

## Article

# Beyond Secularization and Post-Secularity—Joseph Ratzinger’s and Józef Tischner’s Concept of a Breakthrough

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**Abstract:** The inspiration to write this article was provided by the assessment made by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI: man of the Western civilization is undergoing a deep spiritual crisis. Therefore, conversion, a breakthrough, or spiritual renewal is absolutely necessary. Without this renewal, humanity will become a victim of its own thinking, wanting and acting. As I search for a philosophical description of the breakthrough postulated by Benedict XVI, I refer to the original philosophical and religious thought of Polish philosopher Józef Tischner, who presents the question of the breakthrough at the anthropological-axiological level, where he exposes the issue of interpersonal correlation. The basis for the permanent existence of this correlation is man’s ethical awareness grounded in the ethic of dialogue. This grounding is particularly important, because it is a guarantee for overcoming internal and external threats to the existence of a religious community. Tischner presents the issue of this grounding against the background of the secularization of Western society. By distinguishing relative secularization from radical secularization, Tischner provides an insightful analysis of the phenomenon of the apparent and the true *sacrum*. For a real breakthrough, only the true *sacrum*, which Tischner believes to appear at the level of the Christian *sanctum*, is of primary importance. He understands *sanctum* as holiness grounded in goodness. It is holiness that is the real key to overcoming man’s multiple crises at the level of his thinking and religious life, at the level of both his private and social life. The presence of *sanctum* in human life constitutes, in Tischner’s view, the very core of the breakthrough and an expression of the important significance of religion in both individual and social human life. According to Tischner, it is owing to the presence of *sanctum*, i.e., that which is absolutely good, that man does not have to fall into the trap of post-secular thinking. For post-secularity, as Tischner believes, seeks ways to overcome the tension between the secularized world and the world of religion only in renouncing, for epistemic reasons, the absolutization of secular reason. In his opinion, however, this is not enough for believers and non-believers to follow a common path of cultivating the heritage of universal principles and values, historically expressed mainly in religious life. Only the capacity for selfless kindness can serve as the basic condition for both believers and non-believers to understand and preserve this heritage.



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## 1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s the word “breakthrough” has been featuring more and more prominently in both colloquial speech and multidimensional reflection on the meaning of humanity’s history. In this word, an integral element in the historical line of development of mankind has been discovered. Some have associated the breakthrough with the events at the turn of the centuries and millennia. Others have discerned in it a result of the changes taking place in the field of empirical sciences and humanities, in the political and economic image of the world. Currently, this word is being used in connection with the unknown that, like a shadow, follows the suffering people who have been in different ways painfully affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Admittedly, every now

and then public attention is brought to various symptoms of the ongoing civilizational breakthrough. Given the above, there is a living conviction that the sphere of many people's spiritual life *sensu largo* is in need of a thorough breakthrough, especially in the context of crises in religious life that we are time and again informed about. The semantic scope of the noun "breakthrough" is undoubtedly very broad. More often than not, it implies a radical turn, a change, an absolute need for some novelty in people's thinking, wanting and acting. The very thinking of the need for some novelty in life can generally be viewed as a manifest reaction to some crisis in the life of a man who experiences himself within a nation, a state, or—broadly speaking—some cultural and geographical region. The understanding of the word "breakthrough" will be based on Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI's position on the one hand, and Polish philosopher Joseph Tischner's one on the other hand. Both of them associate the problematic of the breakthrough with the condition of man's spiritual life, especially if he is a representative of the Western, Euro-Atlantic civilization. What exactly is this breakthrough about, what does it find expression in, and is it at all legitimate and necessary to speak about it today?

With regard to Joseph Ratzinger's theological viewpoint and Józef Tischner's philosophico-religious position, I present answers to these questions in the following thematic sections of the present research paper. First, I signal the problematic concerned with the effects of the civilizational crisis, which constitutes the main point of reference in Benedict XVI's appeal for a breakthrough in the life of contemporary people. Then, I expose the philosophical tools with which, in my opinion, one can gain a deep understanding of what Joseph Ratzinger has in mind as he directs at contemporary man, as well as at a religious and national community a call for a breakthrough as a man's multi-faceted conversion. For this purpose, I refer to Józef Tischner's axiologically and agathologically grounded philosophy of man, in which he points out the necessity of building interhuman bonds as the prerequisite for the breakthrough. Hence, I above all explain why, according to Tischner, man's ethical awareness—as it is grounded in the ethic of dialogue—is of fundamental importance to the possibility of a breakthrough in the face of the religious and civilizational crisis. In the explanation I refer to the Tischnerian analysis of the history of the secularization of Western societies, and especially to the analysis of the difference between *sacrum* and *sanctum*, which I employ for a critical diagnosis of the phenomenon which because of, among others, Jürgen Habermas is called post-secularity (Kaul 2020). I conclude the paper by pointing to the vital significance, in Benedict XVI's and Józef Tischner's thought, of the understanding of the breakthrough for the preservation of the patrimony of universal principles and values in the contemporary world.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1. An Absolute Need for a Breakthrough

