solidarity provided an opportunity to clear our world of concepts and values from all kinds of Marxist influences which had resulted in a profound spiritual and moral impoverishment of many people.

Tischner was aware that solidarity did not represent a complete ethical theory, but was merely one of many ideas. It was a kind of light, an idea to be reproduced. The ethics of solidarity wants to be an ethics of conscience. It is conscience that calls us to solidarity with or for someone. Solidarity is always that of a particular community, and of dialogue. The ethics of solidarity must be an ethics of conscience. „The foundation of solidarity is conscience, and the impulse for its emergence is the call for help from a man wronged by another. Solidarity consists in a special bondage between people: one person becomes bound to another to take care of someone who needs help. I am with you, you are with me, we are together – for him“⁵.

After 1989, Tischner practically abandoned a more comprehensive reflection on the phenomenon of solidarity. In that period, his comments on this subject are marginal. Unfortunately, while becoming involved in deliberations on the forms of overcoming the heritage of communism and possibilities of developing a Christian concept of liberalism, he did not pay much attention to the category of solidarity⁶. Tischner believed that upon emerging from the totalitarian epoch, a society of dialogue needed to be built. That was the first stage in overcoming communism. It was necessary to get rid of the conviction that only those in power were right. Thus, the construction of social dialogue could begin, going gradually from a monologue to a dialogue-based society.

After 1989, Tischner developed the category of *homo sovieticus* which he used to describe certain specific characteristics of people living under communism. It was an abstract category, since no full-fledged „Soviet man“ ever existed. *Homo sovieticus* is a man enslaved by the communist system, existing also in post-communist countries. For a Soviet man, three values are important above all others: work, a share in power, and a sense of personal dignity. Dependence on these three values can be expressed in the formula saying that existence de-

⁴ TISCHNER, J.: *Etyka solidarności and Homo sovieticus*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1992, p. 11–12.

⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

⁶ Cf. TISCHNER, J.: *Nieszczęsny dar wolności*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1993.

termines consciousness. The „Soviet man“ is a one-dimensional being; he lacks a spiritual perspective, one that would go beyond the here and now. Existence determines thinking, freedom, actions, and the entirety of being.

In the beginnings of the transformation of regimes, Tischner admitted his concept of solidarity needed modification and supplementation. He acknowledged that his earlier analysis of solidarity did not take into account the need for its being deeply rooted. The idea of solidarity is not a stand-alone; it stems from the underlying principle of the dignity of human person. „In order to further develop, or, indeed, to save the ethos of solidarity, it must be demonstrated that in it and through it our most profound respect for a person and his or her inalienable rights is expressed. We must bind that which is bound already: personalism and solidarity, solidarity and personalism“⁷. The ethics of solidarity must become a personalist way of thinking.

Memory, narrative and solidarity according to J. B. Metz

In Metz's concept, solidarity is one of three categories of practical fundamental theology, the other two being memory and narrative. The memory-narrative-solidarity triad expresses the mystical and practical dimension of Christian faith. Solidarity is founded on the Christian belief in its practical dimension – the dimension of faith in God before whom all people are subjects. Only in that form can faith motivate man to become concerned for universal justice and transformation of social life.

Solidarity is first of all a category of help, of bringing comfort to a subject faced with threats and suffering. Its foundation is the solidarity of Christian hope directed towards the God of the living and the dead who „calls everyone to exist as subjects before Him“⁸. The first fruit of that solidarity of hope is concern for the living, especially for those oppressed and afflicted; the second fruit is memory of the dead. This way, a twofold, profoundly humanist structure of Christian solidarity is delineated.

Metz does not share the fears that the basis of solidarity is only valuable as part of reflections of personalist and existential nature, in which the „me-you“ relationship is emphasized. He believes the personalist and existential currents are characterized by an excessive inclination towards privacy. The enclosing of solidarity in the private dimension is the outcome of the rustic

⁷ Ibid, 187.

⁸ METZ, J.B.: *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1977, p. 70.

and romantic consciousness of the society. A reprivatization of faith entails a reprivatization of solidarity⁹.

Metz points out that the ethos of modern societies is largely determined by the exchange of goods. In such conditions, solidarity is reduced to a solidarity of relationships between two equal partners which boils down to mutual, benefit-driven assistance. True solidarity, however, should be something radically different. Its goal may not merely be the mutual success of partners, but concern for the subjective existence of all people.

