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Józef Tischner's question about Leszek Kołakowski's "basic conviction"

Introduction

As we know, Józef Tischner's disputes with Marxism took on various forms and were characterized by manifold shades; similarly varied was Tischner's attitude to Marxists themselves. For instance, let us take into consideration Tischner's extremely critical references to, inter alia, some of the leading Marxist authors in Poland, such as Janusz Kuczyński and Tadeusz Maciej Jaroszewski. It was with regard to them that Tischner not only critically, but even disparagingly wrote that "following the disputes involving Schaff and Kołakowski, nothing interesting in Marxism is happening. [...] Marxists are lacking in intellectual curiosity, the sense of problematisation of that which is seemingly obvious, conceptual accuracy – in a word, they are lacking in philosophical

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skills.”¹ Therefore, Tischner disparaged the thought of the Marxists who were out to make a pretence of understanding Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’s philosophical thought, and of understanding the mosaic of various philosophical currents of the 20th century, which particularly in the free West had a large following. In consequence, these Marxists were trying to convince people that they were intellectually open to non-Marxist thought, and as a result they were capable of entering into dialogue with a variety of contemporary philosophical movements, and particularly with personalism of Mounier’s origin. This opening was supposed to take place in the name of building a better and bright future for man and modern society. It was with his characteristic philosophical punch and – this needs to be added – pity that Tischner regarded such Marxists – like Kuczyński – whom he compared to a gardener admiring the beauty of... weeds.²

It is also noteworthy that Tischner’s critical sense was directed even against Adam Michnik himself. This “democratic socialist”³ and a representative of the lay left⁴ by no means wanted to be a Marxist, and after 1980 over many years was considered to be a friend of Tischner’s, who in fact was fond of him, but having published his renowned book *Kościół, lewica, dialog*⁵ Michnik did not fully gain favour with Tischner. Admittedly, Tischner was delighted by the book. It was published in the clandestine circulation in Paris in 1977, and was a clear proof of the search for pathways to dialogue between the lay left, or rather above all between Michnik and the representatives of the hierarchical Church. Still, in his critical review of the book Tischner wrote that the distance kept by Michnik and the lay left from Marxism was not as long as it might at first glance appear to us. First and foremost, Tischner debunked the phrase “democratic socialism” as a contradiction in terms. As we read: “Democratic socialism” – as we probably remember – promotes “the

¹ J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu* [The Polish Shape of Dialogue], Kraków 2002, p. 177.

² Cf. J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 175.

³ J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 222.

⁴ Cf. J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 239.

⁵ A. Michnik, *Kościół, lewica, dialog* [The Church, the Left, Dialogue], Paris 1977.

ideas of freedom and tolerance, the ideas of the sovereignty of the human person and emancipation of labour [...] but fights against: chauvinism and national oppression, close-mindedness and xenophobia, lawlessness and social injustice. [...] Firstly, the idea of democracy involves the thought that the ultimate subject of power is the whole nation – the people irrespective of class differences, but the idea of socialism involves the thought that this subject is constituted above all by the «nation's leading class» – the industrial proletariat. Therefore, from a purely theoretical point of view, the concept of democratic socialism is like the concept of the squared circle. Secondly, from the viewpoint of pure theory such a definition of left-wing ideals is a vicious circle, because it first establishes some ideal, then it pre-defines it as socialist, thereby leaving no room for any other ethical alternative. Thirdly, from the practical viewpoint, the thing smacks of some form of «moral demagoguery,» because what am I left with, if I do not embrace the ideals of the lay left? Nothing else but: «chauvinism, national oppression, close-mindedness, lawlessness» [...] We have changed over to a different plane of deliberation, but the structure has remained. [...] the question is whether Michnik grants approval to that which happened in Poland after the Second World War, or maybe he thinks that all was just roaming? Does Adam Michnik believe that at least the beginnings were good? Does he – despite all his criticism and oppositional stance – in this way give his moral sanction to the foundations of the current system? I think he does. There is no sign that the opposite is true.”⁶

As far as I can tell, Tischner never took back this evaluation. And this means that in Tischner's opinion Adam Michnik did not manage to break free from this contradiction in terms in which he got himself enmeshed. He wanted to be a democratic socialist, i.e. someone who even when politically imprisoned is morally incapable of shaking off the shackles of Marxist socialism. On the other hand, my reference to Tischner's relation with Michnik clearly shows that not all who had

⁶ J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., pp. 246–248.

been in different degrees bitten by Marxism deserved Tischner's pity and laugh. Tischner really valued Michnik.

