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## The meaning and perception of soul in the culture of the Podhale region

The Podhale Gorals are a cultural group which preserves its identity and folk traditions. The Podhale culture, distinctive in comparison with other Polish regions, and vigorous, is by the Polish people perceived very positively. The elements of the Highlanders' output are willingly used by directors and producers of films, series and advertisements, as well as pop music artists. And although in the pop culture circulation the Podhale culture is today in some way commercialised and impoverished, in its traditional form it carries on all the values important to the Highlanders, as these values define their identity. In the light of the current ethnolinguistic research<sup>1</sup> the Highlanders' nature is constituted by five fundamental characteristics: **tradition, family, honour, faith and dialect**. The religious aspect, so clearly visible in the self-image of a Highlander inspired me to ask about the perception of the soul by the Podhale Gorals. However the collocation DUSZA GÓRALSKA [HIGHLANDER'S SOUL] is not found among Podhale culturemes included in the latest book by Maciej Rak, but spirituality of Highlanders in conjunction with characteristic folk wisdom of the mountain dwellers, expressed in the dialect, is a very important component of the Podhale culture.

I have analysed the selected stories by Rev. Józef Tischner (2007) of the famous collection *Historia filozofii po góralsku* [*History of philosophy in the view of Highlanders*]<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> See the results of questionnaire surveys of Maciej Rak, carried out in 2014 concerning the selection of Podhale culturemes (Rak, 2015, pp. 21–31).

<sup>2</sup> If not stated otherwise, all the translations in square brackets are done by the translator (Joanna Modzelewska-Jankowiak).

i.e. three stories: 1. *O tym, jak Władek Trebunia-Tutka, nas podhalański Platon tłumaczył dusy Władka Pilarcyka z Orawy, że się jej śmierć nie chyto* [About Władek Trebunia-Tutka, our Plato of Podhale, who explained the soul of Władek Pilarcyk of Orawa that death doesn't catch it]; 2. *O tym jako Tadek Pudzisz [z Grónkowa], nas góralski Arystoteles, o dusy ludzkiej ozprawił* [About Tadek Pudzisz [of Grónkowo], our Highland Aristotle, who discoursed about the soul]; 3. *O tym, jak Władek Trebunia-Tutka przepedził Józkowi Róžańskiemu o tym, jakie jest życie pozagrobowe.* [About Władek Trebunia-Tutka, who told Józek Róžański about the afterlife]. I use Highland sayings as well, because as they are stereotypical texts, they constitute a valuable source for examining folk mentality.

I also refer to Highland customs and traditions associated with death and funerary rites.

## Funerary rites in the Podhale culture

An important element of rituals in highland Lesser Poland is the preservation of rituals related to the death of a member of the community<sup>3</sup>. Even today many attitudes, behaviours, signs and symbolic gestures are cultivated, which involve the conviction that the failure to fulfil the obligations towards a death person prevents this person from being saved, and the deceased may disturb the family.

In funeral rites in the Podhale region there are many elements of magic which result from the fact that the Gorals perceive a soul as immortal. Death always announced its near arrival in some way. It was believed that the sound of a door being opened, a picture falling off the wall or a clock stopping spontaneously announced that someone's life would end soon. Falling stars, symbolising a leaving soul, were thought to be an individual harbinger of death which was approaching (Tylkowa, 2000, p. 326).

At the time of death the family was gathering around the dying person, waiting in silence for the last breath. A blessed candle was lit (representing the fire of God), which was to illuminate the way of the soul leaving the body.

The magical rites concerning the death of a close person were affected by the conviction that a human soul observed the orphaned family until the funeral (hence a ritual

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<sup>3</sup> The behaviours of the rural community at the time of death of one of its members were described by many researchers; the deliberations taken up in this paper concerned only the habits related to a human soul.

of covering mirrors or stopping clocks so that their strikes would not stimulate the heart to beat again).

