

The Religious Perspective in Tischner's Philosophy

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Tischner's Conception of Religious Thinking

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The analyses conducted here on the structure of the thinking subject, whose final accomplishment is supposed to be the realization of goodness, have led us to the thesis that the experience of evil makes it necessary for thinking to open up to a new dimension. Further, we have concluded – noting an interesting parallel on this issue between Kant's and Tischner's philosophy – that this new type of thinking should, in the broadest possible sense, be religious in character. Kant, after discovering that “a man of good will can be an instrument of evil,” postulates that man enter the sphere of religious community life; Tischner, faced with the “death of man” after Auschwitz and Kolyma, finds that man is a being in need of grace. We have already presented the most important points of Kant's philosophy of religion in the previous chapter; now we would like to elaborate on Tischner's religious thinking, also rooted in the experience of evil. But first, one important remark must be made.

The parallel we have pointed out between Kant's and Tischner's thought might be slightly misleading. For Kant, religious thinking was certainly only an episode – it is almost entirely connected with the experience of evil and constitutes an answer to this problem. Thus, the system of transcendental philosophy can be interpreted without taking into account his philosophy of religion – and it is so interpreted by the majority of Kantian scholars, who treat his religious thought as an addition of little significance, connected more with the immediate problems of the 18th-century culture than with Kant's major philosophical interests. Tischner's case is entirely different: for him, this type of thinking and this problematic are at the center of his philosophy. The experience of evil is just one of the many moments which refer us to religion – in reality, all thinking, or even more broadly, all human activity can be fully understood only as part of the drama played out between God and man. Religious thinking should not be identified with some theological system;¹ rather, it is the most authentic expression of the fundamental existential situation of man, who, looking for the truth about himself, strives for salvation.

This way of formulating philosophical issues goes hand in hand with the pastoral work of Józef Tischner, who, through the living words of his sermons and the written words of his numerous texts, presented the dilemmas of faith affecting the modern man.² Nor were political experiences without significance for his philosophy of religion: first communism, then the period of transformation and the heated debates over the state–Church relations which took place in Poland at the beginning of the nineties. Taking all these contexts into account, many interpreters see Tischner as primarily a religious thinker, and they look at the other strands of his thought through the prism of the issue of the salvation and perdition of man.³

In the present work, we will have to pass over many themes of Tischner's religious thinking. In keeping with this book's main topic, we are primarily interested in the context in which religious thinking finds its source in the experience of evil. For Tischner, the essence of this new beginning lies in the fact that there arises in man a need for experiencing grace – man, paralyzed by his own weakness, puts his trust in the workings of something beyond himself. But before we elaborate on this

¹ J. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości* [Thinking in Values], Kraków 1982. 359.

² We should mention here several particularly noteworthy books containing this type of religious reflection based on pastoral work: *Przekonać Pana Boga* [To Convince God], *Miłość nas rozumie* [Love Understands Us], *Tischner czyta katechizm* [Tischner Reads the Catechism]. Some of these were based on interviews with Tischner, others are collections of scattered reflections which he noted down as his reactions to current religious, social, and political events. However, in the present text we will not attempt to analyze this otherwise important trend in Tischner's religious thinking.

³ For example, this conclusion seemed to emerge from the presented papers and the follow-up discussion at the conference which took place during the "Tischner Days" in Kraków in 2003 – see J. Jagiełło, W. Zuziak (eds.), *Między potępieniem a zbawieniem* [Between Damnation and Salvation]. A similar thesis is to be found in Jarosław Gowin's book, *Religia i ludzkie biedy. Ks. Tischnera spory o Kościół*. [Religion and Human Miseries. Fr. Tischner's Disputes concerning the Church], where we read: "It was in the field of religious thought that Tischner was a truly original mind" (p.9).

thought, let us outline briefly some of the more general aspects of the ²⁰⁵ Tishnerian idea of religious thinking.

In order to define the essence of religious thinking, the Cracovian philosopher proposes the word “search,” making an allusion to the old scholastic formula. He writes: “The man whose reason searches for faith, and whose faith searches for reason – does think religiously.”⁴ Above all, “searching” expresses a certain incertitude. A searching man has difficulty with defining himself, he gets lost in the world surrounding him, unable to arrange it in his mind into one, ordered whole. But searching does not have to mean chaotically groping around in the dark; it can be directed at something which, though admittedly remaining unknown, is close at hand and longed-for. In thinking this role is played by truth. Thinking revolves around “the issue of the existential truth of man. This truth is indivisible – the same at the level of faith and the same at the level of thought.”⁵ It is very symptomatic that in his philosophy of religion as well Tischner chooses truth to be the central notion, and not, for example, salvation. He writes of this: “All promise of salvation must go through the trial by fire connected with the question of truth. Thinking which stays alive by asking about truth turns out to be a condition of salvation.”⁶ At the same time, it is thanks to truth that man, as a being lost and searching, has a chance of preserving his integrity, of not getting lost completely, because in the end there are not many truths, but the one “existential truth of man.”

What does the search for this truth involve within the sphere of religious thinking? In order to answer this question we must take a look at the three dimensions pointed out by Tischner as determining the structure of all thinking, and then examine how they function in the context of religious thought. These are: “the subjective dimension (I think), the dialogical dimension (I think with you), and the objective dimension (we think about *this*).”⁷

The issue of the thinking subject has been the focus of our attention throughout this work. The point of view presented here, which has primarily followed Kant’s philosophy, showed the basic determinant of the subject’s thinking to be its creativity and autonomy. Thinking, in its various interactions, must in every situation rely upon itself – “I think” lies at the basis of all that is thought. That is why thinking is ultimately verified through its self-referentiality. Tischner, whose views fit quite well into this paradigm of thought so characteristic for modern philosophy, while discussing the subjective dimension of religious thinking does point out one aspect of it which is truly original. Religious thinking consists not so much in autonomous creation as in extracting from one’s own inner self something that is primal in relation to the very act of thinking. In his attempt to reach this deeply hidden source the subject of religious thinking can rely on the help of “a guiding voice.”

⁴ *Myślenie według wartości*, 339.

⁵ *Ibid.* 342.

⁶ *Ibid.* 345.

⁷ *Ibid.* 342.

This “reliance on” does not necessarily mean that the subject is giving up his autonomy. Tischner expresses the specificity of this aspect of religious thinking by recalling the Augustinian metaphor of the inner teacher. Here, thinking consists in the full inner concentration that allows the subject to hear the voice directed at him. In this sense – to use St. Augustine’s formula – we should say not “I think,” but rather “thinking thinks” in me and I submit to the rhythm set by the logic of the Absolute addressing me.⁸ This is why the basic qualities of religious thinking must be humbleness and the readiness to accept what is being revealed in my thinking. The moments of creativity and those connected with the subject’s self-fulfillment are no longer in the foreground.

At the religious level, this submittance takes on the form of a subjective or personal, emotional act of entrusting oneself to God, who “thinks in me.” What Tischner tries to show is that this dependence can somehow be objectivized – thinking is, after all, dependent on the logic of truth: “Admittedly, I do have power over my acts of thinking, that is, I can think or not think, but I do not have power over its results. Once I’ve began thinking in accordance with the logic of truth, I cannot refuse to accept the results of this thinking.”⁹ All thinking is directed at the truth and remains dependent on this truth, which is not, after all, a creation of the subject. This dependence becomes uniquely personified in religious thinking – it is the inner teacher that guides me on the road of cognition. Outside of the sphere of religious thinking I am guided simply by the truth.