In one of his last extensive interviews given before his resignation as pope, Joseph Ratzinger provides some hints valuable in understanding the nature of and necessity for a breakthrough in the world today. His statement results from reflection on the spiritual condition of contemporary nations and states, and on the cultural- and worldview-related, as well as socio-economic, changes that have taken place mainly in Europe and North America above all since the Age of Enlightenment, and particularly in the 20th century. In Ratzinger's opinion these changes are part of the historical process of secularization, which is targeted mainly against the Latin civilization, and whose reach keeps extending to new regions in the world. In the interview he gave to Peter Seewald, particularly striking is Benedict XVI's critical view on the current condition of this civilization, the religious condition of Christians, and especially the spiritual condition of the Roman Catholic Church. Equally striking is the pope's sincere concern for the future of all humanity, which in his opinion is undergoing a severe and multi-faceted crisis at the beginning of the new millennium. Hence, quite firmly and with carefully chosen words, Pope Benedict XVI sensitizes all people to the need for a breakthrough. He says the following: "Mankind stands at a crossroads. It is time for reflection. Time for change. Time for conversion. [...] «There are so many problems that all have to be solved but that will not all be solved

unless God stands in the center and becomes visible again in the world»” (Benedict XVI 2011, p. 11). Of great significance are also the Pope’s subsequent words that carry a lot of weight; Seewald has included them in the preface to his book-length interview. Benedict XVI points out that today the content of the answer to the question whether God exists, and whether He will be accepted by people, or definitively disappear from their lives, will decide—under the current dramatic circumstances—the fate of the world (Benedict XVI 2011, p. 11). The uncommon nature of the drama characterizing the situation is pointed out by the objects of the Pope’s analysis. These include the gross, notorious and reprehensible errors that the Church failed to avoid in the 20th century, but also the global financial crisis in the first decade of the current century, as well as the moral crisis in the Western societies, not infrequently conditioned by the severe crisis in religious faith, so characteristic of the last several decades of the 20th century.

Benedict XVI explicitly associates the crossroads at which mankind is standing with the need for such a breakthrough, which as its background would have distinct anthropological motifs found in the Church teachings. The desired breakthrough, *resp.* turn, or a radical change is not an *Augenblick*-like decisive moment. The turn that the Pope has in mind is to be expressed primarily in fundamental and free decisions made by people over a longer period of time. The fate of the world and man will depend on the direction of the solutions. With the word “reflection” featuring in his interview, Ratzinger clearly implies that the contemporary world cannot continue on the path it has been following so far. If people keep treading the path of unreflecting secularization, unilateral and hence reductionist model of rationality, and uncritical progress conditioned by this reductionism, then mankind will soon become shackled by various ideologies infiltrating the life of the Catholic Church, as well as of states and societies. As regards the problematic of ideologies, it is noteworthy that ideologies are dangerous chiefly because their representatives—which has already been illustrated by the totalitarian systems of the Soviet communism and German fascism—always regard man as something below his proper measure of humanity, making him above all a supine object of manifold manipulation on the part of people in power. It is exactly in this context that Ratzinger says the significant words: “Time for change. Time for conversion”. In his opinion conversion should in fact be construed as a time for contemporary man to turn to the God of the Gospel, and all this that can contribute to a deeper understanding between people of various viewpoints and convictions. The context of the pope’s statement clearly shows that the need for a breakthrough, a turn, or a change applies to the life of both Christians and all people, and especially representatives of the Euro-Atlantic culture circle. Otherwise, humanity will become a tragic victim of problems of its own making—a victim of its own ultrasubjective thinking, wanting and acting. In the interview, Benedict XVI many times points out the dangers in this respect—ones found in the very community of the Church, particularly the Roman Catholic Church. These dangers are typically associated with a false approach to understanding of conflicts between the Church as an institution and many Christians’ everyday experience of faith. On the other hand, the pope points to threats resulting from the radical secularization of the image of the world, and in this context he raises the issue of new religion, the so-called “secular religion” (Benedict XVI 2011, p. 63) which in its essence is a negation of Christianity, and in particular a negation of God’s transcendence, usurping the right for its own theses to be the only signposts in human life. It is hard to dispute the pope’s opinion that over the last century secularization has reached alarming levels. Instead of contributing to fair settlement of conflicts between people, and especially “between the Church and the State” (Locke 2010, p. 61)—which is what John Locke wished for—secularization actually has given rise to so many problematic and painful situations (Puczydłowski 2017) that it is only with the utmost effort that contemporary man can control them.<sup>1</sup> That is why from Benedict XVI’s viewpoint, “the hour of breakthrough”, “the hour of conversion” is primarily connected with a departure from “radical” secularization of the life of nations and states representing the Western civilization. However, would this departure mean a return to the past, the pre-Enlightenment forms of spiritual, and mainly religious life?

In search of the key to better understanding of the pope's reflection on the spiritual condition of contemporary men, the condition of their religious faith, the condition of the Church and the world in the new millennium of Christianity, we embark on the path marked out by Józef Tischner's philosophical and religious thinking. Above all, two essays of considerable relevance for the problematic of breakthrough, written by Tischner towards the end of his life, are the objects of my analysis here. *Wiara w godzinie przełomu* [Faith at the Hour of the Turning Point], and *Drogi i bezdroża sekularyzacji* [Ways and Byways of Secularization] (Tischner 1999, pp. 11–29, 180–89).

