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OBSESSED WITH INNOCENCE

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LAST SUMMER three Nobel Prize laureates met in Vilnius to discuss the meaning of memory. From the many words spoken then, I best remember what Günter Grass said about the strange vicissitudes of German memory. Referring to the recent public discourse in his native land (Ernst Nolte and the historians' dispute in the 1980s and the Wasler-Bubis debate in 1998–1999), Grass described the rituals of collective memory that cause some trouble for his countrymen, especially the older generation. Germans would not be Germans if they did not create a special neologism: "memory work" (a concept that Grass nevertheless mocks—memory is involuntary, unintentional, or, he says, does not exist). Germans are required to work on their memory "as a confession of guilt, it is rejected as an insinuation, and they carefully cultivate it, because for decades, as long as history finds us again and again, it is reworked . . . by younger generations—presumably those without its burden. And it is as if the children and the grandchildren remember in substitution for their silent fathers and grandfathers." What's more, "it seems as if the crimes . . . acquire more importance the greater the distance from the crime."[1]

The Authority of Historians

This portentous epigraph from a Nobel Prize laureate makes a good introduction to the two cents I would like to contribute to the far margin of the discussion of Jan Tomasz Gross's book about Jedwabne. I am following this discussion from Germany, and I think that if it were not for this foreign perspective, which weakens the influence of self-censorship, I would not be able to notice certain elements in this discussion at all. I cannot resist the thought that Gross would not have written this book if he had not worked abroad.

[1] G. Grass, "Milczenie pamięci" (The silence of memory) *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 October 2000.

I am referring not to the censorship of academic circles but to a more optical phenomenon. From up close, and especially from inside, it is impossible to see certain things. The Polish obsession with innocence is impossible to notice. It is also impossible to see that the rules that govern Polish public and private debate are controlled by this pressure of innocence. Above all, one cannot see that what Thomas Merton called the "pitiable refusal of insight" is seen by everyone but ourselves.

It appears that one sees only what one knows. How does what Poles know about themselves and about the Holocaust translate into Polish innocence? The question "What do Poles know?" is directed first to historians. Rightly so, because historians are the ones who construct school curricula. And not rightly so, because as the German example shows, even the most certain knowledge about historical guilt translates into national awareness of this guilt indirectly and with difficulty.

If we can talk at all about the responsibility of Polish historians for what Poles *do not know* about the Holocaust, we can do it only in terms of the sin of relinquishment. This is often the result of the innate caution of historians, which drives them away from certain subjects. The aspiring young historian knows of the price that can be paid in Poland for a "premature" publication. Is it necessary to recall here the name of Michał Cichy and the list of historians who replied to his article?[2] A historian, like any other academic, wants first of all to be "serious." "Serious" in Poland means "uncontroversial." An uncontroversial Polish historian strokes his beard, watches with forbearance those who are in a hurry.

What we are to do with this leisurely manner of the historians in a country in which the last witnesses to the war and the Holocaust are dying out is not really known. The quotation from Günter Grass cited above gives us further perspective. It seems that Polish children and grandchildren will also remember in lieu of their silent fathers and grandfathers. Undisturbed by historians, those witnesses will take with them to the grave everything that still should be told about *szmalcownictwo* [blackmailing] and the Blue Police, about the Baudienst formation in which Polish youth served,[3] and about the pogrom in Warsaw during Holy Week in 1940,[4] about priests informing on Jews on

[2] Michał Cichy, "Polacy-Żydzi. Czarne karty powstania" (Poles-Jews: Black pages of the uprising), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 29 January 1994.

[3] M. Hochberg-Mariańska, "List do redakcji," in *Wizja Polski na łamach Kultury,* ed. Grażyna Pomian (Lublin, 1999), 296.

[4] Marek Edelman, interviewed in A. Grupińska, *Po kole. Rozmowy z żołnierzami getta warszawskiego* (In the circle: Conversations with the soldiers of the Warsaw ghetto) (Warsaw, 2000), 324.

the basis of information received in confessions,[5] about Jedwabne, Radziłów, and about the innocent ritual of "the burning of Judas" practiced during the war,[6] about the glasses of water sold for gold coins to the Jews packed in "death trains."[7] And about the "railroad action" in 1945, in which the partisans of Narodowe Siły Zbrojne dragged some two hundred Jews repatriated from the East out of the trains and shot them,[8] about the murder of Jews returning from exile, about pogroms in Kielce, Kraków, and hundreds of other unknown denunciations during and following the war. Surely this will happen unless, leaving the historians to their own reputations, we do what Jan Tomasz Gross has done and start talking about it.