The moment of “having to rely” on something beyond my thinking highlights what Tischner calls the dialogical dimension. Namely, an integral component of religious thinking is “following the testimony of others.”¹⁰ The thinking of even the most autonomous subject never starts from absolute scratch; it always utilizes something that was somehow transmitted by others. Both in theoretical and practical cognition we appeal to obvious truths that are not only our own discoveries. This relying on the testimony of others takes on a special significance in the case of religious thinking. Here we are dealing with something more than just the transmission from one to the other of some part of our knowledge which can later be verified by means of objective cognition. Religious thinking leads the subject into a relation of trust, giving rise to a special type of a bond: “In a sense, *what* this man is saying is only a secondary issue, what is important is that it is *he* who speaks. In speaking, he entrusts himself to me.”¹¹

This intuition as outlined by Tischner seems to contain two significant moments. First of all, dialogical thinking has something of an appeal to authority about it. Somebody presents me with a truth and I,

⁸ It should be pointed out that religious thinking here reveals a similarity to mysticism. Essentially, Tischner does not develop his ideas in this direction, but, as we will see, in the last accords of his religious thinking – inspired by the intuitions of Meister Eckhart and Hans Urs von Balthasar – themes close to mysticism will appear again.

⁹ Ibid. 346.

¹⁰ Ibid. 348.

¹¹ Ibid. 348.

trusting him – putting my trust in his authority, accept it and shape my thinking accordingly. But the truth discovered in thinking is something more than just an objective state of affairs – it is rather an event, which is experienced all the more strongly through communing with others. This is where the second moment emerges – truth must be shared and freely given to others. The coming towards the other with a true message or the opening up to the word that comes from him: these create the conditions for the development and growth of truth. In this sense truth is like beauty: when it is experienced in communion with another, it becomes something more than what it would have been if somebody discovered it on his own. Tischner stresses that this giving of truth to each other is also directly connected with the experience of freedom: “A reliable witness not only gives testimony, but also gives a space of freedom, where I don’t ‘have to’ do anything, but I ‘can’ do everything. (...) A reliable witness uncovers before me the value of my freedom.”¹² The dialogical dimension of religious thinking carries with it something more than just the entrusting of oneself to the other. A relation is established here: a special bond wherein the other, in giving himself to me, also reveals my own freedom. In this way, the cause of existential truth becomes our common cause – we achieve it not through rivalry, but through mutual caring and sacrifice, through mutually giving testimony.

The third dimension of thinking is the objective dimension, which comes down to the subject’s focusing on the object being thought. The most natural object for the thinking subject is the surrounding world. The attitudes to this world can vary greatly, starting from fear, through indifference, and ending with admiration. Tischner claims that “admiration, which naturally tends towards adoration, leaves its uniquely religious mark upon thought.”¹³ The world, or the scene of the human drama, can inspire in man the feeling of delight and admiration. This feeling, properly nurtured, has the tendency to grow, until it finally directs our attention toward transcendence. Then, “the objective world of man presents itself as a metaphor of real existence (...). This scheme enables the movement of thinking beyond the scene.”¹⁴ Thus, religious thinking allows, on the one hand, a certain human naivete in relation to the world – the world is experienced and admired as a perfect creation. This feeling seems to momentarily absolve man of responsibility for the fate of this world, making it possible for it to be fully accepted as a divine creation. This feeling should not, however, become the source of irresponsibility and willfulness, but should rather create a certain distance towards the surrounding reality, showing that not all human matters are connected with the experience of this world. The story of man does not end on the earthly level; the scene is only a road towards what is absolute and not of this world.

¹² Ibid. 351.

¹³ Ibid. 358.

¹⁴ Ibid. 358.

Let us sum up. Religious thinking, like all thinking, strives towards the truth. But the truth at stake here is the ultimate and the most integral truth, that is, it is the truth expressing fully the existential situation of man. At the same time, despite this absolute dimension, religious thinking is characterized by a unique “lightness,” resulting from the feeling that not everything depends on me. In my thinking I can “rely on”: the inner voice which guides me; the testimony of another human being, whom I can trust; and finally the surrounding world, which does not so much weigh down on me with its necessities as seduces me with its charm and seems to be saying that its goings-on are not that important, since the ultimate truth lies beyond its bounds. And finally, this ultimate truth is not something created by me. It has the character of a gift, which – in my freedom – I can accept or refuse.

It should be remarked that Tischner also notices a danger connected with religious thinking. In his opinion, religious thinking can become a source of the temptation to give oneself over to truth completely and in a way that frees from all responsibility. This phenomenon – a kind of “grain of totalitarianism” embedded in religious thinking – reveals certain similarities with systems of enslaving man, and so it can prove very dangerous. Tischner writes, for example, that “*sacrum* is the source of the totalitarian claim. (...) *Sacrum*, while inspiring fear and fascination, does not inspire what is fundamental – a sense of responsibility.”¹⁵ In putting one’s trust in the truth which comes from the Absolute, man might feel absolved of all responsibility, and then he might become capable of anything – including serious crime. An example of such a temptation – fortunately resisted – is to be found in the Bible story of Abraham and Isaac; unfortunately, later in the history of the Church there have been events in which this danger was actually realized. Modern political thought was certainly born out of the need to remedy such occurrences.

This attitude of Tischner’s, critical and suspicious towards at least a certain type of religious thinking, came out particularly strongly at the beginning of the period of the political transformation in Poland. The debate concerning relations between the Church and the newly democratic state swept through Polish public life with great momentum. Tischner took a very clear stand – he believed that entering politics with bannerfuls of religious mottos was undesirable, if not dangerous. In order to show clearly what the mixing of *sacrum* and *profanum* might lead to, he used, among other things, the term “political religion.” He wrote: “Political religion is changing the meaning of faith. Religion that has become a political tool loses its strictly religious dimension... In political religion it is not the rule of law that matters, but the power of the ruler. The exploitation of religion aims at absolute rule.”¹⁶ The analogies by means of which he would point out the similarities between totalitarian and religious power structures,

¹⁵ J. Tischner, *Polski młyn* [The Polish Mill], Kraków 1991. 159.

¹⁶ J. Tischner, *Nieszczęsny dar wolności* [The Unfortunate Gift of Freedom], Kraków 1996. 177.

as well as the questions which he asked on these matters, were sometimes surprising or even shocking, regardless of the political contexts in which Tischner formulated them. For example, let us recall the following words: “Doesn’t Catholicism pose the danger of establishing a new version of totalitarianism? (...) Doesn’t totalitarianism consist in religion entering politics and replacing its principles of operation with its own principles? (...) Is religion, the Church, a form of neo-totalitarianism, or is it not?”¹⁷

The consequence of such texts, as well as of the numerous television and radio interviews in the same spirit, was a clear-cut image of Tischner as a supporter of pure, post-enlightenment liberalism. In his opinion, no deeper ideological conflicts should take place within the sphere of politics. The common good can be built together by citizens who privately adhere to different concepts of truth. The one truth of democracy appears to be the law in effect: “A democratic state is a state ruled by law. What law? A law that constitutes the common good of all the citizens, independent of what they believe to be their own absolute truth.”¹⁸

This theme, closely connected to Tischner’s involvement in the difficult discussions concerning the way in which “the unfortunate gift of freedom” should be used in independent Poland, forms an interesting supplement to the central idea of his religious thinking. What emerges here is a strong opposition between the order of politics and the order of religion, as well as the postulate to separate these two in the practice of public life. Yet in the context of Tischner’s purely philosophical considerations this division no longer seems so clear cut. We will come back to this topic later on, but for now let us return to the primary issue – religious thinking born out of the confrontation with evil, which finds its expression in the formula: “man is in need of grace.”

The Problematic of Grace

The concept of grace lies at the very heart of Tischner’s religious thinking. The genesis of this issue – let us stress this once again – is connected with the experience of evil: “Within religion, asking about the nature of grace involves asking about the nature of evil. Grace is meant to remedy the evil which has penetrated deep into the human being. The greater the violence of evil, the greater the need of grace.”¹⁹ But now we must ask what the exceptional character of grace consists in – since it significantly affects the structure of thinking – and what exactly happens to thinking under the influence of grace.