## 2.2. *A Breakthrough in the Context of the Tension between the Office of the Church and Religious Faith*

In the former of the essays Tischner performs a critical analysis of the dispute between the office and faith in the Church. This analysis is continually accompanied by two presuppositions made by the author. "Firstly: I do not perceive faith as a state ossified once and for all, but I see it as an enormous river buffeted by conflicts and tensions, which at times is tempestuous, but at other times runs smoothly. [...] Secondly: [...] the Gospel is the strength of the Church, and a departure from the Gospel is its weakness" (Tischner 1999, pp. 13–14). The former presupposition serves as the foundation for Tischner's belief that conflicts and disputes within the Church by no means lead to disappearance of faith, or destruction of the institutional character of the Church, but they are above all intrinsic to the logic of the development of religious life. With the latter presupposition Tischner, like Benedict XVI, claims that on manifold pathways of experiencing the truth about the Church, it is not conflicts and disputes themselves, but "manners of approaching and overcoming them" that are the most important" (Tischner 1999, p. 28). It is with this matter that Tischner connects the meaning of the word "breakthrough" in the life of the Church. The postulate of the evangelical approach to resolving various tensions, not only between "the office and faith" within the Church, but also between the Church and the secularized world engender in Tischner an unusually optimistic view of the future of the Church in the world: "I am convinced that Christianity—the Gospel—lies not so much behind, but ahead of us. The history so far has been a challenging quest for the identity of the Church in dispute with others [...] Today we are on the brink of a period in which the quest for and confirmation of the identity will take place in the process of discovering similarities. [...] Thus far, we have been confirming differences that have given rise to opposition and bloody conflicts. Now is the time for a departure. We cannot bring the dead back to life, but once we have come to love the differences, we might mature enough to reach a deeper understanding" (Tischner 1999, p. 13).

In reference to John Paul II's teachings, Tischner first draws the reader's attention to the necessity to fulfil some prerequisites for the possibility of a real breakthrough in the life of the Church. The first one is a "historical examination of conscience." It is by no means about self-criticism, enforced by some external circumstances and aimed at a radical break with the past, questioning the historical unity of the Church and the well-being arising from the act of throwing off the taint of guilt. In the pope's call for an examination of conscience, Tischner discerns rather a call for "a radical inner transformation that is to bring about a new understanding of the Church, a deeper interpretation of faith, more evangelical involvement in the community life. The point is not to abandon the ideal of unity, but to understand that unity is about reconciliation, which in turn does not presuppose blurring all differences" (Tischner 1999, p. 13).

Therefore, it is clear that for Tischner both the necessity for inner transformation, the revival of the ideal of unity, and the related need for reconciliation may take place only in the believers' specific state of consciousness, without which the life of the Church is brought to the edge. Inspired by the Ten Commandments and the history of the struggle for interhuman "recognition" described by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Tischner points to one of the most basic dimensions of religious experience in Christians: "God «recognizes» by «choosing». [...] We choose according to how we have been chosen. Thanks to these choices, our axiological «I» becomes axiological «We». Ultimately, a Christian's

freedom is patterned on God's freedom. Thus arises a «bond», i.e., *religio*" (Tischner 1999, pp. 16–17). The reference to the problematic of the axiological "I" involves a crucial theme in the Tischnerian philosophy of man. Present throughout man's life, which is full of vicissitudes and errors, the axiological "I" is a unique and irreplaceable value worthy of absolute recognition. To be more precise, it is man himself as a person who is in a way an absolute to himself, the ultimate subject of goods and values, which—paradoxically—is not enough for himself, but needs his uniqueness and originality to be recognized by others: "The axiological «I» needs a mother and a father. If its matrix is general participation in good that characterizes subjectivity, then the Other—a man or God—is the father." (Tischner 2005, p. 327). In the Church community, whose axis of life is the experience of being mutually chosen—recognized, the axiological «I» turns into axiological «We». This transformation is the key to the Tischnerian understanding of the Church as a community of chosenness, in which faith develops. The source of religion, i.e., a bond at the heart of which lies faithfulness to God and man, is the original and free fact of being chosen by God, which becomes a measure of freedom and mutual chosenness among people. It is only the "examination of conscience" and the "awareness of mutual chosenness" that, in Tischner's opinion, set a proper atmosphere for a breakthrough in the Church's reflection on its own identity, which to a large degree is conditioned by the manner in which the Church approaches its internal conflicts and threats to itself.

Leaving aside the details of Tischner's insightful descriptions of painful and difficult life situations, which many a time lead to man abandoning God and the Church, it must be noted that above all Tischner emphasizes a twofold threat to man's religious faith and his bond with the Church, and by extension to the possibility of a necessary breakthrough in the relationship between the Church institution and religiousness of a specific man.

Tischner reckons causing manifold horrible suffering—in a word, dialogically construed evil and the related separation of the voice of love of God from the voice of one's reason—as well as the so-called "masochistic instinct," (Tischner 1999, p. 19), i.e., the loving feeling that a believer has for his own and others' suffering, among the gravest internal threats to the development of the religious idea of chosenness in the Church. The destructive force of these threats lies in man himself. In this context, Tischner presents faith as a great inner dispute engaged in by "man over himself, his love, his fellow being and his God." (Tischner 1999, p. 20).