What the Holocaust Has to Say

Zygmunt Bauman wrote in his book *Nowoczesność i zagłada* [Modernity and the Holocaust] that sociology in its current shape has less to say about the Holocaust than the Holocaust has to say about sociology.[9] I do not know whether Bauman's provocation has influenced the writings of Jan Tomasz Gross, but it seems that what Gross's critics have most held against him is his intentional or unintentional approach to it.

What disgusts historians and even provokes Jacek Żakowski[10] to evoke the phantom of postmodernism, is, for me, most important in Gross's book. I have in mind that scandalous "new approach to the sources." Gross writes about it in the following way: "Our initial attitude toward every report by would-be victims of the Holocaust should be changed from one of doubt to one of affirmation."[11] I am not concerned with whether this sentence would be useful to someone verifying sources. While not taking away the importance of source verifi-

[5] Marek Edelman, in ibid.

[6] Interviews from the archives of the Department of Ethnology at the University of Warsaw.

[7] K. Jeleński, "Od endeków do stalinistów" (From the "Endeks" to the Stalinists), in *Wizja Polski na łamach Kultury,* 101.

[8] A. Cała, H. Węgrzynek, and G. Zalewska, *Historia i kultura Żydów polskich*, s.v. "pogrom."

[9] Z. Bauman, *Nowoczesność i zagłada* (Warsaw, 1992), 22.

[10] A reference to Jacek Żakowski's article "Każdy sąsiad ma imię" (Every neighbor has a name), which was printed in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 18–19 November 2000. For an English version of this article, see "Every Neighbor Has a Name" in *Thou Shalt Not Kill: Poles on Jedwabne* (Warsaw, 2001), 76–90.

[11] J. T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny, 2000), 94.

cation, I would like to suggest that something much more important is at stake here.

At this point, in order not to call a spade a spade too soon, I would like to tell two stories. On Chłodna Street in Warsaw, there is a pastry shop that I often visit with my family. From its windows, the view of Chłodna, crowned with the silhouette of the Church of Saint Karol Boromeusz, has always seemed strangely familiar to me. Those cobblestones, the last ones in Warsaw, with the traces of tramway tracks . . . It was only when I saw Wajda's movie *Korczak* that I realized how ignorant I was.[12] I understood that here, over Chłodna, was the famous wooden footbridge that connected the large and small parts of the ghetto. I understood why tourist buses come here. From the café one could see young foreigners in skullcaps, standing on the street in the rain as they listened to the guide. Perhaps they also prayed.

One day the neglected square on Chłodna Street was torn up. Soon a cross appeared and a plaque bearing the inscription "Jerzy Popiełuszko Square."[13] I do not think that those who gave the square at Chłodna the name of a martyred Polish priest had bad intentions (probably the fact that Popiełuszko had an apartment on Chłodna Street was a factor), but there are many squares in Warsaw and the bridge over Chłodna Street was the only one. Neither I nor any of the Warsaw bureaucrats remembered this bridge. Our memory is a place without Jews. Jan Tomasz Gross's idea is a way to remedy this situation. All of us need a "new approach to the sources."

If there is anyone who, despite everything, still does not understand why we need this "new approach to the sources," I can tell one more true story. A few years ago, students from my department organized a field trip to the Yakutsk region. They did not find any especially interesting shamanism there, but they noted a very particular local memory of recent history. The village stood on the permafrost, on the exact location of a former labor camp. On the graves, or rather over the human bodies thrown into the crevasses, life proved to be impossible. The children were dying. The ethnographers were asked to stop being ethnographers and to say their Catholic prayers for the dead. The point

[12] Andrzej Wajda (1926–) is the leading film director in Polish postwar cinema. His film *Korczak* (1990) was highly praised in 1990 at the Cannes Film Festival but later received critical reviews for portraying a "Christian vision of the Holocaust." Betty Jean Lifton, one of the leading experts on Janusz Korczak, defended it in the *New York Times* in May 1991.