Tischner begins to shed light on the special relations brought about by grace by leaving aside the religious context and focusing – in a way very typical of him – on “clarifying the phenomenological basis of this

¹⁷ J. Tischner, *W krainie schorowanej wyobraźni* [In the Land of Diseased Imagination], Kraków 1997. 33.

¹⁸ “Tygodnik Powszechny” [The Universal Weekly] 1994, no. 49.

¹⁹ J. Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy over the Existence of Man], Kraków 1998. 131.

210 concept.”²⁰ Since grace appears also in common interpersonal relations, it can be subject to phenomenological description.

First of all, grace brings in a certain hierarchy –one who bestows grace is, at least for that moment, “standing above” one who receives it (in a way, he dominates). This means further that the giving of grace is unforced – it is not a settling of the score, a payment for previous or expected services. It is as if grace comes from a different order of things than the usual exchanges of “one thing for another.” So the key task is to grasp this new order where the structures of thinking, up till now considered rational, collapse. The concrete and obvious expression of rational thinking is the ability to notice and understand causal relations, which are then translated into calculations: for a thing of such and such a value, such an equivalent is owed. Tischner refers to this rational order as the ontological order – it is the world of what exists and can be rationally ordered. But “in describing the world of grace one should beware of making the error of transposing ontological categories onto a domain which has a different meaning. Such a transposition threatens to become a disregard for the unique ‘logic of grace.’”²¹ Thinking which remains under the influence of grace does have its own logic, and determining the structure and the principles of this thinking which thinks beyond the ontological sphere will become Tischner’s main task within his project of religious thinking.

Another basic issue is the question of the connection between, or rather the mutual exclusion of, grace and human freedom. The ways of understanding this relation have changed fundamentally over the course of history. The Christian tradition looked at man through the lens of original sin – this flaw put man in fetters that could only be broken through the effects of grace. Hence, within this tradition, the freedom of the will is one of the properties of human nature that can either develop properly (in accordance with nature), or be lost. The modern tradition, which we examine in this work focusing mainly on Kant’s philosophy, puts the issue of freedom even more radically – freedom is not just a human property, but it is the true source and foundation of human nature. Would it not destroy its very essence if human freedom so understood were subjected to the workings of grace? And consequently, doesn’t religious thinking find itself in structural conflict with the idea of man’s autonomy, which has been guarded with such care by modern philosophy?

These issues need to be investigated more deeply, and this, in turn, requires taking into account the historical disputes which took place within Christian philosophy over the nature of grace. In referring to the doctrines of Pelagius, St. Augustine and St. Thomas, Tischner places their interpretations of grace within the context of his own controversy over the existence of man: “The controversy over the nature of grace used to be a controversy over the existence of free will, now this controversy

²⁰ Ibid. 129.

²¹ Ibid. 130.

takes on the features of a controversy over the existence of man.”²² It is ²¹¹ Tischner’s belief that inquiring into the essence of religious thinking brings to a head the question of man, whose very existence is threatened by the presence of evil. Let us now take a brief look at how he interprets the classic theories of grace of the above-mentioned Christian thinkers, and what conclusions he draws from these interpretations for his own vision of religious thinking.

On the Pelagian understanding of grace, Tischner writes the following: “For Pelagius, nature is the basic form of grace, and as such it is a strong, proper root for human activity, which in its freedom either develops according to its dynamics, or renounces its nature.”²³ In this perspective the order of grace is inscribed in the order of nature; it is one of its integral elements. The very act of creation, of the world and of man, is already a kind of grace bestowed by God; man, being part of the divine order of things, acts in accordance with his natural predispositions. This vision of creation is an answer to Greek fatalism and pagan manichaeism – man is not a puppet manipulated by the gods, and the world is not an arena for the battle between the forces of good and evil. Fundamentally, man’s destiny lies in his own hands, and that is the principle effect of grace. This is expressed in freedom – this distinctive quality of man, which is also a gift of grace.²⁴ It is primarily thanks to freedom that man is able to creatively develop his predispositions. He can do this in accordance with nature, which entails following the correct role model, this model being mainly Christ (but other saints as well); but he can also – because he is free – choose to follow the wrong example of Adam or other sinners. This is when the sinful contamination of man comes out. The choice belongs to man alone and is not connected with any supernatural effects of grace.

Thus in the case of Pelagius, who incorporates grace into the ontological order of things, there does not seem to be any structural tension between natural and religious thinking. This finds support in the fact that people who have not experienced religious revelation can nevertheless reach a high degree of moral perfection by relying on their own reason alone. As Tischner aptly comments: “A whole flock of pagans has gone further along the road of virtue than the herds of fresh converts who get bogged down in filth despite being richly endowed with the grace of baptism.”²⁵ Grace can, therefore, be understood as a component of the order of creation – and then practically in any correct and honest thinking one can discern some elements which grant it a religious dimension as well.

In Tischner’s interpretation, this way of looking at grace is developed and systematized by St. Thomas Aquinas. As with other parts of his system, here this great mind of the Middle Ages comes up with a characteristic synthesis of the thought of Aristotle, who was not familiar with the concept of grace, with the new ideas brought about by Christianity.

²² Ibid. 136.

²³ Ibid. 148.

²⁴ Ibid. 142.

²⁵ Ibid. 143.

²¹² Tischner remarks: “As a result of Thomas’s analyses, human sin comes out of the darkness and stands in the light of reason. It no longer carries any traces of manichaeism. It becomes clear and distinct. The Greek concept of harmony helps to explain the nature of sin. Sin disrupts the harmony of the world; it wrenches the body from the power of reason, and reason from the power of God. The battle with sin becomes to a large extent the battle to reclaim and maintain this basic harmony of the human being.”²⁶ In Tischner’s opinion, Aquinas’ conception is dominated by the Greek idea of harmony. The universe is the rational entirety of being, ruled by the laws of the eternal logos – man acts and controls his life within this framework. The guarantee of this rational order is God the Creator and his eternal law, to whose authority man should submit, just as the will and the senses should submit to the authority of reason. The act of grace is identified here with the act of creation, which is where the perfection of being – its truth, goodness and beauty – finds its source: “there is nothing greater than creating.”²⁷ From the perspective of the harmony of the world, grace has really only a secondary role to play.

Admittedly, Thomas does try to somehow emphasize the significance of grace. He interprets it as an “ethical force” thanks to which man – preserving his connection with God – is able to do good. Without this help it would be difficult to move about within the rational space of creation: “the finitude of a human being consists in the fact that he cannot make himself good otherwise than by choosing the good that comes toward him.”²⁸ Man himself is not an autonomous source of goodness, but must always be stimulated by the goodness addressing him from the outside. Only then can he, by using reason, live and function in accordance with the world’s eternal laws. Hence nothing deeply good can happen without grace: independently of its presence man can at most perform basic biological or mechanical tasks necessary to keep him alive. But at the same time, this puts the effects of grace within the space of this world, “reifying” it, making it one of the causes subject to the logic marked out by the structure of being. It could be said that for a man who naturally leans towards the good and who acts according to the regime of the “logic of being” it is not particularly difficult to achieve perfection. It is enough to behave with moderation and to let oneself be guided by reason, applying the Aristotelian rule of “the golden mean,” and then the harmony of the outside world will also be reflected in man’s inner self. But then grace, only seemingly supernatural by now, is squeezed into the course of events taking place within the order of causal relations.

Such a way of envisioning grace meets with strong opposition on Tischner’s part, since – in his view – it forces us to “think about the workings of grace the same way we think about a cause. Here is the cause, there are the effects. The differences between the inner and the outer are

²⁶ Ibid. 154.

²⁷ Ibid. 157.