In this context, I wish to emphasize that in my numerous conversations with Rev. Tischner and my reading of his works I never experienced any kind of pitying or half-joking manner in his attitude to such representatives of Polish Marxism as Jan Szewczyk, Adam Schaff or above all Leszek Kołakowski. And it is Leszek Kołakowski and his philosophical work that I will now focus on, viewing his ended involvement with Marxism through Tischner's eyes, that is through the lens of above all that which this Cracow-based Christian philosopher wrote about Kołakowski, and that which he discovered as something extraordinarily important in his philosophical work.

The fundamental question

Quoting Heidegger, Tischner would remind his students that a true philosopher was a philosopher of really one thought. I contend that in Tischner's opinion Leszek Kołakowski was a philosopher like that. Tischner above all wanted to understand him. He wanted to understand why this brilliantly educated man and a humanist *par excellence* was to begin with by no means an opportunistic or ambiguous leftist, but a true and staunch Marxist and militant at that. Tischner also wanted to understand why Kołakowski so quickly turned into a true revisionist and soon became one of the greatest critics of dialectical materialism in the world (it happened within several years only and before the forced emigration). In this context, let us note that mere few years earlier this materialism was ineffectively defended in a polemic with Rev. Kazimierz Kłósak by Adam Schaff, Kołakowski's ideological comrade. In other words, Tischner wondered how it was possible for Kołakowski to "be himself" as a eulogist of Marxist ideas and "be himself" as their outspoken critic and man who as of the 1960s would ruthlessly refute these ideas. And so it is legitimate to ask a question about what kind of pivot all his thinking revolved around, or in other words, what central thought constituted this pivot around which all his philosophy and all

his life – which at some point in time in a sense turned against itself – “revolved.” This was brilliantly captured by Tischner, who wrote about Kołakowski the following: “[...] for him Marxism was a part of his own life. Therefore, for the philosopher to crack down on Marxism meant as much as to crack down on himself.”⁷

As we inquire about the pivot around which all the thinking of Leszek Kołakowski, both the Marxist and a severe critic of Marxism, revolves, we inquire about what is absolutely important in this thinking, what decidedly comes to the fore in all the research activity undertaken.

The basic conviction

As a spiritual grandson of Marx, Leszek Kołakowski was above all a “master of suspicion.” He looked into social relations, their manifold meanings; he looked into cultural trends, as well as expressions of religious life, examining and interpreting their senses, and he did all that above all to expose in human action all that in some way – in his opinion – did not serve that which in the first place it should serve: the class interest. Faced with the image of the hermeneutics of suspicion, which was a striking thing in all of Kołakowski's works, Tischner posed a radical question about the origins of such hermeneutics, about the inviolable obviousness on which Kołakowski based his hard-hitting explication of reality which in his case always remained subservient to some ethical ideal. In other words, Tischner was wondering what in Kołakowski's life was the unchangeable reference point thanks to which this philosopher from Radom was always himself, whether in his Marxist and fierce criticism of particularly the Roman Catholic Church and the so-called Catholic philosophy, or in his unprecedented turn away from Marxism. Tischner writes: “As I look at the development of Leszek Kołakowski's thought, I remember about one question: what is absolutely important in this thinking? I inquire about the reasons for his criticisms, and the reason for his acceptances, as well as about the convictions that are

⁷ J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 207.

so basic that they were present when Kołakowski was a Marxism enthusiast, and they are present today, when he is a critic of Marxism.”⁸ Tischner uses the term “basic convictions.” And so we have the plural. In fact, however, we should use the singular, because the thing is – and this is evidenced by Kołakowski’s statements – that it is just one basic conviction which is a hermeneutic source of Kołakowski’s dynamic and hard-hitting endeavours.

In dictionaries of the Polish language the word “conviction” is usually explained as “certainty about someone or something, faith in the truth or rightness of something.”⁹ The synonyms of the word “conviction” include the following words: decision, concept, finding, belief, attitude, evaluation, opinion, viewpoint, orientation, judgement, view.¹⁰ As we look into the etymology of “conviction,” we come across the Latin *decidere*, which means to “cut off.” In this context, *conviction* is about cutting off other possibilities. But I believe that in the case of the “conviction” that Tischner discovers in Kołakowski’s views, it is better to follow an intuition whereby “conviction” is associated with “evidence” and “bearing witness.” From this perspective, it might be easier for us to understand what made Kołakowski develop his views, what he wanted to give evidence for, or what he wanted to bear witness to. Therefore, to use Saint Paul’s idiom, we want to understand what Kołakowski wanted to stand up for, to defend, what he wanted to bear witness to in his hermeneutics of suspicion both as a Marxist and as a man who broke with Marxism at some point in his life.