[13] Jerzy Popiełuszko (1947–1984) was an outspoken chaplain of the Solidarity movement. During the period of martial law he delivered special sermons for the Homeland in the Church of Stanisław Kostka in Warsaw. The communist Special Forces murdered him in October 1984.

was, probably, to assuage the conscience of the natives, who more than once had been rewarded for catching and delivering escapees from the camp—it was enough to bring only a severed white hand.

This is a naive but educational story. It is sad because it shows the disintegration of native culture (the shamans' prayers do not work anymore). But it is uplifting, because it shows the reality of the spiritual world—among Yakuts, of course.

Mole of Conscience

The "new approach to the sources" proposed by Gross has one fault. It can convince only someone who is already convinced. Influenced by Plato and Socrates, Stanisław Vincenz said once that what decides the worth of a man is his ability to be persuaded.[14] This idea is long out of fashion. Times have changed, and now one who can be easily persuaded is considered not a philosopher or saint but, unfortunately, a fool. It is a mystery how people change their minds at all today.

The person who is persuaded by Gross's postulate of a "new approach to the sources" is probably the same person with whose voice Czesław Miłosz once spoke about the mole-guardian with the red lamp on his forehead;[15] the same to whom Nicola Chiaromonte wrote about the worm of conscience[16] and Jan Błoński addressed his book *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* [The Poor Poles look at the ghetto];[17] the same one to whom Tadeusz Mazowiecki spoke in his *Antysemityzm ludzi łagodnych i dobrych* [The antisemitism of the kind and the good][18] and to whom Jan Józef Lipski spoke in *Dwie Polski, dwa patriotyzmy*

[14] Stanisław Vincenz (1888–1971) was a Polish philosopher and writer. One of his best-known works is *On the High Uplands: Sagas, Songs, Tales and Legends of the Carpathians*.

[15] The metaphor of the "mole-guardian with the red lamp on his forehead" comes from the well-known poem of Czesław Miłosz "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto." Although Miłosz himself declined to offer any specific interpretation of the metaphor, it is accepted that the mole represents the guardian of the dead.

[16] Nicola Chiaromonte (1905–1972) was an Italian philosopher and literary critic known for his liberal and antifascist position. The worm of conscience comes from his collection of essays entitled, in English, *The Worm of Consciousness and Other Essays*. ("Conscience" would be a better translation of the original.)

[17] In his collection of essays *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* (Kraków, 1994), the distinguished literary critic Jan Błoński analyzes in depth the metaphor of the mole-guardian with the red lamp (16–17).

[18] Tadeusz Mazowiecki (1927–) is a politician and writer representing the liberal Catholic intelligentsia. He was the first noncommunist prime minister (1989–1990). His essay "Antysemityzm ludzi łagodnych i dobrych," published in *Więź*, May 1960, is a classical text about the problem of antisemitism in postwar Poland.

[Two Polands, two patriotisms].[19] All of them are memorable texts completely forgotten. We read little and badly and remember even less. "Remembrance cannot be ordered," argues German writer Martin Walser, who started the German debate about memory.[20] It is worth asking why our memory is so capricious and stubbornly uncooperative in relation to issues so morally clear and right.

Collective memory scorns facts and appeals. Even if those facts are abundantly clear to historians, they place no obligations on human memory. Again the Germans are a good example. German society deserves high praise for the work it started on itself after the war, but observing the reaction of the crowd at certain moments in German history is enough to raise doubts about the extensive resocialization process that has lasted for more than fifty years. In 1998, in the church of Saint Paul in Frankfurt, when Martin Walser ended his speech protesting the masochistic practice of the "constant presentation of German shame" and "the instrumentalization of the memory about Auschwitz," everyone present—nearly all of the local political and intellectual elite—honored the speaker with a lengthy standing ovation.[21] They knew the facts too well. They were protesting against them, demanding a break from the truth, "the right to look the other way." The only person not standing and applauding Walser was the gray-headed Ignatz Bubis, the head of the General Council of Jews in Germany.

Confessing Someone Else's Sins

My discipline, ethnography, is interested not in facts but in what people say about them. What people say about facts is "unimportant" for historians, so it is no surprise that a historian facing the chimera of collective memory is usually helpless. Gross deserves praise because in his book about Jedwabne and in his other works, he discusses not only facts but also what people say about them.