²⁸ Ibid. 156.

becoming blurred. But phenomenology protests against such efforts. (...) After the analyses of consciousness by Henri Bergson and Max Scheler, after the constitutive studies of sense by Edmund Husserl, the language of causality seems remarkably barbaric.” And then he continues his criticism: “The man of *Nichomachean Ethics* does not feel in any need for grace. Nothing compels him: neither the rupture at the level of being, nor the encounter with evil. He does not need a savior who would die for him... Hope implodes him from within and ruins him. It ruins the harmony he is grounded in. Hope is incompatible with the principle of inner balance, with the idea of the golden mean, which all Aristotelian virtues hinge upon. Hope is madness amidst harmony.”²⁹ From the point of view of Aristotelian – Thomistic rationalism, the irrationality of grace simply becomes destructive – after all, what possible purpose could be served by the “madness of the cross” in a rationally controllable reality?

Here we can see that, in Tischner’s view, an important aspect of the Christian teaching on grace is missing from Thomistic theory. Aquinas, in placing man within a rationally ordered universe, is not able to see into the depth of freedom given by grace, that grace which often works against the logic of being, or at least in a way which is completely incomprehensible from the point of view of that logic. Thus, the unique character of religious thinking gets lost in Thomism, and for this reason Tischner looks for inspiration for his philosophy of religion primarily in the thought of St. Augustine.

Right from the point of departure, Tischner indicates the fundamental issue which distinguishes the Bishop of Hippo’s doctrine of grace from that of Pelagius and of St. Thomas: “St. Augustine understands grace not as external help, but as inner help acting directly on the will of man.”³⁰ Divine grace, and thus also religious thinking, becomes completely separated from the order of nature – everything happens within the human soul, within the space of the subject’s inner life. The great problem lies in the fact that, even at its very source, the nature of the soul – much like the nature of the external world – appears to be tainted by sin and evil. At the level of the ontology of the world evil can be interpreted as the absence

²⁹ Ibid. 158. Tischner goes even a step further in his critique of Thomism. In interpreting Thomas’s teaching on grace as saying that grace is ultimately the cause that keeps alive the bond between man and God (as between a subject and a sovereign), Tischner puts forward the thesis that freedom has been completely “sacrificed, laid down on the altar of grace.” And asks: “Do we not find here the thesis so characteristic of modern totalitarianism, that freedom is just the understanding of necessity?” (ibid. 162). Such suspicion seems much exaggerated. It should also honestly be said that the critique of Thomism contained in this part of the analysis can raise some doubts – Tischner reads Aquinas in a rather simplified way, treating him as a straightforward continuator of Aristotelianism and forgetting about the other influences incorporated into his system, the thought of St. Augustine, for example. In this sense, Tischner clearly looks at Aquinas from the perspective of the needs of his own theory. But his polemic with Thomism is not the main point here, as what we are primarily interested in is Tischner’s project of religious thinking, for which the ideas of Aquinas are merely a counterpoint. It needs be admitted, however, that Tischner simply uses Thomistic philosophy to his own ends.

³⁰ Ibid. 144.

²¹⁴ of goodness or the privation of being. But within the soul evil marks its presence as an active force preventing man from arriving at the desired goal, even when that goal seems clear and within reach. The soul of man is sick and in need of support; it can only be cured through some special “therapy.” Evil does violence to the soul – it makes the soul do the evil that it does not desire, and not do the good that it does desire. And so the evil here bears once again some resemblance to the Greek concept of *Fatum*.

Tischner makes the following comment: “Even if evil has the character of ill-fate, grace – goodness – is something fundamentally different: it works overtly, in the consciousness and through the consciousness. Its workings are also personal; in its activity one can discover the presence of God himself.”³¹ Grace is the “cure” for the sickly human soul. But in contrast to the power of evil, which emerges from its hiding place, acts “in the darkness” and avoids recognition, grace is set within the sphere of consciousness – it stimulates thinking. Here we are faced with the first paradox of grace: on the one hand, it is the expression of something irrational, and on the other, it generates a new way of rational thinking. The irrationality of grace is connected with the disruption it causes within the natural order of things; grace – as we have said already – is not the outcome of some ordered sequence of causal events: “If the desperate are to receive hope, it can only come from above as a gift of grace. This gift does not emerge as the result of a preceding chain of causal relations. It is a ‘miracle of the soul.’ It cannot be explained rationally.”³²

As a result of the presence of grace, rational thinking based on synthesis and self-verification, with the mechanism of the subject taking a stance in respect to himself as its foundation, faces a certain “complication.” Thinking must now “rely on” something beyond itself. Within this “reliance” there is still an order, the guarantee of which is the presence of a personal God. For the present we must settle for this symbolic language, meant to express the “irrational rationality” of religious thinking. The greatest expression of this rationality is the constant growth of man. Thinking which appeals only to nature enables man at most to maintain the same level of existence (keeping oneself alive understood in purely biological terms), and in practice it usually leads to a fall: “In order to explain the upward movement, we must refer to the forces which come from above.”³³ Such an appeal to the grace coming from above is made precisely within religious thinking.

The second paradox of grace is connected with freedom. Tischner admits outright: “It seems that the current deliberations over the nature of grace have ended up in a vicious circle. If man is free, God is not omnipotent. If God is omnipotent, man is not free.”³⁴ The thinking whose source was the subject’s relation to himself was, at the same time, an expression of the absolute autonomy of the subject. The subject himself

³¹ *Ibid.* 147.

³² *Ibid.* 149.

³³ *Ibid.* 150.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 164.

was the causative force and the creator, because every external element²¹⁵ ultimately became a moment in the synthesis performed by autonomous thinking. But according to the Augustinian intuition invoked by Tischner, this freedom-based mechanism is flawed by some “genetic defect.” The soul is sick and in need of support; the free man is not able to be good, and so in fact he remains enslaved to sin and needs to be freed. This can only happen through the workings of grace bestowed by the omnipotent God. But this drastically violates the principle of autonomy – for what kind of a freedom is it, if it can only exist thanks to external help?

Is it possible to imagine an order of things where the paradoxes of grace would somehow be resolved? Can irrationality be reconciled with the order of thinking, and the intervention of an external force with inner autonomy?

Tischner will be trying to show that this kind of space, where the conflicts outlined above disappear, is indeed imaginable. What is needed to enter this new dimension is religious thinking that frees from the bonds of ontology and is guided by the principles established by the philosophy of goodness. This newly postulated type of reflection Tischner calls “agathology.” Religious thinking, grounded on the principle of the primacy of goodness over being (the primacy of agathology over ontology), opens us to the order of salvation. As the motto of his project of agathological thinking Tischner adopts words drawn from Hegel: “God is the God of free humanity.”³⁵

The Order of Salvation

In following Tischner into the sphere of religious thinking, we have to remark at the very beginning that we are entering on a path which should lead to the establishment of, or at least to an outline of, a new paradigm of thinking. The issue of this paradigm change and its consequences will be taken up in the final part of this work. For now we must only stress that the Cracovian philosopher, in his thinking on “the order of salvation,” is inspired mainly by the ideas coming from the circle of philosophers of dialogue, and that he applies here the conceptual apparatus of his philosophy of drama (which is also extensively influenced by the philosophy of dialogue). Our present analysis will not focus on the issue of the connections between Tischner’s theory and the thought of Lévinas, Buber, Rosenzweig and other dialogical philosophers. Rather, we will turn our attention to the main intuitions presented by Tischner, looking to find there some inspiration for a new way of thinking which would make it possible to solve the thus-unsolvable problem of the domination of evil in the world.

The very first sentence Tischner writes concerning the order brought about by grace already reveals the influence of the philosophies of dialogue and drama: “Grace, working in time and through time, establishes a certain

³⁵ Ibid. 164.