Kołakowski wanted to give evidence by exposing and by this act of exposing – following his philosophical master Karl Marx – he wanted to change the world. On this subject Tischner wrote as follows: “Karl Marx said: «Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.» Kołakowski decided to be

⁸ J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 209f.

⁹ *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/przeswiadczenie;2511406.html> (6.10.2019).

¹⁰ Cf. *Internetowy słownik synonimów języka polskiego*, <https://synonim.net/synonim/prze%C5%Bwiadczzenie> (6.10.2019).

a philosopher who is anxious to change the world – by exposing. That which was to be exposed first was religion. Then it was Marxism. [...] The hermeneutics that he used to criticize religion was based on second-hand data that remained outside the range of his ordinary experiences. The hermeneutics used to expose Marxism lived in the momentum of these experiences.”¹¹

In his question about the basic conviction in Leszek Kołakowski's thinking, Tischner inquires about nothing else but precisely and above all this extremely important thing, that which Kołakowski wanted to stand up for, and that which he wanted to bear witness to in his attempts at changing the world. In Józef Tischner's opinion, the basic conviction around which Kołakowski hovers both as a militant Marxist and then as an anti-Marxist is determined by two concepts: human dignity and its attendant human rights.¹² After all, it was not only in his apology for Marxism, and then in his radical criticism of Marxism, but also in the time when his attitude to the Catholic Church was already quite well-balanced and even friendly, that Kołakowski kept on exposing various problems connected with the protection of human dignity and human rights following therefrom.¹³ There is no doubt that Tischner read Kołakowski, both in the 1950s and in the years immediately preceding the 1968 turning point as well as in the time after the turning point, as a philosopher focused above all on the defence of human dignity and rights. Naturally, I do not discuss here at length the issue of the rightness of the defence methods applied by Kołakowski, as that

¹¹ Cf. J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 213.

¹² A particular interest in this problematic was shown by Leszek Kołakowski already in *Szkice z filozofii katolickiej* [Sketches on Catholic Philosophy], Warszawa 1955, p. 168.

¹³ It should be noted that Kołakowski the Marxist engages in a radical criticism of the Church in the name of reinforcing the idea of human rights. Kołakowski the anti-Marxist positively reviews the activities of particularly the Roman Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council, and engages in a damaging criticism of the communist totalitarianism also in the name of salvaging the idea of human rights that is anchored precisely in human dignity. This issue was brilliantly presented by Kołakowski in one of the interviews he gave in Oxford in the latter half of the 1990s: *Liberalizm a Kościół. Z Leszkiem Kołakowskim rozmawia Piotr Kostyło* [Liberalism and the Church. Leszek Kołakowski in an interview with Piotr Kostyło], Bydgoszcz 2020, pp. 3–18.

is not the object of the present study. I above all concentrate on the exegesis of Tischner's understanding of the basic conviction in Leszek Kołakowski's philosophy, and on the attempt to confirm that Tischner is really right when in *The Polish Shape of Dialogue* he writes about this basic conviction as Kołakowski's way of providing evidence in favour of human dignity and rights: "The crux of the matter was human dignity and rights."¹⁴ As he refers to Kołakowski's language, which we encounter every now and then in his writings from the period of rampant Stalinism in Poland,¹⁵ and which sometimes is abusive, unjustified, suffused with even contempt for Catholicism and the views held by Catholic thinkers, Tischner emphasizes that it is only at the beginning of the 1980s that: "one should recognize that Kołakowski is not only a writer who merely describes something, but he is above all a thinker who gives evidence for something. [...] In other words: what is the hermeneutic principle of his hard-hitting endeavours? The principle is evident: it is by no means some or other dogmatically adopted Marxist thesis, but the author's natural sensitivity to all manner of degradation of human dignity. Kołakowski's writings differ from writings by other Marxists of that period in that they are more profoundly and authentically permeated with the element of human rights. As I return to these texts today, I do this not only to use

¹⁴ J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 221.