[19] Jan Józef Lipski (1926–1991) was a writer and literary critic. In 1987 he became a leader of the newly reestablished Polish Socialist Party (PPS). His essay *Dwie Polski, dwa patriotyzmy* is a historical discourse written from the perspective of the PPS on two models of Poland—one right-wing, nationalistic, and antisemitic, and the other democratic and pluralistic.

[20] " 'Erinnerung kann man nicht befehlen' Martin Walser und Rudolf Augstein über ihre deutsche Vergangenheit," *Der Spiegel*, no. 45 (2 November 1998): 48–72.

[21] Wojciech Pisiak writes in detail about Walser's speech and his debate with Ignatz Buber, the head of the General Council of Jews in Germany, in "Ostatnia bitwa o pamięć?" *ResPublica Nowa*, no. 10 (1999): 8–27.

When a discussion of Polish-Jewish relations begins in the context of the Holocaust, Poles say the same things over and over again. In the beginning, when the historians are repeating their time-honored "too early,"[22] the conversation does not go easily. Soon, though, it achieves a certain maturity, turning into something that Stańczyk in *Wesele* called "confessing someone else's sins."[23] Many examples of this "confession of someone else's sins" can be found in the letters to the editor that have flooded *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, or the Paris-based *Kultura* after they published texts that offended this dogma of Polish innocence in relation to the Jews. Dear editor, are you getting such letters now?

The truly Polish discourse on antisemitism includes a list of topics at the ready—particularly Polish "living images." The subject "Holocaust" automatically starts the projector. But anyone expecting to find the horrors of extermination here would be mistaken. The show would begin with a few old church clichés like "His blood is on our heads and on the heads of our children . . . ," or "Let us pray for the faithless Jews . . ."[24] That those images have lived so long is hardly surprising since they are recalled every year during the Good Friday service. Next comes the image from before the war of the Jew in his dark coat lolling on the bench next to the fountain in the Saski Garden, as if he had already started to fulfill his promise that "the streets will be yours, the tenement-houses ours."[25] In the next picture, other dark-coated Jews welcome first the Russians, then the Germans, and then the Russians again with bread and salt. In the next, Jewish Pole-haters, who were brought by the Soviets, show off their communism and Jewishness in the postwar UB [Security Police]. In the next image Jews—this time hiding behind Polish names—suck the blood from the Poland of Gomułka and Gierek, and, with their characteristic chutzpah, occupy the highest positions in the financial mafia after 1989.[26]

The Polish "confession of someone else's sins" must end with penance, which of course will also be "someone else's." A penitent is obli-

[22] "Too early" was also a repeated answer to the survey by *Kultura* in 1957. See Adam Uziembło's letter: "*Kultura* is doing a survey with the goal of doing research on antisemitism. I am not sure it is time for it." In *Wizja Polski na łamach Kultury*, 117.

[23] Stańczyk is the jester in *Wesele* (The wedding), an important national drama written in 1901 by Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907). Modeled on a possibly historic figure of the sixteenth century, he is a bitter critic of Polish society and its elite.

[24] *Wizja Polski na łamach Kultury*, 123.

[25] See the illustration to the text "Chałaty w Saskim Ogrodzie," in *Mały Dziennik*, no. 210 (31 June 1939).

[26] Władysław Gomułka (1905–1982) was a communist politician. Between 1956 and 1970 he was the first secretary of PZPR. Edward Gierek (1913–2001) replaced him as the

gated not to say silly things about imaginary Polish antisemitism. "The editors know perfectly well how much damage Polish antisemitism has done to the Polish cause abroad. Is artificially fanning it supposed to repair this damage?" asks Aleksander Grobicki, a correspondent for *Kultura* in 1957.[27]

"Comrades!" Paweł Jasienica cried dramatically during an assembly of the Association of Polish Writers in 1968, "For reasons known only to himself, someone is trying to stigmatize our nation by putting the label of antisemites on us . . . Nothing can do more damage to us than the creation of an opinion in the world that we are a nation of antisemites."[28] The minutes go on: "The applause and cheering continue without pause for a long time."[29]

The applause and the cheering continue today. The list of names, initiatives, and organizations is long. Following the publication of Jacek Żakowski's text we hear again that the only result of all this will be a defeat in the New York court case concerning the return of Jewish property.