216 order in the way of experiencing time by the person who received it. This order is determined by the three main acts of the drama: creation; revelation, i.e. being chosen; and salvation. These three acts of the drama have both their ontological and agathological sense.”³⁶ We have already seen that it is impossible to interpret the workings of grace by means of ontological categories without somehow distorting its essence. This is why Tischner proposes describing the phenomenon of grace – and thereby capturing the unique character of religious thinking – through the lens of the dramas that man participates in through grace. In Tischner’s theory, the three basic planes of human drama are: creation, revelation and salvation, and within these – as we shall see – other important dramatic forms will appear.

But before we trace the successive forms of drama brought about by the activity of grace, it must be stressed that thinking in terms of drama necessarily and fundamentally changes the way of understanding the subject: “A rough sketch of the human drama seen as the outcome of creation, revelation and salvation contains *implicitly* a rough sketch of the subject of such a drama – of a person who not only simply is, but also is her own freedom and her own reason.”³⁷ For now, interpreting the nature of this change seems rather difficult – yet another quote from Tischner might point us in the right direction: “What matters for a person is no longer either ‘being’ or ‘a being,’ but rather the *quality* of being, which transcends ‘being’ itself. The ontology of a person is subjected to the laws of agathology. (...) A person relates to herself, but this relation differs in character from what Heidegger described with the word ‘existence.’ What is meant here is rather ‘justification,’ ‘salvation’ in which, or thanks to which, the human being attains ‘truth.’”³⁸

So far, our understanding of the subject has focused on the fact that he affirms his own being by having to somehow relate to himself – “I am” was at once the subject’s first and final word. Now something different, something more is at stake. The subject still relates to himself, but now, in this inner relation, he must take into account another’s point of view – what is most significant is no longer that I am myself, but whether my mode of being is justified, whether it deserves salvation. In this sense, the dramatic subject is established and constituted by some form of a relation radically external to the inner life. Since the essence of this relation is the bond being formed with another subject, it is appropriately called a “dialogical relation.”

So far, in looking into this new situation we have been dealing with symbols and intuitions alone. How these intuitions may crystallize and gain concrete form is first of all suggested by Tischner in his claim about the primacy of the good over being, and of agathology (philosophy of the good) over ontology. The subject, as a person participating in a drama, not only and primarily “is,” but carries within himself some good important

³⁶ Ibid. 167.

³⁷ Ibid. 169.

³⁸ Ibid. 168.

for another. Thanks to this good the subject is justified in the eyes of the other, and thereby not only the fact of his existence is affirmed, but also the quality of this existence. Second of all, within the drama of religious thinking there must be shelter for human freedom – the infinite power of God in addressing the finite subject respects his autonomy, since, as we have stated above, “God is the God of free humanity.” This is why the mutual acknowledgment of freedom will play such a significant role in the relations between subjects.

After these introductory comments concerning the subject, let us now take a closer look at the most important elements of Tischner’s phenomenological analysis of dramas, which is in fact an attempt to understand goodness as grace.

The first plane of the drama of grace is creation. We have already shown that some of the Christian doctrines of grace are limited to this level – God bestowed his grace on man by creating a rational world ordered by eternal laws, and man should be capable of benefiting from this grace, and thus making himself part of the perfection of creation. Here the idea of grace is enclosed entirely within the sphere of ontology. Yet, an essential question remains: Why was man created at all? “The answer is: God created me, so that he could reveal himself to me; God wants to reveal himself to me, so that he can save me. All this happens in the name of the good and on account of the good.”³⁹ Creation is an introduction to revelation, which in turn opens before man a world of completely different, non-ontological relations. What, then, lies at the heart of revelation?

Revelation can be understood as the revealing of something that previously remained hidden. In this case, the question of *who* reveals is only a secondary matter, while the objectivity of *what* has been revealed stands at the center. But the revelation described by Tischner, which is supposed to express a deeper level of the drama of religious thinking, is fundamentally different in character: “Revelation, where the way of speaking dominates the content of what is spoken, establishes a new order between persons. Here, words have ‘weight’ rather than ‘meaning.’ Words ‘weigh.’ They reveal the dimension of goodness.”⁴⁰ The intuition which appears here is basically contradictory to the fundamental principle of traditional rationalism: the meanings of words are determined by the states of things, and the role of the subject pronouncing the words is limited to that of a medium, and, ideally, a completely neutral medium at that. It is not important *who* claims that “ $2+2=4$,” this proposition has an impersonal validity. As we start speaking about revelation in the religious sense, we are entering a world of relations where the quality of the message is primarily determined by who is the subject communicating the message. The person who speaks and the way of speaking are more important than the content being communicated.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid. 167.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 173.

⁴¹ A spectacular literary expression of precisely this intuition can be found, for example, in Dostoevsky’s writing, in his apotheosis of the person of Christ. In one of his letters the

Tischner particularly stresses that this way of understanding revelation entails a completely new order within the relations between persons. Each person becomes her own self and affirms her own significance not by having to relate to herself, but through the act of being chosen by the other. The other chooses in order to entrust himself, to entrust some intimate part of himself. This gives rise to a unique bond between the I and the Thou; a bond which alienates itself from the external order of things.

This bond becomes particularly significant when God bestows grace on man, that is, when God entrusts himself to man, chooses man as a partner for dialogue. There is no ontological obligation in this relationship, no threats or orders appear. Revelation is expressed through a question: "A question means that there is no compulsion, but that there is the acknowledgement – or acceptance – of the human ability to take questions. Where there is no compulsion, there is freedom. (...) The first freedom is the freedom of the Other who asks, and through the act of asking 'entrusts himself.'"⁴² Tischner does his best to convince us that through revelation understood in this way a completely new dimension of freedom is revealed, a dimension incomprehensible from the point of view of ontology. There, freedom is associated simply with the lack of obligation, with independence from causal determination; here, it signifies being chosen by another (God) and answering his (His) appeal.

A symbolic expression of this new quality of freedom is the name given to a person. The subject is himself – he has his own unique name, because he was chosen, because another addressed a question to him. Once again, ontology is blind to this new quality – it sees the being is a nameless thing.⁴³ Born in the appeal itself, the personal name is rooted in the bond with the other and not in the being: "A question does not establish being, but it does establish an obligation towards the person. It is the same with confiding and entrusting oneself to the other."⁴⁴ Thus, the new order of interpersonal relations emerges as a structure of mutual, intimate commitments, which in no way can be made objective.

Tischner writes that the depth of these relations lies in the fact that man, as a finite being, is able to be a partner for the Absolute, that is he can have God himself confiding in him. This brings in another dimension of the religious drama, i.e. justification. Justification takes place "when a finite being discovers that, despite his finitude, he can receive 'God's confessions' and, as a free creature, 'justify' his own being and the being

writer admits: "It should be believed that there is nothing more beautiful, deeper, kinder, wiser, more courageous or more perfect than Christ. What is more, if somebody proved to me that Christ was outside the truth, and it really were so that the truth was outside Christ, then I would rather remain with Christ than with the truth." (see F. Dostojewski, *Dzieła wybrane*, [Selected Works] vol. IV, p. 719). Similar opinions are expressed by the characters of Dostoevsky's novels – the best known of these is probably the scene of the conversation between Shatov and Stavrogin in *The Demons* (widely known as *The Possessed*), where one can find a comparable quote (ibid. 251).

⁴² *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy Over the Existence of Man], 175.

⁴³ For some very interesting analyses of the functions of a name see Adam Hernas, *Czas i obecność* [Time and Presence], 162-202.

⁴⁴ *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, 175.

of the world.”⁴⁵ Justification leads us closer and closer to the order of sal-²¹⁹vation – “To save is to justify, again and again, each time more radically. (...) The drama of justification has a special significance. It is an attempt to reconcile opposing, or even contradictory, values: the good God with the bad man, freedom with grace, separation with the deepest bond.”⁴⁶ We have already discussed the paradoxes brought about by the concept of grace, which seem to surface continually in religious thinking. Tischner tries to show that justification is the act which is capable of reducing or even resolving contradictions.