The soul decided on the time of death: [When the soul decides, it flies away] "Dusa jako zamiaruje, tak i ulatuje" (Hodorowicz, 2006, p. 49), it abandoned the body and made its way towards the righteous judgement. If a person did not follow the orders of God, then the soul was condemned to purgatory and only the close people could liberate it from that place through prayer: [Care for the souls and say prayers for the dead] "O dusyckach staranie, wypominków dawanie" (Hodorowicz, 2006, p. 135). When the soul is redeemed, then it goes to the land of bliss, promised to people by God: [The released souls go the homeland] "Duse uwolnione idom w rodnom strone" (Hodorowicz, 2006, p. 49).

The majority of the Highlanders are Catholics firmly committed to the Christian religion. Religiousness is a feature of the Highlander' attitude which immanently links with the respect and preservation of their tradition and, at the same time, the sense of their own uniqueness. Józef Tischner mentions these aspects of Gorals' religiousness:

*[In the Podhale region there is very natural religiousness, which I would define as thoroughly evangelical, though not always orthodox (...). Faith in the proximity of God is very strong here. And this is the faith rooted in the literal understanding of the Bible. The wrath of God is not a metaphor. This anger is something we have to be afraid of. On the other hand it won't harm a hair on your head without the will of God, therefore highland robbers, escaping with their spoils and the pursuit was coming, were singing: "God, our God, do not abandon us, because if you abandon us, it will be over and done with us...". In his song another characteristic feature of religiousness of the Podhale region can be observed: a sense of dignity, awareness of some uniqueness: well, we are bastards, but the world without us would be stagnant (...)]*

*Na Podhalu istnieje bardzo naturalna religijność, którą określiłbym jako na wskroś ewangeliczną, choć nie zawsze ortodoksyjną (...). Wiara w bliskość Boga jest tu bardzo silna. I jest to wiara zakorzeniona w dosłownym rozumieniu Biblii. Gniew Boga nie jest metaforą. Tego gniewu trzeba się bać. Z drugiej strony włos z głowy nie spada bez woli Bożej, dlatego zbójnicy, gdy uciekali z łupem, a pościg się zbliżał, śpiewali: „Boże nas, Boże nas, nie opuszczaj nas, bo jak nas opuścisz, to już będzie po nas...”. W tej pieśni jest jeszcze jedna rzecz charakterystyczna dla religijności podhalańskiej: poczucie godności, świadomość jakiejś wyjątkowości: no, jesteśmy dranie, ale świat bez nas by się zastał (...).<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> *Przekonać Pana Boga.* Dorota Zańko and Jarosław Gowin talk with Rev. Józef Tischner (1999, p. 18).

Rev. Prof. Józef Tischner, born in Łopuszna in the municipality of Nowy Targ and buried there, is directly attached to the Podhale region. Many times he gave speeches and sermons in the Podhale dialect, and his philosophical deliberations hidden in the Highland anecdotes are well known. He is the author of *Filozofia po góralsku*, the collection of humorous short stories about the most difficult issues which thanks to the form imparted to them become comprehensible.

It should be stressed that a significant linguistic component of the homilies of the priest of Łopuszna is the Highland dialects. He is thought to be a pioneer of preaching sermons in the dialect in the Podhale region (Sikora, 2012, p. 134). The most famous of them were given near Turbacz<sup>5</sup>. These homilies attracted the faithful, and the priest speaking the dialect and dressed in the Highland clothes evocatively emphasised his membership in the Highland world. These sermons were true and clear for inhabitants of the Podhale region, because, according to Tischner, the dialect is not only different pronunciation of the general Polish language, but also a different way of thinking and describing the world (Sikora, 2012, p. 138). The Highlanders' speech also gives possibility to add point with humour, is filled with a wit and a sense of humour<sup>6</sup>. It also gives a sense of freedom and builds the common world between a speaker and a listener. Rev. Tischner speaking the dialect easily reached the listeners. The dialect increased emotionality of the reception and at the same time it built a feeling of community.

Rev. Józef Tischner was an excellent observer who was able to notice things that the Highlanders wanted to hide on the one hand, and, on the other hand, things that they were proud of. He gave the following answer to the question: [*What are the people of mountains like in fact*] *Jacy są naprawdę ludzie gór*:

*They have all the faults of other people, and maybe even more. But they also have some advantages, which the other people have not got. In extremely tough times, in the 18th and 19th centuries, they were able to create an individual synthesis of cultures, including the elements of different origins in the folk culture, in which they express themselves up until today. The components of this culture are as follows: language, music, dance, very characteristic type of piety, strong experience of freedom, attitude provoking danger* (Tischner, 2003b, p. 22).