The Psychoanalysis of Polish Antisemitism

Maria Janion once formulated the thesis that nothing can cure "cursed Polish problems" but true and thorough psychoanalysis. Konstanty Jeleński advanced an identical thesis in the context of Polish-Jewish problems.[30] He noticed that every time the problem of antisemitism was addressed in the Paris magazine *Kultura*, the editorial office was flooded with letters of protest defending Polish honor. In 1957, *Kultura* sent a survey on Polish-Jewish relations to its readers. The first section was entitled in a provocative way: "The Psychoanalysis of Polish Antisemitism." The replies were few. Those that did arrive were so typical

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Party's first secretary in 1970, a position that he held for one decade until the workers' strikes of summer 1980.

[27] *Wizja Polski na łamach Kultury*, 109.

[28] Paweł Jasienica (1909 —1970), pen name of Leon L. Beynar, was a writer and popular historian. He is an author of the highly acclaimed *Piast Poland* and *Jagiellonian Poland*.

[29] K. Jeleński, "Hańba czy wstyd?" in *Wizja Polski na łamach Kultury*, 137.

[30] Konstanty A. Jeleński (1922–1987) was a leading intellectual among postwar Polish émigrés in Paris. He was one of the founders of *Kultura* and worked for the French monthly *Preuves*. The survey on Polish-Jewish relations was published in *Kultura*, nos. 1–2 (1957).

that they prompted Jeleński to conclude with a question: "Could it be that Rafał Malczewski[31] is right in saying that Polish antisemitism is a mass neurosis? Neurosis manifests itself in the same way in individual patients: escape from the problem, strong denial of the mere fact of psychosis, cruelty to oneself after admitting the neurosis."[32]

Anyone who is persuaded by the Jeleński-Malczewski diagnosis can easily see all the symptoms of the described illness in Polish private and public discourse about antisemitism and in the debate about Jedwabne. Indeed, what is this persistent impulse to blame the pogroms on the "scum of the society" if not a denial or an escape from the problem? (What is the ratio of scum to not-scum in a society in which, in the region of Małopolska alone, the Home Army listed the names of sixty thousand *szmalcownicy*?)[33] What is this empathic assumption of the damage that the brothers Laudański, the ones most active in the pogrom, had had to suffer at the hands of Jews? What are these attempts to enter into the spirit of Jedwabne ("a tiny town, going mad from the pain," in which "not even one Aryan store could survive" before the war) and these speculations about how hard it was to stand up to the murderous instincts of fellow citizens who had just made up their minds to murder their neighbors?

If we are talking about empathy, why not direct it to the Jews of Jedwabne? (Gross does this, but Tomasz Szarota and Jacek Żakowski hold it against him.) Why are Jewish faces so blurred? Why, indeed, shouldn't we listen as Jews speak their own "language of tragedy," as Jacek Żakowski calls it? As a result of fighting off this language, don't we coincidentally defend our "right to look the other way"?

The Innocence of the Expelled

Psychoanalysis in Poland is something suspicious, unpopular, and not cheap. Luckily Poland is also a country of inconsistent people: they praise some but read others. Another Polish peculiarity fosters psychoanalysis: the *Vater-kompleks*. Because of it Poles accept anything from certain people, even the bitter medicine of the couch. One of them is

[31] Rafał Malczewski (1892–1965) was the son of the distinguished painter Jacek Malczewski. Like his father he was also a painter and after 1945 lived outside Poland in France, Brazil, and Canada.

[32] K. Jeleński, "Problem anytsemityzmu. Ankieta Kultury," in *Wizja Polski na łamach Kultury*, 107–8.

[33] Letter by Jacek Myczka to the editors of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10 September 2000.

the Trappist monk Thomas Merton. The other, quite unexpectedly, is a declared enemy of psychoanalysis: Father Józef Tischner.[34]

Amazingly, a passage in Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* can be applied to the problem of Polish antisemitism, and to the even larger problem of its supposed nonexistence. The parallel is hidden because at first glance Merton is talking only about the white American South. Until the Civil War, life in the South was supposed to have resembled paradise—gentle blacks sang on plantations while noble whites looked after them. The outbreak of war annihilated this paradise. Merton writes: "Since the Civil War, the whole nation participated in sin, and the sin has become inescapable. The pioneer child, or the child of plantation-owners, was cruelly awakened. And he has faced in himself the cruelty that he did not realize was there: the meanness, the injustice, the greed, the hypocrisy, the inhumanity! He knows there is a mark on his forehead and is afraid to recognize it—it might turn out to be the mark of Cain!"[35]