Justification is a dialogical relation, it takes place between persons – I justify myself before the other, I am justified in somebody else’s eyes. At the same time, justification changes somewhat the status of the person it applies to – a justified man becomes, in a way, a different man than the man he was up to the time of justification; for example, an excluded and stigmatized villain is once again accepted into the community. The necessary point of departure for justification is the acknowledgment of one’s own weakness and guilt. Tischner speaks here of “the ontological awareness of evil: I am evil and as such (as evil) I have no right to exist, but indeed I do. The pain of this contradiction – a contradiction which has become me – constitutes the reality of the damned.”⁴⁷ On the ontological level, the consciousness of evil is a trap with no exit: all that is left to man is futile despair and the feeling of helplessness. To this despairing man comes an impulse from a different dimension – the grace of the infinite God, who chooses, entrusts himself, and, at the same time, justifies. Suddenly and inexplicably, the persons “can be themselves again in the mutual communication of good, a communication based on love.”⁴⁸

Justification opens up a space for the workings of goodness. Here all the rational calculations break down – the damned does not receive justification as a reward anything, for any merits or services, rather, he receives it in spite of everything. In this sense “justification is an unjust gift, given to man for nothing at all.”⁴⁹ A symbolic expression of this “lack of logic” and irrationality of the forgiving justification is Christ’s evangelical teaching that one should forgive one’s fellow man not 7 times, but 77 times. There is no logical support, no particular reason for this number, and so Tischner can say that justification “does not have any sufficient reason, only insufficient reasons.”⁵⁰ If we consider the principle of sufficient reason as the basic principle of ontology, then what we are dealing with here must be seen as a unique *concretum* which reveals the non-rational and non-ontological character of justifying grace.

There is one more aspect of justification that goes against our notions of rationality based on ontological relations. If grace is treated as a

⁴⁵ Ibid. 188.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 189-191.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 190.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 191.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 192.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 195.

220 certain good, then the person granting it to others should assume that the more she gives to one person, the less will remain for another; if she chooses to give it to one person, she will have to send others empty-handed. Tischner underlines that “the logic of justification is different. It tells us that in justifying one, it is possible to justify all the others ‘in him.’”⁵¹ In a different part of the book he stresses even further the radically different character of the principle of activity behind the good: “The causality of the good does not coincide with the causality of being; it does not care about proportions, does not respect the sufficient condition, does not exhaust its powers while acting. When being acts, the effects must be proportional to the causes. When goodness acts, no one should try to measure the proportions.”⁵² Goodness, as opposed to being, grows stronger through its activity – the more it gives, the more (and not less) it can give. So justification reaches out to those innumerable, inexhaustible, stores of goodness, which are not reduced but multiplied as they are shared. This intuition once again shatters all the ontological arithmetic. The finite subject is freed from the framework in which, having limited resources, he had to calculate and try to give to each man his due. Now he can afford the “luxury of injustice” – there is enough justification for everyone. In the Christian tradition, the true source of these inexhaustible reserves is, of course, the saving death of Christ. Here we reach the very heart of the mystery of religious drama, where justification is a vital moment of the order of salvation.

The next moment which is essential for the religious drama, and which completes the order of salvation, is conversion. Tischner writes: “The entire logic of the order of salvation is contained in the concept of conversion. Inquiring into conversion means inquiring into all its component parts – the moment of being chosen, revelation, and justification. But primarily, it means inquiring into the moment of entrusting oneself.”⁵³ Let us then take a closer look at this experience.

Tischner appeals to two different metaphors which illustrate two different understandings of conversion. The first invokes a situation analogous to losing our way in an unfamiliar area. We realize that we are wandering about, lost in an environment which seems somehow false, and suits neither our nature nor our expectations. We have to focus and retrace our steps, until we reach the point where it is possible to turn in a different direction. For Tischner, the main philosophical expression of such a vision of the human lot is the philosophy of Plato. The passing from illusion to truth – the freeing from chains which kept man in the cave of mere appearances – happens through the use of the subject’s own powers. It consists mainly in replacing confidence in one’s senses with confidence in one’s reason – only reason enables us to break through the appearances to the true essence of things, and only reason is capable of

⁵¹ Ibid. 198.

⁵² Ibid. 286.

⁵³ Ibid. 201.

creating a yardstick (through self-referentiality) with which to measure and thus establish order in one's own immediate surroundings. The ideas of the Enlightenment, which we have already analyzed, can be interpreted as the fulfillment of such an understanding of conversion. There, the birth of "the new man" was connected with the idea that man would finally mature and muster the courage to fully employ his reason. 221

Tischner, however, is more interested in the second metaphor of conversion, since this one leads us to the very heart of religious thinking. An example of this metaphor is the story of Saul, who converted and became St. Paul: "For Plato, freedom is primarily a freedom at the level of the attitude to objects. Objects enslave through their impact on the senses. (...) The case of St. Paul is different. There, enslavement is the expression of the mutual 'entanglement' of people in each other's convictions. (...) In Plato, conversion takes place without the external help of grace; conversion is the return of man to his own nature – man becomes what he really is. In the case of St. Paul, his own powers are insufficient. What is needed is somebody who disrupts the original firmness of conviction."⁵⁴ Plato's thought, and after him that of the entire mainstream of European rationalism, moves on what Tischner has called the ontological plane. The story of St. Paul takes us to the heart of drama and dialogue. What does it tell us with its images of the second type of conversion? How should we read the intuitions inscribed in those images?

Saul's waywardness – his eagerness to persecute the followers of Christ – was probably caused by a number of factors; his entire life story stood behind it. But then God suddenly addresses him with a question: "Why are you persecuting Me?" This question begins the drama of conversion. In the light of this question the earlier "life of the subject" becomes somehow condensed – all previous choices, calculations and judgments somehow converge at one point. On the one hand, they are stigmatized – you are persecuting me. On the other hand, the one who asks seems to be appealing to some good deep within the subject – he addresses him as "you" and expects a reaction, gives him a chance, sows the seed of a new bond. At this moment the continuity of the subject's life is somehow interrupted: "Conversion is a 'jump' without small steps. Man enters a borderline situation: either-or. He chooses. The choice is the death of the old man."⁵⁵ This change is something deeper than a verification of the earlier mistaken convictions: "Conversion is not only the exchange of a false view for a true one, but it is also cleansing oneself of a persecutor's stigma."⁵⁶ What is meant here is a radical change of attitude, with the intellectual factor as only one of its aspects. A symbolic expression of this change – of entering a new sphere of relations – is the acquiring of a new name.

For Tischner, this exceptional event makes it possible to put one's finger on the moment of transition from rational ontology to dialogue,

⁵⁴ Ibid. 204.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 207.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 209.

222 from the philosophy of values (axiology) to the philosophy of the good (agathology). What makes itself present – in the most radical sense of the word – in the question initiating the potential conversion is the good which remained hidden until that moment. This emerging good seems to challenge the logic of all earlier actions. Tischner tries to elucidate the essence of this event by contrasting the concepts of the good and of value. Let us pause briefly to consider this distinction.

In Tischner's philosophy the concept of value has always played a large role. In his polemic with Heidegger, he defended the idea of "thinking in values," where the reference to the objective world of values was the constitutive factor both for thinking itself and for the identity of the thinking subject – values formed the 'score' according to which man was to create himself. Philosophizing in this spirit, Tischner came up with the original concept of the "axiological I," which was meant to express the nature of the relationship between the thinking subject and values. But in delving deeper into the religious drama, this Cracovian thinker also opens up a new chapter of his philosophy. Tischner now questions the results of his own earlier analyses and stresses that the "axiological I" is losing its significance.⁵⁷ On the relation between goodness and values he writes: "Values are what appear in the light: they belong to the object, are rooted in a situation, given to us to admire (beauty) and to realize (morality). The good is something that remains in the shadows, is not of this world, and yet it directs the light of values, shines for me, shines for my good."⁵⁸ Once again what we have here is an attempt to capture and describe the difference between the ontological order – the world of what is visible, of what functions according to the principle of sufficient reason, i.e. the rule saying that nothing "smaller" can result in anything "bigger" – and the sphere of something that discretely makes itself felt, yet remains invisible.