<sup>5</sup> The homilies of Rev. Tischner preached in the Podhale region were collected in several publications: *Boski młyn*, wstęp A. Kudasik, oprac. Z. Stojakowska-Staichowa, Kraków 1992; *Idzie o honor*, wstęp A. Wnuk, oprac. Z. Stojakowska-Staichowa, Kraków 1994; *Słowo o ślebodzie. Kazania spod Turbacza 1981–1997* [dołączone kasyety magnetofonowe z nagraniem kazania], zebrali i oprac. K. Tischner, posłowie W. Bonowicz, Kraków 2003.

<sup>6</sup> The humour in the dialectal homiletic of Tischner had an explanatory function. It facilitated the interpretation of difficult theological and philosophical issues.

## The concept of the soul in the deliberations of Rev. Józef Tischner

The deliberations concerning a soul were also in the range of subjects taken up by Rev. Tischner. In terms of the Christian religion a human soul is immortal and its nature is rational. After death it leaves the body and goes to the Last Judgement where it is subject to judgement. In the case of life which was against the principles of the Decalogue, the soul goes to purgatory (if its sins were not mortal) or directly to hell. The souls that are in heaven wait for the resurrection of the righteous announced by Jesus Christ:

*[I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die (John 11:25–26)]*<sup>7</sup>

*Jam jest zmartwychwstanie i żywot; kto we mnie wierzy, choćby i umarł, żyć będzie. A kto żyje i wierzy we mnie, nie umrze na wieki (J 11, 25–26)*<sup>8</sup>.

The last way of the soul of a dying Highlander leads through the dear mountains. It is the specific connection of the Christian tradition with ancient myths and philosophy:

*[When a man dies, his soul is taken to the judgement. They go through the Kościeliska Valley towards the hole where the Dunajec River flows out. Over there, near the hole the judgement takes place. When the soul seems to be dirty, they push it into the hole. And over there, next to the peak, there is a large lake, and on the lake there is a boat, and in the boat Jaś Sabała is playing. When Sabała is playing his music – which they call today "Sabała's" music – the boat is carrying the souls to the other shore and is leaving them to purify. And when Sabała is playing "ozwodna" music, the boat is returning with the souls which have purified themselves, and is going to the ridges, through Świnica, Rysy and Garluch]*

*Kie cłek umre, to duse jego na sąd wiedóm. Dolinóm Kościeliskóm wiedóm, ku totyj dziórze, skąd Donajec wypływo. Przy dziórze sąd się odbywo. Wtoro dusa niecysto sie widzi, tóm do dzióry pchajóm. A hań dalej, pod turniom, jezioro wielgie sie znajduje, a na jeziorze łódź, zaś na łodzi sóm Jaś Sabała siedzi i gro. Kie Sabała gro swojóm nute – totóm, co jóm dziś „Sabałowóm” nazywają – to łódź bez jezioro na drugóm strónie płynie i hań duse ostawio, coby sie ocyściły. A jak Sabała gro „ozwodnóm”, to łódź się sama wraco, z dusami, co się juz ocyściły i ku niebu granióm, bez Świnice, Rysy i Garluch (Tischner, 2008, pp. 70–71).*

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://biblehub.com/john/11-25.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from: *Biblia Tysiąclecia*, 1982, wydanie 3. poprawione, Poznań – Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Pallotinum.

In the Platonic approach a soul is an immaterial element, giving life to material concepts. It lives in a human body regardless of its nature which seeks autonomy. It is therefore a kind of a prisoner. Because Plato showed that it comes from the world of ideas and therefore from the world that a person is unable to learn or see. However, the soul commits sins in this world and as a punishment it is sent to the earth and imprisoned in a human body. The soul resides there until this person dies and only then it can return to its own world.

