

Exactly ten years have passed from the first printing of my book, *Solidarity Means a Bond*. Józef Tischner's warning, which I cited in the *Introductory Word* to that edition, that 'the moment we forget how important solidarity is, would be the moment of our community's suicide' sounds today like the prophecy of a Cassandra. One may doubt whether in today's divided and conflicted Polish society there remain any traces of some elementary 'us,' a sense of the bond, which gives rise to an ability to thinking and acting in solidarity. As Cyprian Kamil Norwid wrote 150 years ago, 'the Fatherland is a *moral unity*, without which no party can even exist – without which parties are like *bands* or the *polemic camps of nomads*, the fire of which is discord, and the reality the smoke of words.' Has the existence of a community united by basic values, the existence of which we were firmly convinced not too long ago, not become in these latter years an ethical desert, given over as prey to those warring 'bands' and 'polemic camps' – the incarnations of (in the very worse sense of the term) political passions?

In the fever of the current problems, disputes and quarrels with which Poles are antagonised, it is worthwhile to inspect them from a proper distance. The 40th anniversary of the birth of Solidarity encourages us to consider our history in a wider perspective, and to seek its deeper sense, especially as in AD 2020 we are also celebrating the anniversaries of other events essential to our community: the centenary of the Battle of Warsaw, a time at which, despite the deep divisions among them, Poles were able to unite with one another and restrain the Bolshevik tide, and the centenary of the birth of the greatest of our countrymen, Karol Wojtyła. John Paul II was a man burdened with an extraordinary mission, and an extraordinary fardel of duty, without whom it would be difficult to imagine the shape of today's Poland and that of our contemporary world. But he is no longer physically among us, for 15 years now, just like Fr Józef Tischner, the 20th anniversary of whose death also falls this year. It is to Tischner's *Etyka solidarności* [*The Ethics of Solidarity*] that we owe our ability to speak of our community in a manner much wiser and deeper than the game of interests and the struggle for power would allow.

The decade that stretches between the two printings of this book seems an entire epoch. A new generation has grown to adulthood, for whom the 'first Solidarity,' the fall of Communism, and the beginnings of the Third Polish Republic exist only as episodes from long-past history, known only from schoolbooks, which means more or less as much as the regaining of Poland's independence in 1918 or the Warsaw Uprising did for my own. Can the memory of the heritage of Solidarity still function as a foundational myth of our community for young Poles, since the dispute about what that heritage is really based on, and to whom it really belongs, constitutes a constant source of division and conflict, and a weapon used in the same?

These two intellectual and spiritual patrons of Polish Solidarity have also been marked by the passage of time. Their figures grow continually blurry in our memory. What is worse, invoked instrumentally as they are in various narratives, they sometimes take on characteristics that are truly like caricatures.

The person of Fr Józef Tischner is becoming more and more anonymous for many. If he rouses anyone, or is associated by anyone with anything, this usually has to do with politics – for good or evil, depending on the political preferences of the person in question. Who among us, who gladly confess to belonging to a supragenerational 'generation of JP II' and know well what great good fortune we had to have commerce with a saint, could even conceive, a few short years ago, that ideas of 'dewoitylisation' or 'decanonisation' in his regard would surface in the public forum, and be seriously considered? New narratives, created by ever new epigones of the 'masters of suspicion' are busy at work in an attempt to seize hold of our reason and wipe clean our authentic memory. For this reason it is important that reliable relations concerning what is most essential for our community be written down and recorded by the witnesses of those events, and transmitted to future generations of Poles.

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



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