Tischner goes even a step further and speaks of the danger that arises when the good is reduced to a value: "Discovering the dimension of participation in the good is threatened by reification in a value. For some time now there has been a tendency in philosophy to substitute the concept of the good with the concept of value. Such means are an attempt to bring the good closer to phenomenological experience. But has this aim been achieved? What is actually achieved here is the aestheticization of the good: the good reduced to the order of values becomes an aesthetic value."⁵⁹ Ontology, where the good is seen through the prism of being, aestheticizes the problem of man. The religious drama, on the other hand, reaches down to the depth of goodness inscribed in man himself. This concrete good is awakened by the workings of grace bestowed by the infinite good.

One more aspect of Tischner's analyses needs to be considered – a characteristic feature of the dialogical relations is their "assymetry." Un-

⁵⁷ Ibid. 207.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 176.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 177.

like in ontological thinking, we should not assume a potential identity ²²³ between rational subjects: “I cannot demand from my neighbor the same that he has the right to demand from me.”⁶⁰ Neither what man receives through grace, nor what he is called to do and what he is to give to another, is a consequence of the current chain of cause-and-effect relationships. And if we wanted to somehow take the past into account, we would have to follow a principle contrary to that which is generally accepted: the less is due, the more should be given. “To give oneself to the other; the less he deserves such devotion, the more of oneself one should give.”⁶¹ For, as Tischner writes, “the essence of grace is its gratuitous character. This means that grace is not based on the principle of reciprocity.”⁶²

Again, let us summarize briefly. We have to make it perfectly clear to ourselves that, in trying to reconstruct Tischner’s idea of the order of salvation as that deepest space where the drama of religious thinking is enacted, the whole time we have been relying on intuition and metaphors. Firstly, Tischner gives the different traditions of Western European rationalism one common name: “ontological thinking” or “the logic of being.” The modern tradition we analyzed earlier, taking Kant as its main representative, also falls within this very broadly understood category, at least to some extent. Secondly, on account of the problems of “ontological thinking” which emerge out of the confrontation with evil, Tischner speaks of the need to work out a new order of thinking. For the time being this is practically only a postulate. For what else, if not a postulate, is a claim of the following type: “The logic of dialogue is of a higher order than the logic of being. It is not being that justifies the good, but it is the good that justifies being.”⁶³ This is, in fact, tantamount to postulating the establishment of a new “logic of dialogue.” In trying to build the foundations of this logic within the framework of drama of religious thinking, the Cracovian philosopher draws mainly intuitive outlines – this is what we must call his descriptions of the dialogical relations between subjects, referred to by such terms as revelation, being chosen, entrusting, justification or, finally, conversion. These notions have deep religious significance, rooted especially in the Christian tradition. But from the philosophical point of view, they are only a metaphorical expression of certain intuitions concerning the relations between different subjects. A particularly important aspect of this symbolism is the fact that it shows religious thinking as reaching out into regions which somehow remain hidden: as we have already quoted, values are clear and rational, the good hides in the shadows.

Keeping this in mind, we will endeavor to take one more step in following Tischner and his intuitions, which should enable us to enter this new space of thinking and to make ourselves comfortable in it.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 172.

⁶¹ Ibid. 179.

⁶² Ibid. 192.

⁶³ Ibid. 187.

The key issue, which somehow encapsulates the essence of our investigations so far, is the relationship between goodness and freedom. As we have already repeatedly discussed, religious thinking focuses on the good. Tischner writes: “Justification constitutes the conditions for the birth of the good. The good ‘is born’ as the fruit of ‘a conception’ which came from outside.”⁶⁴ Thus he invokes yet another metaphor, the “birth of the good,” in order to show that goodness and freedom remain uniquely connected, and that it is within this relationship that the still unexplored depths of these two concepts come into light.

This last part of the Tischnerian analyses presented here, which focuses on the question of the “birth of the good,” is particularly inspired by theological texts – those of Meister Eckhart on the one hand, and those of modern theologians Hans Urs von Balthasar and Gisbert Greshake on the other. Let us begin by recalling a particularly important intuition concerning the absolute good: “To be the good – the absolute Good – means to be independent of the goodness of all other goods (...). Here, independence signifies freedom. It is unthinkable for the absolute Good to be a relative good, and consequently a dependent good. Freedom is a fundamental property of the Good.”⁶⁵ Of course, somebody might object here that Tischner explains something unknown (the absolute Good) by referring to something equally unknown (freedom); that he treats the good as a subject, for we can assign the property of freedom to a subject only. Despite the fact that such objections may be well-founded, let us for a moment longer submit to the “logic of drama” and follow its metaphorical depiction of the good which acts from freedom.

The good is active, and Tischner’s birth metaphor is meant exactly to express the exceptional nature of this activity. The metaphor is borrowed from the writings of Meister Eckhart, where we can read: “Goodness within the good gives birth to itself, and to everything that is goodness.”⁶⁶ Tischner comments thus: “Being does not emanate from goodness as light does from a candle. Neither does it follow logically like a deduction from a premise. Giving birth evokes the idea of consciousness and freedom: it is impossible to give birth without being conscious of it, and it is impossible to give birth without wanting to do so.”⁶⁷ The good does not act in reaction to anything, it is not a response to some chain of earlier events, nor is it the result of stimuli and impulses pertaining to some desired goal. Its activity interrupts the continuity of structure – its “giving birth” signifies a completely new beginning, which in no way derives from what previously existed. The paradox of this situation lies in the fact that – contrary to what the above claims may suggest – the good being born is not anything new created *ex nihilo*. In truth, it has always been there; the

⁶⁴ Ibid. 199.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 271.

⁶⁶ Meister Eckhart, *Traktaty* [Treatises], trans. W. Szymona, Poznań 1987, p. 82.

⁶⁷ *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy over the Existence of Man], 273.

novelty lies in the fact that it is revealed and its light shines forth: “And ²²⁵ what is born has already existed. But it existed in such a way as if it did not exist. ‘To be born’ means: to come into the light and to see the light.”⁶⁸ In this paradoxical procedure of birth a particularly important role is played by freedom, since what culminates in freedom is the possibility of creating a new beginning – of separating oneself from the pressures of various determinants and relying on the fundamental good.

In the philosophical tradition, freedom was often identified with power – being free meant having the strength to effectively force through one’s own ideas despite external limitations. Freedom can also be understood as the capability of making choices – different alternative solutions present themselves to me and I have the ability to rationally analyze those possibilities and choose the one that seems optimal. Yet in the analyses conducted here, Tischner distances himself from such conceptions of freedom; his intuitions are much closer to the Bergsonian formula: “freedom is taking possession of oneself.”⁶⁹ Together with a new beginning, man gets the opportunity to once again become himself – Tischner reads this thought through the lens of drama and sets it within the already discussed opposition between ontology and agathology: “Man can always start over. But starting over does not entail a complete break with what was before. The ontological identity remains while the dramatic, agathological identity changes. (...) To put it simply, ontological permanence is juxtaposed with agathological difference.”⁷⁰ It is thanks to freedom that man can function on two different planes. While preserving his substantial identity – that is, while continuing to exist as the same being – he can give new dramatic sense to the person he is; he can reveal a new, or rather, a hidden dimension of the goodness within himself. Thus, while remaining himself, man enters a space of completely different relations – relations which earlier seemed absurd or impossible.