There are also outer threats—ones whose destructive force stems from the surrounding world. Tischner's attention is above all drawn to various forms of currently widespread individualism, all manner of substitutes for a religious community. Not only do they cause an erroneous approach to the tension between "the office and faith," but they often result in abandonment of the religious community. Such abandonment "may lead man outside the Church, outside religion" (Tischner 1999, p. 23). With regard to the life led by people in traditionally Christian countries, both in the past and the present, Józef Tischner signals a painful phenomenon that he defines as exploitation of religion for political purposes. This phenomenon consists of building political communities on the basis of religious bonds. "Religious recognition and chosenness are supposed to become a foundation for political recognition. Politics has got inside churches. Political divisions and conflicts have penetrated religion" (Tischner 1999, p. 24). Pointing to the essence of this outer threat, Tischner finds that it is above all expressed in "the manipulation of transcendent chosenness for political purposes." (Tischner 1999, p. 25).

Analyzed by Tischner, the problematic of a breakthrough is concluded with his reflection of significant substance, without which his quest for the prerequisites for the possibility of a breakthrough, both in the intra-ecclesial tensions and disputes between the Church and the world, would not be entirely understandable. Tischner writes: "The Church addresses the questions that are real questions posed by the contemporary world; it does not come up with artificial problems. The Church lasts in history. It has seen and been through a lot, and so it is sharing its experiences. When it directs its voice at non-Catholics, it expects nothing more than attentive listening to the arguments it presents. A Catholic may

accept the Church's teaching by faith in the Church, while a non-Catholic—by virtue of the arguments put forth. To some, the Church is «the way of Truth», while to others it is the entity that «provides food for thought». One can engage in a dispute, accept or reject a proposed viewpoint, but one cannot not take it into consideration.” (Tischner 1999, p. 27).

This quotation is worthy of attention primarily because it indicates something that it does not say explicitly. In it, Tischner points to the very “core” of the desired breakthrough, the “feature” without which understanding inside the Church, as well as between the Church and the world is not possible. Tischner points out the necessity of deepening awareness in both believers and all those who want to be men of good will. He means ethical awareness grounded in the ethic of dialogue. He discovers this ethic in the Church's attitude over the last decades. While fulfilling the two above-mentioned conditions, i.e., doing an “examination of conscience” and arousing in people “awareness of mutual chosenness,” ensures a possibility of a breakthrough, it is only by way of dialogue that we can gain a deep understanding of how the awareness of mutual chosenness is expressed, and it is only the ethic of dialogue that reveals the very essence of the breakthrough. It is nothing else but dialogue that builds space for coexistence between the Church and the world. It is precisely in the atmosphere of thinking and living by dialogue that we discover that faith itself is essentially dialogue in which a difference of opinion does not ruin anyone, but is a starting point for reconciliation. “This discovery would not have been possible (writes Tischner, alluding to the «vein of gold» in his philosophy of man—agathology, to John Paul II's teachings, as well as to Emmanuel Lévinas' and Charles Taylor's views), if an even more fundamental concept—good—had not been put in a new light. Dialogue is so valuable, because it is a manifestation of participation in good, and a manner of realizing good among people.” (Tischner 1999, p. 29).<sup>2</sup> Tischner makes the fate of the Gospel in the contemporary world, and the fate of religion conditional upon the realization of the dialogic approach to resolving manifold conflicts that plague believers and non-believers. Noteworthy, it is only daily realization of the ethic of dialogue that, in Tischner's opinion, conditions the possibility of actual emergence of necessary breakthroughs in various critical situations in the most recent history of mankind.

### 2.3. *Secularization—A Chance for the Relationship between Faith and Reason or a Threat to It?*

Let us recall that the phenomenon of secularization (Runehov and Oviedo 2013, pp. 73–85) is a special point in Benedict XVI's reflection on contemporary threats to man. The pope does not pass a direct value judgement on this phenomenon, but he perceives it as a certain historical process in the culture of the Western civilization, which manifests itself in progressive emancipation of the secular sphere of human life from religious dominance. The context of the pope's statement clearly shows that secularization—especially its so-called “aggressive,” or “radical” variety—brings more losses than benefits. It does not only obscure the relationship between faith and reason; its dangerous effect is above all about the emergence of the so-called “secular religion” with its absolutist aspirations. The pope believes that such religion is detrimental to man mainly because it generates different forms of a “dictatorship of relativism,” (Benedict XVI 2011, pp. 52–59) thereby harming the idea of true tolerance. In consequence, secular religion gradually destroys freedom of religion, which is thus supposed to become subject to the overbearing norm of secular religion in control of man's whole life: With that—emphasizes Benedict XVI—we are basically experiencing the abolition of tolerance, for it means, after all, that religion, that the Christian faith is no longer allowed to express itself visibly. When, for example, in the name of non-discrimination, people try to force the Catholic Church to change her position on homosexuality or the ordination of women, then that means that she is no longer allowed to live out her own identity and that, instead, an abstract, negative religion is being made into a tyrannical standard that everyone must follow.” (Benedict XVI 2011, pp. 43–54).