According to the Podhale Plato, which in Tischner's disquisition is Władek Trebunia-Tutka, the soul belongs to the eternal world and is immortal. Death is not able to defeat it:

*[When a soul learns what is eternal, this soul itself also has to be eternal, because if it wasn't it wouldn't be able to learn the eternal. And because the soul is eternal, it cannot die]*

*Kie dusza poznaje to, co wiekuiste, to sama tyz musi być wiekuisto, bo jakby nie była, to by tego nie poznawała. A kie jest wiekuisto, to śmierć się jej nie chyto* (Tischner, 2007, p. 69).

The Podhale philosopher divides cognition into senses and a mind. The first element allows us to explore what is constantly changing, and the other element wants to learn the truth about eternal life. Therefore there are two dimensions of the world: today's (discovered by means of the senses) and eternal. A human being should be aware of the fact that in their body a soul lives which is immortal. It is an element stabilising the peoples' lives, and it is responsible for the recognition of good and evil. It is a God's element. The Highland sayings state that *[the soul keeps the man together]* "cłeka w kupie trzimie dusza" (Hodorowicz, 2006, p. 35), but also *[the soul enriches the man, and the truth enriches the souls]* "cłeka dusza bogaci, zaś duse bogaci prowda" (Hodorowicz, 2006, p. 34). The soul is therefore a kind of a spiritual heart. It is exposed to all the temptations and bad persuasion, because *[a devil chases a soul like a cat chases a mouse]* "djaboł za dusom, jako kot za mysom" (Hodorowicz, 2006, p. 43). Its task is to rest the evil, but it not always succeeds. In tough moments the prayer may be helpful, because the prayer is a rescue and helps the soul to free of evil powers: *[When the soul is in a quite difficult situation, the prayer will help it]* "Kie ciynzkawo dusy, modlitwa jom rusy" (Hodorowicz, 2006, p. 82). The soul is also free from any material needs but it is not indifferent to any spiritual and immaterial aspects. For the Gorals such inspirational element is music. Melodies conveyed for centuries are an individual song of praise, but also the manifestation of belonging to a given community. The repertoire of Podhale melodies includes not only songs praising God, but also texts referring to the Highland robbers' myth or extolling beauty of

the mountains. However the soul after contacting the Highland music gains redemption, liberates from possession of the devil and does not give in the temptations of evil: [*When music comes to ears, your heart becomes lighter*] "*Kie muzike chycom usy, zrazu bywo lzyj na dusy*" (Hodorowicz, 2006, p. 85). Thus the soul in Tischner's view is a part of the Highland world. It has got the characteristics that are from somewhere around Giewont. Because the soul is religious and brave as well – it tries to resist temptations<sup>9</sup>.

Aristotle, Plato's student, saw the soul differently. In his opinion, a person as an indivisible existence cannot live without matter (which is the body) and the form (which is the soul). Moreover, Aristotle hierarchises the types of souls in terms of a function, and distinguishes a vegetative soul (belonging to plants, responsible for nutrition and growth), a sensitive soul (belonging to animals, responsible also for feelings and drives) and a rational soul. The latter has got a human being only and it is responsible for mind (thinking) and will (decision-making).

A similar classification is brought by the Podhale Aristotle (in Tischner's story Tadek Pudysz personates this figure). In his approach there are beings without souls, such as boulders, stones, mist or water. Plants are next in the hierarchy, they have got souls called [life-existent] – "żywobytna" (their life has an established rhythm – the soul is born, grows older, dies and, in addition, a plant "leaves" a little seed and therefore gives life). Another soul – in the opinion of the philosopher of the Tatras – is a soul of an animal:

*[But fish in water, or sheep in a clearing, or horses on a track, they have got better souls. They have such souls which give something to them. An animal feels what happens. (...) And there are such animals that have family instincts]*

*Ale ryba we wodzie, abo owca na polanie, albo kón na dródze, to juz lepsóm duse mo. Ona jest tako, ze ik cuciyam darzy. Zwierz cuje, co i jak. (...) A sóm i takie, co majóm rodzinne wycucie* (Tischner, 2007, pp. 101–102).