Tischner tries to make this intuition more concrete with the example of truthfulness. Here we have a man surrounded by spirals of lies, a man who has been betrayed and cheated repeatedly. What comes to his mind is “the simplest of possibilities: to answer a lie with another lie. If I am a victim, let others be victims as well. (...) I am not a liar because I love to lie, but because others have lied to me. At the base of the choice to lie there appears a moment of justice.”⁷¹ To measure others by the same yardstick that they are using to measure us seems to be an attitude both rational and just. Man is then quite predictable for others; the space in which he moves has its order and its rationality. But the freedom which Tischner is trying to reveal is based upon a completely different logic – despite the lies surrounding me I can tell the truth, I can choose truthfulness, which is good. The subject, since he is free, “can give expression to a different

⁶⁸ Ibid. 280. Compare with p. 311: “Only something that already is can actually be born.”

⁶⁹ H. Bergson, *O bezpośrednich danych świadomości*, [Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness] trans. K. Borowska, Warsaw 1913, p. 161.

⁷⁰ *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy over the Existence of Man], 307.

⁷¹ Ibid. 308.

226 experience of goodness – the generous acknowledgement of and respect for truth and truthfulness. His new freedom is a mode of being of the new good. Now he can say: I am truthful.”⁷²

No matter how badly he was deceived and ill-treated with lies, man does have the possibility of disrupting the vicious circle and telling the truth. This freedom becomes “a mode of being of the good”: without changing anything in the substantial sense, preserving his personal identity, man shows a new face – that of someone truthful. Tischner thus describes the apparent paradox: “Only the good is and is not at the same time. Truthfulness in a world of lies is and is not. It is not, because there are lies everywhere. Yet somehow it is, because – in being chosen – it does not appear from nothingness, but emerges from deep within a person.”⁷³ Freedom does not create anything – rather, it allows the becoming of what already was, yet remained hidden. In this sense freedom acts primarily within the subject; it is the ability to “do something that seems impossible with oneself.”⁷⁴ Freedom, as a mode of existence of the good, makes it possible for the subject’s true face to emerge – it makes it possible for me to be good in spite of external determinants.

The metaphors analyzed above, through which Tischner wanted to capture the dramatic relationship between goodness and freedom, all moved within the sphere of the subject’s inner life. On the one hand, this seems justified, since, as the Cracovian philosopher writes, “a person’s inner life constitutes a concrete reflection of the drama of the good.”⁷⁵ The subtle dramatic relations, which are generated by the activity of grace and which make up the content of religious thinking, gain concrete form within the space of a person’s inner life. On the other hand, however, this way of viewing the situation can be very misleading. This is because the drama of the good is neither enclosed within nor focused on the subject, but its essence consists in establishing a new type of interpersonal bond. The life of the subject is only a reflection, something tangible that can be grasped, something in which extra-ontological relations are revealed. The true drama of the good is set within the interpersonal space – religious thinking and the order of salvation are realized in the relations between free persons.

Tischner characterizes the deepest meaning of freedom in this very spirit: “Freedom is first and foremost a dramatic category: it manifests itself between people (between persons, strictly speaking). Originally, it is neither in me, nor in you, but ‘between us.’ We are free in relation to each other.”⁷⁶ He writes elsewhere: “The specific shape of freedom emerges from my relation to another finite freedom and to the Infinite Freedom. We have a ‘triangular’ relationship: I–you–he. The peak of the triangle reaches into eternity, while concrete freedom awakes and matures in time.

⁷² *Ibid.* 309.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 311-312.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 295.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 317.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 298.

Its maturing is the fruit of a dramatic ‘game’ between the freedom of the Other – the finite and the infinite one.”⁷⁷ In this last fragment, inspired by the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Tischner climbs to an even higher level of metaphor in order to illustrate the relationship between freedom and the good.

There seems to be nothing extraordinary in the claim that freedom involves interpersonal relations. Normally, however, such a claim would be understood as saying that freedom, as the property of each individual person, is a potential source of conflict – when each person is trying to freely fulfill her own vision, there must be a clash with the analogous yet usually contradictory aspirations of other persons. The natural attitude in such conditions seems to be the desire to dominate the others and to impose one’s own will in order to secure one’s interests. What political philosophy suggests instead is negotiating a compromise, which means agreeing on such terms that would enable everyone to exercise their freedom at least to some limited extent.

Tischner’s vision, however, is radically different. Freedom is not really part of the structure of the subject; it reveals itself only in the relation with another subject. “Freedom emerges from the attitude towards another freedom” and, in contrast to traditional thinking, Tischner believes that this attitude does not have to develop into a hostile one – the relation between two freedoms does not have to take the form of conflict. Actually, it can be quite the opposite – only within this relation can we fully see that “freedom is a mode of being of the good”: “I am free by recognizing the freedom of the other. The proper way of possessing oneself is possible only when one renounces the desire to possess the other. By possessing oneself, one lets the other be. In letting the other be, we experience the good of our own freedom and in this experience we possess ourselves more profoundly.”⁷⁸ Here, Tischner’s intuition tells us that freedom is the means which makes it possible for the good hidden in the other to be revealed. The freedom of one subject is not a threat to the other, but it is the condition necessary for the other’s freedom to also become a means of giving to others. This is how the community of generosity is formed, the essence of which is the mutual giving of the good. There, the object of mutual care is that “Thy freedom be done” – “Freedom is the offering of a gift. This sheds new light on our earthly understanding of the other. The other now appears to me as one to whom I can give myself, and who can respond to this offering with another gift.”⁷⁹ The other is not an adversary, but somebody to whom I can and should give, and who allows my deepest reserves of good to be revealed. Such a bond is the true and the expected fruit of the drama of religious thinking.

Once more we need to underscore what we have already discussed: Tischner’s conception of religious thinking is very much inspired by

⁷⁷ Ibid. 328.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 334.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 341.

228 Christian theology, and its last accords even by mysticism. The formula of “Thy freedom be done” is actually an attempt to make the Christian mystery of incarnation and redemption more concrete. The image of an order of things where interpersonal relations consist in generous mutual giving is so far removed from our everyday experience that its source can only be religious – it is “not of this world.” It lies first and foremost in the opening up to the infinite Good: “Finite freedom awakens and matures through the mediation of Infinite Freedom. But for this mediation to be at all possible, there must appear within finite freedom a certain susceptibility to the Infinite, a certain ‘moment of the Infinite.’”⁸⁰ The Christian tradition gives us a particularly vivid depiction of the drama played out between God and man, and a very concrete example of a bond between the finite human goodness and the infinite goodness of the Absolute: “The classic place where the encounter of the finite and the Infinite freedom is ultimately brought to fruition is the figure of Jesus Christ. The meeting and interpenetration of divinity and humanity which are realized in Christ constitute the climax of the story of salvation.”⁸¹

God lets man be – he tells him: “If you want to, you can follow Me.” This can be understood as another way of saying that the Infinite Good creates the conditions for man to be himself, to be good. In the Christian tradition, this determination of the Absolute is expressed in the mystery of incarnation – God becomes man and sacrifices himself for man. In the act of salvation – at the highest point of religious drama – the infinite good reveals itself. Man, as a finite subject, should somehow replicate this process – he is supposed to let the other be. When he is able to say: “Thy freedom be done” and to build interpersonal relations based on this principle, his own depth manifests itself, as well as that of his neighbor. In this way, conditions are created for resolving the permanent conflict represented by the difference between good and evil.

Of course, there remains the issue of how to express these images and intuitions in a purely philosophical way. How can the drama of religious thinking, which gives hope of freeing man from evil, be reforged into a new paradigm of thought? Is it at all possible to work out a model of thinking which could resolve the problem of tension between good and evil, or which would at least make it possible to avoid the effects of this tension better than within the modern paradigm of thought? These questions, which have been our constant companions throughout these analyses, will be taken up in the next, final part of this work.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 329.

⁸¹ Ibid. 330.