

The Good

Józef Tischner

Translation of „Wydarzenie spotkania. Dobro” [The Event of the Encounter. The Good] in: Józef Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu*, Kraków: Znak 1998, pp. 60-62.
Translated by Artur Rosman.

How can we conceive of the good? We can only conceive it by penetrating into the depths of numerous dramatic threads that are woven between people. At the foundations of all the threads inheres one thing: a grain of goodness awoken within man by the good.

Let's consider a fragment by replacing individual formulation with concrete pictures, so far as it is possible, "Not out of weakness; to what could not be contained there corresponds no capacity. The non-present is incomprehensible by reason of its immensity or its 'superlative' humility or, for example, its goodness, which is the superlative itself. The non-present here is invisible, separated (or sacred) and thus a non-origin, an-archival... The Good cannot become present or enter into representation."

To paint a picture for you: God appeared upon the scene of Abraham's life. Who was He?

He was the one who awakened desire; nothing less, but also nothing more. ⁶¹ Inconceivable. But not inconceivable in the way a desert one traverses is (Kantian infinity?), nor like a starry sky that encompasses everything (Hegel and his absolute?). What about the good? It is inconceivable, but engaging; invisible, but yet it can see; absent, and yet it makes someone present... it awakens goodness within man, whose expression is desire.

The appearance of the infinite Good between people constitutes something that has never existed before—a new interpersonal tie. We read further on, “No one is good voluntarily. We can see the formal structure of nonfreedom in a subjectivity which does not have time to choose the Good and thus is penetrated with its rays unbeknownst to itself. But subjectivity sees this nonfreedom redeemed, exceptionally, by the goodness of the Good. The exception is unique. And if no one is good voluntarily, no one is enslaved to the Good.”

The figure of Abraham is the beginning of religion. Choice is the essence of this religion: the chosen one chooses the one who chose him. Faithfulness flows from this, and signifying that the choice was a lasting one.

Abraham’s religion would not be a religion if it did not constitute another form of faithfulness—faithfulness toward other people, faithfulness toward a whole nation. The experience of the face is the key to this faithfulness. This is because desire is essentially awakened within a man only when he runs across human poverty. There comes a calling from this poverty: thou shalt not kill. This calling finds no support in the ontological structure of the world.

It disguises something absolute within itself—something that does not allow excuses. What is the face of the other? It is a trace God has left us, therefore a sign of our election. It is a trace that cannot be abandoned in order to run after the suspect. It is a trace of a trace. One must hold fast to the human being touched by poverty, because only he can be found in the traces which God leaves as he walks the world.

“*Toward another* culminates in a *for another*, a suffering for his suffering, without light, that is, without measure, quite different from the purely negative blinding of Fortune which only seems to close her eyes so as to give her richness arbitrarily. Arising at the apex of essence, goodness is *other* than being. It no longer keeps accounts; it is not like negativity, which conserves what it negates, in its history. It destroys without leaving souvenirs, without transporting into museums the altars raised to the idols of the past for blood sacrifices, it burns the sacred groves in which the echoes of the past reverberate. The exceptional, extra-ordinary, transcendent character of goodness is due to just this break with being and history. To reduce the good to being, to its calculations and its history, is to nullify goodness. The ever-possible sliding between subjectivity and being, of which subjectivity would be but a mode, the equivalence of the two languages, stops here. Goodness gives its irreducible signification to subjectivity.”