Again, Tischner's philosophico-theological reflection can serve here as a useful aid in understanding the meaning of the pope's statements. Tischner intentionally avoids

reducing the question of secularization to only an issue concerned with some technical term used over the centuries in the language of the ecclesiastical and state law. Because of this, the historical problematic of the sequestration of the Church goods by the state and other secular legal entities is not the focus of attention for Tischner, who above all concentrates on the very essence of secularization: “The starting point for secularization is a situation in which everything was sacred: the sea and the mountains, the sun and the moon, love and hate, birth, disease and death, nations and the state. The end point of this process is a situation in which nothing is sacred, and all is rational, ordinary, earthly. [...] Secularization essentially coincides with desacralization, and desacralization coincides with laicization.” (Tischner 1999, p. 180).

Let us pay attention to certain thematic threads in this quotation. The process of secularization above all means a transformation whereby the image of the world no longer needs supernatural explanation, and whereby man in his understanding of his own life does not need to look for a basic point of reference in his conviction that everything he deals with is a sign of God’s presence in the world. As a result of secularization, God “is relegated to the background,” and man is left to his own devices. The opposition of the rational to the sacred proves that in his description of the essence of secularization Tischner finds himself in the sphere of the intellectual influence of such theorists of social life as Peter Berger, but above all Max Weber, who interpreted the development of Western societies as a process of secularization. Its constitutive factor is rationalization of reality, whose two expressions—advancement of science and advancement of technology—effected a disenchantment of the world, human experience, ideas and institutions from various irrational elements: “The modern form of theoretical and practical, intellectual and teleological transformation of the image of the world, and the way of life into a rational structure produced a general effect whereby the more this peculiar kind of rationalization developed, the more religion—when viewed from the perspective of the intellectual formation of the image of the world—took on an irrational character.” (Tischner 1999, p. 127). Therefore, the thought about God’s presence among us too was regarded as something superfluous from the vantage point of science and technology, and the very precondition of rationalization required that man become independent of religion.

Tischner distinguishes between the relative and radical sense of secularization. The Enlightenment played a particular role in this distinction. Until the emergence of the Enlightenment thought, the predominant one was relative secularization, which Tischner understands as a result of various disputes over the quality of *sacrum* which people experience, and which does not, however, disappear from the world arena. As he explains the essence of the disputes in the essay on ways and byways of secularization, Tischner first points out the significance of the Gospel itself and the life of the early Christians for the desacralization of the regulations in the law of ancient Judaism. The essay also features a Weberian theme of destruction of the sacred and magical character of the heathen world, caused by the Judeo-Christian culture (Weber 1995, p. 133): “The entry of Christianity onto the historical arena sparked a great controversy over the authenticity of *sacrum*. Whichever way you look at it, Christianity was a true «revolution of desacralization». How many «sacred places» were wiped by it off the face of the earth? How many «sacred springs» became overgrown with weeds? [...] Heathenism defended itself with might and main, resorting to, among others, violence. [...] Saint Augustine mentions the efforts made by pagan thinkers, who—aware of the burgeoning crisis—were aiming to limit the number of «deities». However, their efforts came to nothing. The problem was quality, not quantity.” (Tischner 1999, pp. 181–82).

Still, the Enlightenment did not only abandon the disputes over the quality of *sacrum*, but it resolutely began creating the image of the world without *sacrum*. Tischner writes: “Desacralization turned radical.” (Tischner 1999, p. 182) Referring to writings by Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach and Nietzsche, Tischner presents the history of modern secularization as a process aimed at definitive demythologization of Christianity, and the related birth of man’s total responsibility for his own fate and the fate of the world only.

The problematic of the birth of this responsibility, developed in the context of understanding secularization as a process of man's liberation from the magical and sacred forms of religion, and of posing insightful questions about God and man, found a special place in Protestant and Catholic theology in the latter half of the 20th century. Tischner analyzes thought of particularly two theologians—Friedrich Gogarten and Johann Baptist Metz.<sup>3</sup>

In one of his main theses, Gogarten claims that deep faith cannot arise without the believer's secularization in the world. In other words, such secularization is not an impediment to faith, but serves as its indispensable condition (Gogarten 1953, p. 141). Tischner addresses this theme, writing that in a sense Christianity demands secularization—thanks to it a man of faith, endowed by God with reason and free will, ceases to be someone dependent on outside forces. “He must become himself. Maturation is his fate. Desacralization is a way of maturation” (Tischner 1999, p. 184) leading to self-dependence, in which man—a child of God—discovers himself as the one who in his freedom from the world and for the world takes on full responsibility for himself and the world.

As he refers to Metz, who in his theology develops the Nietzschean motif of “worldization,” i.e., undeification of the world, Tischner first points out that worldization itself is Christian through and through. God's incarnation and the life of the Church are, on the one hand, signs of acceptance of the world by God, and on the other hand serve as evidence that God allows the world considerable autonomy. Seen from this perspective, secularization appears to be a chance of deep understanding of the relationship between God, man and the world. However, from Metz's viewpoint, as Tischner observes, an overly optimistic conception of secularization in Protestant theology may result in obscuring the corrective function of Christianity in the assessment of history and life of society.

Beginning with Wilhelm Herrmann, a teacher of Karl Barth, the expression “Weltlosigkeit des Glaubens” [worldlessness of faith]<sup>4</sup> put down roots in the Protestant theology of secularization, because after all God justifies—i.e., chooses—man solely on the basis of his act of faith. It is precisely this expression, which underlies the classical Protestant conception of secularization, that became an object of harsh criticism by Metz. Tischner commented on this as follows: “Metz strives to restore to *sacrum* its critical function with regard to the world. *Sacrum* does not only compel one to accept the world, but also to criticize it. It makes specific demands on the world. Including political demands. An encounter with *sacrum* is a crucial event for a man and mankind on the way to liberation.” (Tischner 1999, p. 185).