Stubborn Southerners did not reconcile themselves to their expulsion from paradise. They coped "justly and scientifically" with this uncomfortable knowledge by projecting it on blacks: "The white racist's hate of the Negro . . . is made acceptable to him when he represents it as a Negro hatred of the whites." Blaming blacks, the white man from the South can safely say that "he is what he always dreamed he was—gentle, kind, fair, noble, courteous, yet simple."[36]

Does the antisemitism of good and gentle people, merciless and touchy, one that preempts a discussion about the Holocaust before it even begins, one that exaggerates every unjust Jewish voice, and is silent about each just voice, come from a similar traumatic experience?

Isn't the Holocaust, from the perspective of many old Poles, just a perfidious Jewish-German dirty trick, which forever cuts off the return to Soplicowo,[37] this paradise in which Jankiel played dulcimers under Gerwazy's eyes as the lion lay next to the lamb?[38]

[34] Father Józef Tischner (1931–2000) was a philosopher, representing the liberal wing of the Polish Roman Catholic Church. He is the author of many works, such as *The Ethics of Solidarity* (*Etyka Solidarności*) (1981) and *The Polish Shape of Dialogue* (*Polski Kształt dialogu*) (1981).

[35] T. Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York, 1989), 36.

[36] Ibid. 33, 37.

[37] Soplicowo is a noble Polish estate depicted in *Pan Tadeusz* (1834), the national epic of Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855). It is a place where Polish culture and traditions are preserved. Jankiel is the Jewish character in *Pan Tadeusz*, representing commitment to Polish culture and the struggle for freedom from the Russian yoke. The character of Jankiel came to symbolize Polish-Jewish cooperation and has been referred to by other artists and writers. Gerwazy (Rembajło) is another character of the epic.

[38] See Simon Schama, "Krajobraz i pamięć," *Krasnogruda*, no. 11 (2000): 16–17.

Soplicowo's paradisiacal myth played an important role in the period of the struggle for independence. Now that we are home again, this myth has become a dangerous illusion. Merton writes: "When a myth becomes a daydream it is judged, found wanting, and must be discarded. To cling to it when it has lost its creative function is to condemn oneself to mental illness."[39]

The Stigma of Innocence

In the book *Jak żyć* [How to live] by Józef Tischner, Jacek Żakowski found a soothing quotation about the limits of human responsibility: "The responsibility of man does not reach beyond the limits of the possibility of effective action." Beyond "Tischner's barrier," as he calls it, Żakowski feels safe. From my point of view, incorrectly so.

I do not think that this is what Father Tischner had in mind. Although Tischner was not a radical in the style of Elias Canetti[40] ("Only he who worries himself to death treats himself seriously"), he knew the human conscience as no one else. He defended the superiority of the conscience even in situations in which it was in conflict with the voice of the Church. He knew that individual conscience—like collective memory, which, it seems, has a lot in common with conscience—cannot be forced into anything. It relies on its own sense of hearing. "Do not be afraid," says Tischner only to those who have the courage to have this hearing, who want to have conscience. "The man who discovers the truth, even if it is a cruel truth, attains dignity. He takes pride in the fact that he can admit the truth. It does not destroy him. On the contrary, it says to him: you are *Homo sapiens*." Those who are innocent do not need these words.

Tischner also knew the traps of conscience. He warned that because of man's innate inclination to self-praise, his voice, often equated with the voice of God, is easy to confuse with other voices; "The nation, for example, or another collectivity then becomes the absolute." Is this not the religious problem of many Polish patriots?

The most common method of self-deception, continued Tischner, consists in giving oneself absolution and blaming others. In the nature of conscience, however, lies a paradox: to be sure, conscience is the moral voice that calls us to remain innocent, but at the same time it is

[39] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 33.

[40] The writer and playwright who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1981. He was born in 1905 in Bulgaria.

the religious voice that teaches us something quite the opposite: "The saintliest saint feels that he is the greatest sinner." And finally, this conclusion: "If Poles were truly religious, they would not try so forcefully to convince themselves and others of their innocence."[41] Amen.

. . . . .

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Translation by Ewa Dzurak with Carla Lillvik.

[41] *Przekonać Pana Boga. Z ks. Józefem Tischnerem rozmawiają Dorota Załko i Jarosław Gowin* (Kraków, 2000), 104.