The notion of solidarity is thus related in Metz's concept to the subjectivity of man and his identity. Solidarity becomes a category of rescuing a subject from annihilation in the conditions of a scientific and technical culture characterized by apathy, a crisis of communication, and the stasis of history. True solidarity is expressed through the commitment to enable all men to exist in their subjectivity before God. Thus, whenever the subjectivity of an individual is negated, there is no room for solidarity. This mistake was made by Marxism, when its struggle for a "new man" and the subjectivity of oppressed classes resulted in forsaking personal identity. Solidarity is not the abandonment of individuality; solidarity results from an autonomous, individual decision. It is a solidarity of individuals, not of masses. Mass treatment and relegation of individuals into the crowd destroys solidarity¹⁰.

Metz also accuses Marxism of misconceiving history. While Marxists adhere strongly to the idea of historical unity of humankind, they relativize the concept of universal justice, referring it only to the future. This destroys unity and true solidarity, since universal justice applies then only to future generations, and not to the dead or the victims of history, who also belong to the human community.

In the Christian understanding of history there is still room for ties between those alive and those who have passed away. Consequently, we could talk about „forward-looking“ and „backward-looking“ solidarity. In solidarity with the dead, man asks not about his own death, but expresses his concern for another person: what happens with you in death? In dying, a subject is threatened with the loss of identity. The category of solidarity becomes a form of rescuing the subject from oblivion and death. Understood this way, solidarity is part of history as a history of suffering, which includes the pain of death. Metz explicitly emphasizes that the basis of all solidarity – both that

⁹ Cf. METZ, J.B.: *Zur Theologie der Welt*. München: Kaiser Verlag, 1991, p. 81.

¹⁰Cf. MARCUSE, H.: *Die Permanenz der Kunst*. München: Kösel Verlag, 1987, p. 46.

which is „earthly“ and that which is directed towards the dead and the victims of history – is God, who is a God of the living and the dead.

The fruit of acting in the spirit of solidarity is the „option for the poor“. Metz's thought coincides here with the views of liberation theology (Boff, Gutierrez, Miranda, Segundo). In this perspective, the „option for the poor“ is not only the outcome of ethical reflection, but has its ultimate substantiation in Divine Revelation which is clearly sympathetic with the little and weak, the poor and oppressed of this world. God has secretly, but in a real and determined way, endowed the poor of this world with his presence with particular favour. And since a mutual relationship exists between God and the poor, one needs to know God in order to know the poor, and know the poor in order to know God¹¹.

Metz also relates his deliberations on solidarity to the issue of inculturation, which touches upon the question about unity and multiplicity in the Church. It may become a way of practicing and developing solidarity, or its negation. Today, we are witnessing the development of a Christianity that is becoming ever more polycentric, rooted in many cultures. Consequently, we need the Church to be a Church of global solidarity, based on the recognition of the subjectivity of men irrespectively of their cultural roots. A culturally polycentric Church is possible if we seek freedom and justice for all, and develop a culture of recognition for others in their diversity.

It was very unfortunate that so little attention was devoted to solidarity in the Eastern and Central Europe after 1989. Tischner's concept was more useful in the society's struggle against the communist system, but lacked appropriate sensitivity to the unemployed, poor and weak who emerged during the transformation of political systems. It appears that in this context, Metz's concept was better suited for those parts of Europe, and could have substantially helped in creating a democratic society of solidarity, strongly emphasizing the need for subjective existence of all people.

Solidarity is not a technique of keeping accounts, but a way of living. „True solidarity consists in continually giving, not to realize some kind of justice which would restore the order of the universe, but to jointly bear the burden of limited human nature. Solidarity is not a distribution of goods by an anonymous hand; it is born when we share while facing one another. This makes giving meaningful“¹².

¹¹ Cf. ROTTLÄNDER, P.: *Option für die Armen*, in: *Mystik und Politik*, ed. by E. Schillebeeckx, Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1988, p. 73.

¹² MILLON-DELSOL, CH.: *Solidarność zakorzeniona*. Kraków: „Znak“, 2000 nr 8, 53.

It appears that a renaissance of solidarity is yet to come. It is not the case that there is no alternative for the modern neoliberal economic and social policy – which is very clearly visible in the current crisis. In this context, we keep hearing more and more often now about the need for a globalization of solidarity which becomes anew an important element of communal life. In the opinion of Z. Bauman, what we urgently need today is the subjection of unleashed global powers to political and democratic supervision. Many problems of contemporary world spring from the fact that economy has been released from the social and ethical ties that used to constrain it in local societies and states. Fostering the attitude of solidarity in the global dimension may become an important element in the creation of a new order in the world in the social, political, and economic dimension.

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S U M M A R Y

According to Tischner, the foundation of solidarity is conscience, and the impulse for its emergence is the call for help from a man wronged by another. In Metz's concept, solidarity is first of all a category of help, of bringing comfort to a subject faced with threats and suffering. It was very unfortunate that so little attention was devoted to solidarity in the Eastern and Central Europe after the fall of communism.