As he discusses the issue of secularization in Christian theology, Tischner brings to the fore yet another danger, which always results in falsification of the truth about *sacrum*. Tischner believes that the recurrent theme in secularization is the one of power. Thirst for power gave rise to fight against *sacrum*, so that man could rule the world and other people without hindrance—for the same purposes (ruling the world and other people), the same thirst for power would often take advantage even of the highest value. “Entangled in the dialectic of power and submission, *sacrum* was rid of its essence. That is what desacralization is about: ridding *sacrum* of its essence.” (Tischner 1999, p. 186). Because of the thirst for power, *sacrum* paradoxically became a controversial value in the sense that some regarded it as a true, reliable and indisputable value, while others found it to be illusory. That is why, at the conclusion of his essay on the ways and byways of secularization, Tischner poses a question about the right criterion for its reliability and illusoriness.

#### 2.4. A Prospect of a Breakthrough: From Manipulated *Sacrum* to Christian *Sanctum*

As it has already been stated, the subject of “good” is one of Tischner's favourite themes in his philosophical and religious thinking. It is precisely ‘good’ that constitutes a true criterion for distinguishing reliable *sacrum* from *sacrum* manipulated by people—desacralized *sacrum*. Tischner finds illustration of the problem of *sacrum* as the highest value not only in the Gospels, but also in Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*, and Meister Eckhart's *Treatises*.

In defence of the undisputed character of *sacrum*, Jewish priests and teachers of the law condemned Christ to death. As they defended the highest value, they also defended their privileged place in the world of established forms of religious life. The action they took stemmed from the “law of retaliation,” which—in Tischner’s opinion—Nietzsche masterfully detected in the religious institution: “As we know, priests make the most evil enemies—but why? Because they are the most powerless. Out of this powerlessness, their hate swells [...]. The greatest haters in world history, and the most intelligent have always been priests: nobody else’s intelligence stands a chance against the intelligence of priestly revenge.” (Nietzsche 2006, p. 17).

As he comments on Nietzsche, Tischner pays particular attention to feelings aroused by the law of retaliation, but above all he points to man’s strong conviction that he knows the liberating truth. On the one hand, this conviction involves a contemptuous attitude towards those who hold different views, but on the other hand, the awareness of salvation grounded in the fulfilment of the letter of the ritual law; all this makes men of retaliation see themselves as role models for others (Tischner 1999, p. 187).

In regard to the Old Testament reference to *sacrum*, the life and teaching of Jesus are reformatory in the sense that the faith in *sacrum* they propose is free from “the law of retaliation.” Christianity rejects vengeance and hatred, and it opens man up to the meaning of good, which he himself constitutes as a child of God. Good is the true key to authentic faith, which is the complete opposite of apparent faith. In his understanding of good, Tischner remains under the spell of medieval mysticism, according to which good as a personal dimension of man’s holiness is a proper foundation for man’s good deeds. The fourth part of *The Talks of Instruction* by Meister Eckhart, which Tischner quotes from, reads as follows: “People should not worry so much about what they have to do; they should consider rather what they are. [...] Do not think to place holiness in doing; we should place holiness in being, for it is not the works that sanctify us, but we who should sanctify the works. [...] insofar as we are [holy] and have being, just so far do we hallow all that we do.” (Meister 2009, p. 489).

There is no doubt that Tischner’s contact with Eckhart’s mysticism allowed him to discern the Christian *sacrum* within the horizon of good, and interpret it as *sanctum*, which he describes thus: “The true *sacrum* of Christianity is man—a child of God. [...] In order to expose this human, and even personal dimension of holiness, the language of Christianity preferred to use the word *sanctum*. *Sacrum* still has a pagan overtone [...] it can revive, but it can also stone, crucify and kill. [...] The Christian *sanctum* is different: it is a source of life, the word of life, and food of life. [...] *Sanctum* is that which is absolutely good.” (Tischner 1999, pp. 188–89). In other words, man’s holiness appears to Tischner as his intrinsic capacity for being selflessly good.

### 2.5. A Breakthrough in the Post-Secular Era? Critique

Let us return to the questions that were posed at the beginning of the present paper. What does a breakthrough consist in? How is a breakthrough expressed? Is it at all legitimate and necessary to speak about a breakthrough? The answer to the third question will result from the answers to the first two. We already know that in his proposed answers to these questions, Tischner associates the “breakthrough” with a change of attitude to resolving and overcoming different conflicts within the Church, and in its relation to the secularized world. The essence of this change comes to be expressed in the act of engaging in dialogue, which is a manifestation of freedom as man’s capacity for being good, i.e., always in a selfless manner. Speaking about dialogue is by all means legitimate and necessary, because—as it turned out—the project of aggressive secularization did not bring the fruits expected by its originators. Radical secularization was defined as straightforward progress. Its purpose was to lift man up from the level unenlightened life, from the level of “*sacrum* as an illusion of the world,” and onto the level of rational life predicated on scientific and technical thinking. Although rationality thus conceived was to give rise to total marginalization of man’s religious faith, it failed to achieve that. On the contrary—the