¹⁵ Cf. *Szkice z filozofii katolickiej*, op. cit., pp. 32f, 145, 213, 218; L. Kołakowski, *Wykłady o filozofii średniowiecznej* [Lectures on Medieval Philosophy], Warszawa 1955, pp. 6, 37, 40–45, 131f. A strong and legitimate objection to contempt speech in science was raised by Rev. K. Klószak in his article *Próba oceny* [An Attempt at Evaluation] published in "Życie i Myśl" (1956) nr 3, p. 89. A comprehensive discussion of the deeply embarrassing criticism levelled by, inter alia, Kołakowski at the Church, as well as a defence of the Church anthropology against the onslaughts launched by the Polish Marxists in the 1950s are provided by Tadeusz Gadacz in a research paper entitled *Ks. Klósaka spór z materializmem i jego znaczenie* [Rev. Klószak in Dispute with Materialism and its Significance], "Studia Philosophiae Christianae" 28 (1992) 2, pp. 109–125. A thorough analysis of Kołakowski's attitude to religion, Thomism and the Catholic Church before 1965 as well as after that year is provided by Mateusz Pencuła in a research paper entitled *Leszek Kołakowski o religii* [Leszek Kołakowski on Religion], "Edukacja Filozoficzna" (2016) nr 61, pp. 77–105. Cf. also C. Mordka, *Od Boga historii do historycznego Boga. Wprowadzenie do filozofii Leszka Kołakowskiego* [From the God of History to the Historical God. An Introduction to Leszek Kołakowski's Philosophy], Lublin 1997, p. 127ff.

them as the basis for accusations levelled against the author, but to discover the beginnings of something that was to come to fruition in the form of *Main Currents of Marxism*.¹⁶

On the one hand, it is characteristic, but on the other hand incomprehensible that early Kołakowski – an intellectual and a man with good humanities background – would ascribe the violation of human rights and the debasement of man to the Roman Catholic Church. It is just startling that he would discern this mistreatment of man, conditioned by intellectual backwardness, particularly in the thought of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas and in Thomism: “Thomism aims to establish man’s role and value in the world in a manner that makes it necessary for a man to submit himself to the church: the church is a cashier through the agency of whom the human being repays his debt to the omnipotent. The only thing that needs to be done is to charge to man’s metaphysical account sums that he will never be able to repay and that will make him, for his whole lifetime, a submissive slave to the invisible creator and his visible network of agents.”¹⁷ It was in Thomist realism – as Tischner observes – that Kołakowski discerned the apology for the political and cultural degeneration of the bourgeois society, responsible for the violation of human dignity and human rights.¹⁸ It must be emphasized that in his opinion Saint Augustine was an author of radical destruction of ancient humanism. Kołakowski the materialist writes as follows: “In the fight against the materialist traditions of the ancient culture [...] Augustine constructed the first elaborate system of Christian philosophy, which used divine reasons to justify slavery and exploitation, propagated disdain for life and the world, distrust in human strengths and possibilities, took away from man everything that constitutes the value of life for the sake of the vision of imaginary afterlife benefits.”¹⁹ Similarly, he took an extremely critical stance on neo-Thomism, which he accused – and

¹⁶ J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu* op. cit., p. 210.

¹⁷ L. Kołakowski, *Szkice z filozofii katolickiej*, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁸ Cf. J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 162.

¹⁹ L. Kołakowski, *Wykłady o filozofii średniowiecznej*, op. cit., p. 37.

it is not really clear why – of intellectual ignorance, and which he identified with a primitive tool in the fight against the idea of revolutionary movement.²⁰ Kołakowski would also buttress his position with quotations excerpted from the works by moral theologian Victor Cathrein, and neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain. It is clear that early Kołakowski quotes all these thinkers in an unacceptable and selective manner that only serves his purpose and substantiates his own persuasions, which anyway Kołakowski never denied.²¹ Indeed, Tischner notes that too, but he adds one important comment: The manner of critique presented (by Kołakowski – J. J.) is unacceptable, but the fact of critique and the questions posed are justified.”²² Tischner writes this, above all taking into account Kołakowski’s concern for human dignity. At the same time, however, Tischner adds a very critical remark about Kołakowski: “Kołakowski learnt the Church from the texts instead of looking at what was going on with the Church outside his window. In a way, he believed the words he read more than his own ears and eyes. That is probably why he could not grasp the difference between the obedience that a Christian owes to God and the obedience he owes to his fellow human being. But that is not all. While Kołakowski was sensitive to human dignity, he was not sensitive to what was going on with that dignity in Poland at that time. He could not see the concrete – concrete plebeian faith. He was by no means involved with any experience of a simple peasant or worker who on Sunday would kneel down in front of the altar and in this position felt no less human or worthy of himself. In order to see and feel all that it was not necessary to be a believer. It was enough to live and breathe Poland. Kołakowski lived in Poland, but regarded everything from on high, from a distance.”²³

As I have already written, it is noteworthy that because of his basic conviction about the abiding significance of human dignity and its

²⁰ Cf. L. Kołakowski, *Szkice z filozofii katolickiej*, op. cit., p. 145.