At the top of the hierarchy there is a human soul, which has got the gift of thinking (and, furthermore, it is alive and can feel):

*[It has got a head! It makes you, man, go nuts trying to figure something out, tap your finger against your forehead, clutch your head and you are thinking at the same time. And when you are thinking, you think: maybe this way, and maybe another way? Maybe here*

<sup>9</sup> The Gorals are such a kind of people, as evidenced by the results that I obtained at the questionnaire survey carried out using the ethnolinguistic method in 2010 (among 100 responders, 98 respondents recognised a Goral as a religious person, and 99 respondents – as a courageous person).

*and maybe there? And maybe with this one, and maybe with that one. And what would be if it didn't happen? And what would be if it did happen?]*

*Óna mo głowe! Óna sprawio, ze – cłeku – zachodzis w głowe, ze pukos sie w głowe, ze trzymos sie za głowe, a przy tym myślis. A jak myślis, to se myślis: moze tak, a moze inacyj? Moze tu, a moze hań? A moze z tóm, a moze z tamtóm. A co by było, jakby tego nie było? A co by było, jakby to było? (...) (Tischner, 2007, p. 102)*

Moreover, the soul is the most sensitive part of human existence. It is immortal and therefore it is somehow magic. It has got a gift of communication with other beings through its superhuman gentleness: *[And even an animal can talk to a human soul]* "I źwiyrz potrefi cłekowi do dusy przegodać" (Hodorowicz, 2006, p. 69).

## The Summary

The concept of the soul expounded by Rev. Józef Tischner using the Podhale dialect is closely associated with culturemes of Podhale, such as music ("Sabała's" music), and mythological motifs.

The Gorals' conviction of their uniqueness is reflected in their understanding of the transmigration of souls, because souls – characterised by typically Highland features – go to God along the tracks leading through the mountains and Podhale valleys. The presence of Jan Sabała during this journey, who is like Charon carrying souls across the Styx River, reinforces the belief in the important role of Highland music in building the Podhale identity. Music accompanying the transmigration of souls is not only a proof of the Gorals' sensitivity to beauty – it is also a sign of the particular God's love towards the Highlanders' community. The Gorals intuitively need God and believe that they are dear to God, but this not always must be translated into their devout life (Kapla, 2015, p. 46). The fear of death, especially of death that comes too early, influences the development of ritual and magical behaviours which accompany the process of dying and a funeral. These practices coexist with the Christian view of the world and the Christian care for the good of the soul. For the Highland proverb says: *[Bad affects your interest, worse affects your health, but the worst affects your soul]* "Zło pohyba na dobru, gorso na zdrowiu, nosrozso na dusy" (Hodorowicz, 2006, p. 192), the "loss" of the soul is the worst and the most severe damage experienced by a human being.

Translated by Joanna Modzelewska-Jankowiak



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## The meaning and perception of soul in the culture of the Podhale region

### Abstract

The paper discusses issues related to funerary rites in the culture of the Podhale region and the concept of soul, as laid out in the Highlander dialect by Rev. Józef Tischner, a concept which is closely connected with Podhale cultureemes, e.g. music, as well as with mythological themes. The Highlanders' belief about their own uniqueness is reflected in their perception of soul travel, in which a soul is endowed with typically Highlander properties and heads towards God through the mountains and valleys of Podhale.

### Keywords:

Polish Highlander culture, Rev. Józef Tischner, soul, religiousness, funerary rites

## **Znaczenie i sposób postrzegania duszy w kulturze podhalańskiej**

### **Abstrakt**

W referacie podjęte zostały zagadnienia związane z rytuałem pogrzebowym w kulturze podhalańskiej oraz koncepcją duszy wyłożoną gwarą góralską przez księdza Józefa Tischnera, która ściśle łączy się z podhalańskimi kulturowymi, takimi jak muzyka, i motywami mitologicznymi. Przekonanie górali o ich wyjątkowości znajduje odzwierciedlenie w pojmowaniu przez nich wędrówki duszy, która – odznaczając się typowo góralskimi przymiotami – zmierza do Boga ścieżkami wiodącymi przez góry i podhalańskie doliny.

### **Słowa kluczowe:**

kultura góralska, ks. Józef Tischner, dusza, religijność, rytuał pogrzebowy