relation between reason and faith, science and religion has in the recent decades been elevated to a completely new level of discourse. The necessity of reintroducing religion to the public debate has been more and more frequently raised. This state of affairs first came to be evidenced by the renowned Capri seminar organized, among others, by Gianni Vattimo in 1994 (Derrida and Vattimo 1999). However, the seminar participants did not create possibilities for a debate on the transcendent God as the reference point necessary in planning the future of mankind, but announced, to the world, the end of thinking about God in metaphysical terms. In their opinion, the revival of interest in religion did not mean a break with the reduction of theology and religion to anthropology, which was anchored in the 19th century. Nor did the revival mean a break with the promotion—also in the sphere of postmodern thought in the 20th century—of the reduction of God’s transcendence to man’s immanence, and of religion to a moral system. In this context, the following words by Jacques Derrida sound particularly meaningful: “Undoubtedly, ever since Hegel wrote that the fundamental sentiment of his era was expressed in the dictum «God is dead» times have changed. But is «our» time (which, like Hegel’s time, begins with the birth of Christ) really so different? And is the phenomenon which is imprudently referred to (in parliaments, among terrorists and the media rather than at churches, as they are getting more and more deserted) as «the revival of religion» truly something other than «the death of God»?” (Derrida and Vattimo 1999, p. 5).

The subject of the reinstatement of religion in the contemporary public and philosophical debate was broached—as we know—by Jürgen Habermas at the beginning of this century. Let us recall that on 14 October 2001, in the speech given in Frankfurt on the occasion of being awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, Habermas presented an evaluation—as relevant for our times—whereby today’s societies are post-secular. This means that they should no longer ignore or even eliminate from public life religion as an obstacle to the development of rationality and orderly social life (Habermas 2002, pp. 8–21; Verovšek 2020; Matos and Renić 2016). In the face of manifold civilizational crises, many representatives of present-day societies—shaped after the times of indisputably aggressive but ultimately ineffective secularization inspired especially in the 19th century by all manner of materialistic monisms—begin to discern the vital significance of religion in the life of individuals and entire societies (Habermas 2002, pp. 17–19; Jasiński 2020). According to Habermas, this means that we need to reconsider the relationship between the secularized world and religion, which still wields great motivating power in the development of a more humane image of the world. This also means that there is an overwhelming desire—also for epistemic reasons—to abandon the absolutization of the secular reason, and that it is necessary to embark on the path of a complementary learning process in which religious and non-religious people—also for cognitive reasons—will seriously approach one another’s contribution to controversial subjects of life of a democratic state ruled by law (Habermas 2005, p. 33; Sepczyńska 2014). In a similar vein, soon after giving his famous speech at St Paul’s Church in Frankfurt am Main, Habermas noted, in one of his most important treatises on scientific dialectic and uncritical faith in science, progress, as well as the history of man’s religious experience, as follows: “The force of religious traditions to articulate moral intuitions with regard to communal forms of a dignified human life makes religious presentations on relevant political issues a serious candidate for possible truth contents [...]” (Habermas 2012, pp. 116–17).

The picture of post-secularity painted by Habermas is at first glance one of a compromise between the naturalistic and the religious experience of the world—a picture of the mutual abandonment of the monopolies on interpretation of reality, and especially the reality constituted by the life of liberal society in a political and democratic system. On the one hand, it is a picture of the sublimation of science and technology manufacturing forces liberated by capitalism, while on the other hand, it is a depiction of the reduction of the historically conditioned powers of religion and the Church (Habermas 2002, p. 11). Habermas defines this attitude of compromise between the two sides, which have so far been in competition, as a form of listening to and learning from each other: “Religious

and secularized members of a political community listen to one another in a public debate, learning from one another.” (Habermas 2012, p. 9).

One might get the impression that the Habermasian concept of mutual relations between religious people and contemporary atheists and agnostics is an interesting concept of the future of a law-based democratic state, as well as a concept of the future of both the Church and various religious traditions. Additionally, the future-oriented post-secular thinking might be recognized as an expression of a breakthrough—a result of the historically conditioned encounter between reason and faith, science and religion. In this context, let us remember that Tischner spoke very significant words about the future of the Church. After all, he said that Christianity still lay ahead of us, and that we had to reconsider the matter of the identity of Christians and their significance in the world. Can we then say that the modes of interhuman understanding or even reconciliation, promoted by Tischner, and rationally predicated upon the propagation of the principle of dialogue grounded in freedom as a man’s capacity for doing good, reckon the philosopher among post-secular thinkers?

Unfortunately, in my opinion the affirmative answer would be premature or even illegitimate. As his two essays, which I refer to in the present research paper on the problematic of a breakthrough, demonstrate, Tischner never abandoned, in the dialogue with the world, his religious identity, his agathological and axiological potentials, which have their origins in the metaphysical message of religion. On the other hand, as one thoroughly follows the Habermasian analyses of the phenomenon of post-secularity, one cannot but get the impression that the abandonment of their religious identity by religious people is the price that according to Habermas believers are supposed pay in order to preserve and cultivate the post-secular model of human life and the world in general (Matos and Renić 2016). This model was developed by the Enlightenment-originated rationality, the principal aim of which is to disenchant, and therefore demythologize all reality. Hence, Habermas stresses that “religious consciousness [...] must adapt to the authority of the sciences which hold the societal monopoly of secular knowledge; and, finally, it must agree to the premises of a constitutional state grounded in a profane morality. Without this thrust of reflection, monotheisms in relentlessly modernized societies unleash a destructive potential.” (Habermas 2002, p. 11).<sup>5</sup> This text goes to show that the post-secular idea by no means exhibits characteristics of a breakthrough, a change, a departure from the previous secularization. Compared with the secularizations of the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as the first three decades of the 20th century, its character is very gentle.