²¹ Cf. L. Kołakowski, *Szkice z filozofii katolickiej*, op. cit., p. 174.

²² J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 211.

²³ J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 212.

attendant human rights, Kołakowski rejected Marxism too. It is an interesting fact that his rejection of Marxism was not in the first place motivated by his discovery of the great contribution made by the Church, especially during the Second Vatican Council, and by Christians in general to the cause of the defence of human dignity and rights. This is because Kołakowski first turned his back on Marxism-Leninism, and only then did he enter into dialogue with the Church and Christian philosophy. He rejected Marxism-infiltrated communism for the same reasons for which in the first place he rejected Christianity, and especially Roman Catholicism. With hindsight, that is after several years of the publication of the third volume of *Main Currents of Marxism*, in which for the first time he openly acknowledges the error of his conduct and thinking during the Stalinist times,²⁴ Kołakowski explicitly admits that he was made to distance himself from Marxism-Leninism by the violation of the idea of human rights by communism. In this context he stresses: "One might say that communism was the most glaring violation of this idea. [...] However you look at it, it was a system of organised violence – of not only a policing, but also economic character – against both physical and spiritual lives."²⁵

Conscience and reason were the tribunal that decreed the rejection of Marxism and in turn communism. Tischner writes: "It is from the ethical standpoint that Marxism gets the blame for becoming a philosophico-ideological form of justification of crime."²⁶ Indeed, Kołakowski still sympathized with Marx, treating his philosophy as a specific expression of the defence of human dignity and rights. However, putting Marxism into practice proved that it was a criminal ideology. Hence, Kołakowski wrote: "At present Marxism neither interprets the world nor changes it: it is merely a repertoire of slogans serving to organize various interests, most of them completely remote from those with

²⁴ Cf. L. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. The Founders. The Golden Age. The Breakdown*, Book Three, trans. P. S. Falla, New York 2008, p. 925.

²⁵ *Liberalizm a Kościół. Z Leszkiem Kołakowskim rozmawia Piotr Kostyło*, op. cit., p. 10.

²⁶ J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 213.

which Marxism originally identified itself.”²⁷ In some other place he writes: “[The doctrine’s] vague and contradictory tenets were alike put down to the «dialectic».”²⁸ In the end, there appears the definitive assessment directly connected with the basic conviction: over the years Marxism became an ideology legitimizing one man’s violence against another, a set of views sanctioning the degradation of his dignity and violation of his inalienable rights. Marxism ceased to be the quest for the truth about man. It became the sphere of living a lie and hypocrisy. Kołakowski writes even about forcing people to tell lies “about the world, their own state, themselves, but they should have preserved the silent memory about some real aspects of the Soviet reality, and that is not only to make themselves constantly live at a proper level of fear, but also because as they kept repeating the official lies, and knowing them to be lies, all the citizens were becoming accomplices of the party and the state to lying.”²⁹ It’s a wonder that even as he was writing *Main Currents of Marxism*, Kołakowski would not always explicitly stress that it was precisely Marx who had laid the foundations on which his banal philosophy could evolve into an inhumane system. It was only later on, and not infrequently as a result of coming into closer contact with the world of Christian culture, religion and philosophy that this – as he would sometimes refer to himself – non-believer devoid “of practically any religious feelings”³⁰ could distance himself from Marx’s views as well as his standpoint on religion, and especially Christian one. And it was only then that he could come closer to religious faith. But this coming close, or this turn was paradoxically a result of the same basic conviction that years earlier gave rise to Kołakowski’s emotionally-conditioned protest against the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, it must be noted that in Kołakowski’s friendly attitude – which took years

²⁷ L. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Book Three, op. cit., p. 1212. Cf. J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 215.

²⁸ L. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, op. cit., Book Three, pp. 870–871. Cf. J. Tischner, *Polski kształt dialogu*, op. cit., p. 215.

²⁹ L. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, op. cit., Book Three, p. 925.