Tischner radically distances himself from this crypto-secularization—post-secularity. Additionally, although the thought, found in his writings, about the need for religious revival is all vibrant, the revival in Tischner’s thought has a completely different meaning than the one concerned with the revival and the opening of religious people up to the needs of the contemporary world, which Habermas called for, and which the Capri seminar organizers wrote about. On the other hand, the necessity for the revival of faith and religious life that Tischner promotes—the revival provoked by conflicts inside the Church, and the very history of secularization paradoxically leads to the “death of God” too. However, this death does not mean a reduction of divine transcendence to human immanence. This death is not a death of God who is a person, or the God of the Gospel. What Tischner means is death of the pagan *sacrum*, which—as it has already been said—revives, but also kills, divides and corrupts people. Without *sanctum*, without holiness grounded in good, people are incapable of overcoming various crises in their private and social lives. Tischner’s entire philosophy of good—his agathology—is encapsulated in his thinking about the need for a breakthrough. Additionally, when in the context of his own analyses of a breakthrough, a change and a turn, Benedict XVI, a theologian, stresses that it is necessary to place God in the centre of the life of societies and nations, that God should again be visible in the world, Tischner, a philosopher, claims that Good, which God constitutes, and His fascinating holiness can reveal itself in no other way than through good and holiness which man is capable of realizing. Additionally, this thought is the key to understanding

the essence of a breakthrough, and to justifying the need for a breakthrough in the world, as it is today afflicted with manifold crises. To Tischner, there is no true breakthrough without a conscious choice of good.

### 3. Conclusions

Neither Pope Benedict XVI nor Tischner claims that the barrier put up to radical secularization is to lead to resacralization of the world. We have observed that secularization is an unavoidable process, and a path to the autonomy of the world and man. Tischner's point—like Pascal's—is that autonomy cannot be absolute, because absolute autonomy cannot in fact exist. Absolute autonomy is man's illusion (Pascal 1989, p. 63). However, there is a possibility of man's autonomy becoming strongly entwined with *sanctum*: "There is this uncanny power in man—the power that becomes manifest in his feud with evil. It is true that man is a source of evil [...]. But it is also true that man can overcome evil. In his hands he holds all the necessary means and tools to do that—beginning with grace and ending with freedom. In this fight he remains «autonomous». If he wants, he can... He has the power to originate good in this world." (Tischner 1999, p. 189). That is how a breakthrough comes to be expressed: in an individual decision to release in oneself the power to originate good around oneself. This is the beginning of work on the patrimony of universal principles and values, deeper understanding of which is helped by religion as well. This patrimony—explained Benedict XVI years ago—is a source of enrichment for peoples and their *ethos*. It speaks directly to the conscience and mind, it recalls the need for moral conversion, and it constitutes a condition for a just and peaceful social order at the national and international level (Benedict XVI 2010, pp. 18–19).

Tischner, who so strongly stresses the evangelical and Eckhartian motif of man's holiness as his capacity for "selfless kindness," (Tischner 1999, p. 189) does this mainly because in this way every believer and non-believer, if he is willing to undergo a conversion and thereby affirm the good in the concrete, personal relationships, can actively participate in the protection and development of this patrimony of universal principles and values, which can be used to rapidly forge interhuman bonds.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that, today, increasing amounts of attention is drawn to the debacle of the radical, or downright aggressive secularization that ushered in the so-called post-secular era, which is the point we will address below.
- <sup>2</sup> I explain the concept of agathology as the core of the Tischnerian philosophy of man in the book *The Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century*. Józef Tischner (Jagiełło 2020, pp. 41–111).
- <sup>3</sup> Even though he does not mention the titles of writings by these two German theologians, particular parts of his analysis prove that he has in mind the following works (Gogarten 1953; Metz 1968).
- <sup>4</sup> A critical discussion of this concept is provided by, inter alia (Timm 1967, pp. 150–54).
- <sup>5</sup> In this context I note a critical commentary by Karol Tarnowski, a Polish philosopher of religion, who—exposing the one-sidedness of post-secular thinking—observed the following: "Recognition of religion by the Enlightenment reason is effected under a certain and fundamental condition: maintenance of the "disenchanted," or demythologizing perspective; in other words, under the condition of the deconstruction of its metaphysical—*sit venia verba*—layer, and its lay—in the strict sense—reassimilation. [...] One can harbour some basic doubt—that religion, interpreted in such an undoubtedly reductionistic manner, might lose its deepest meaning, and by extension its semantic and axiological potentials. While thanks to the thinking done, religion is capable of revealing ever-new, strictly anthropological meanings, their "be or not to be" depends—whether you like it or not—on its metaphysical and dialogic-religious message, which does not have to be overcome at all!" (Tarnowski 2002, pp. 85–86).

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