³⁰ L. Kołakowski, *Notatki o współczesnej kontrreformacji*, Warszawa 1962, p. 99.

to mature – to Christianity, and especially the Roman Catholic Church, the pivotal role was played by the problematics concerned with the idea of human rights: “For the Church the most important issue is the one of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. There is no freedom that costs nothing. Whenever we speak about the freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, we presuppose that there will be some absurd and deranged sects, some grotesque pseudo-religions and cults. And nothing can be done about that, because as long as they do not go around murdering people, we cannot forbid them that. Such are the costs of freedom [...] I think that this has been acknowledged in Christianity.”³¹

Conclusion

The problematics of the basic conviction – this detail which is crucial for the reception of Leszek Kołakowski's views and which I have pointed out in the present research paper primarily proves that Józef Tischner's evaluation with regard to the former Marxist's philosophy is really correct. The question of human dignity and rights, which is addressed in Kołakowski's writings, serves as evidence that it is above all the anthropological-ethical issue that takes centre stage throughout his philosophical investigations. This does not only apply to his critical-polemical writings that fall within the compass of the confrontation between Marxism and Christianity, which I referred to in the context of Tischner's critical remarks. After all, Kołakowski's special emphasis on the anthropological-ethical issue is particularly striking as one reads virtually most of his writings. For if they are the exposition of Kołakowski's fascination for the issues concerned with the relationship between God, man, religion and the Church,³² then the source of this interest is indeed man with his special manner of existence, and his dignity – particularly

³¹ *Liberalizm a Kościół. Z Leszkiem Kołakowskim rozmawia Piotr Kostyło*, op. cit., p. 12.

³² Such a perspective on understanding of Kołakowski's philosophy is adopted by B. Piwowarczyk in the work: *Odczytać Kołakowskiego: problem Boga, człowieka, religii, Kościoła* [Reading Kołakowski: the Problem of God, Man, Religion and the Church], Częstochowa 1992.

man with his right to the freedom of conscience and of religion, as well as with his experience of untruth and manifold incarnations of evil. Embedded in the problematics of God, the Church and religion, as well as founded on the category of human dignity and rights, the characteristic anthropological-ethical feature of Kołakowski's thinking is, therefore, present not only in his early writings, but in equal measure in the writings expounding his late philosophy. This is particularly evidenced by the Oxford-based philosopher's best-seller which was quite quickly made available to the Polish reader. It is precisely the book *If there is no God...*³³ that widely resonates with the basic conviction. In the context of the dispute between the heritage of Jerusalem and the heritage of Athens, between the revealed religion and the intellect dynamizing philosophy and empirical sciences, as well as against the backdrop of the title allusion to Dostoevsky's maxim that if there is no God, everything is permitted, Kołakowski points to something vitally important in man's life. His dignity and his inalienable rights, and especially his right to freedom are ultimately realized in no other way than in the will to look for the truth and in the ability to distinguish between good and evil. But the necessary condition for this realization is man's reference to God. Without this reference the basic conviction becomes absurd, and the battle for man is lost. In this context, let us note some significant words by this former Polish Marxist: "the absence of God spells the ruin of man in the sense that it demolishes or robs of meaning everything we think of as the essence of being human: the quest for truth, the distinction of good and evil, the claim to dignity, the claim to creating something that withstands the indifferent destructiveness of time."³⁴

³³ L. Kołakowski, *Jeśli Boga nie ma... O Bogu, Diable, Grzechu i innych zmartwieniach tak zwanej filozofii religii* [Religion: If There is No God... on God, the Devil, Sin and Other Worries of the So-Called Philosophy of Religion], tłum. T. Baszniak, M. Panufnik, Kraków 1988.

³⁴ L. Kołakowski, *Jeśli Boga nie ma...*, op. cit., p. 134f.

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Abstract

Józef Tischner's question about Leszek Kołąkowski's "basic conviction"

In the present research paper I focus on the issues concerned with the perspective adopted by Rev. Józef Tischner in his review of Leszek Kołąkowski's life and philosophical work. I demonstrate – which is the main purpose of the paper – that this perspective is determined by the Tischnerian discovery of the so-called "basic conviction"

in Kołakowski's writings. Such a conviction was of crucial significance for his philosophical apologetics of Marxism as well as his radical criticism of the Church, and communism founded on Marxism. As Józef Tischner poses the question about the "basic conviction," he proves that in Kołakowski's philosophy from the beginning it centres around ethical issues, and in particular the idea of human rights. It is in these that Tischner discerns the central theme in Leszek Kołakowski's philosophy. In this way Tischner paints a picture of Kołakowski as a philosopher of actually one thought which matures in his work at various levels, but above all at the level of understanding of man, religion and the Church.

Keywords

Leszek Kołakowski, Józef Tischner, Marxism, Church, human rights