

Where you have freedom, the meaning of the word increases,
where the word is meaningful, you presuppose freedom.”

Józef Tischner

AN OBITUARY TO JÓZEF TISCHNER

When, after a long and serious illness, Józef Tischner died at the age of 69 on the 28th of June 2000, the 20th century Polish philosophy lost one of its most renowned minds. From 1950 he studied philosophy and theology for five years as a diocesan seminarist and he was ordained 1955. That early intensive study of classical texts is reflected throughout all of his philosophical works. During that period Tischner was influenced by various thinkers, primarily by K. Kłósak (philosophy) and I. Różycki (theology). Between 1956 and 1963 he worked as a curate in Chrzanów and in Cracow, among other things teaching religion. In 1968 he took his Ph.D. at the *Jagiellonian University* in Cracow and became lecturer at the *Pontifical Theological Faculty* in Cracow (since 1981 *Pontifical Theological Academy* in Cracow). His tutors in Cracow included R. Ingarden, the most famous Polish representative of the Husserlian phenomenology. In 1975 Tischner qualified as assistant professor at the Faculty of Christian Philosophy at the *Theological Academy* in Warsaw. Five years later he became Professor of Philosophical Anthropology at the *Pontifical Theological Academy* in Cracow. For many years he was also a lecturer at the *Theatre Academy* in Cracow. In 1981 he was appointed the president of the *Institute of Science of Man* in Vienna.

In October 1980 his sermon delivered to the leaders of the then three month old workers' movement, *Solidarity*, made him well-known throughout Poland. His words were frequently repeated when Solidarity was banned in the years of martial law (after December 1981): „The deepest solidarity is the solidarity of consciences” and „Solidarity without love does not exist”. His second well-known sermon was delivered to the participants of the *Ist Meeting of Solidarity Delegates* (Gdańsk, 1981) and bore the title: *Independence of labour* [*Niepodległość pracy*]. Since then Tischner has been called the „chaplain of Solidarity”. Those two

events also mark the beginning of his philosophical reflection on social, political and religious questions and on the role of the Church in the transformation processes of the Polish society. Many of those reflections were presented (especially after 1989) in the innumerable and often rather critical articles published in the newspapers: *Tygodnik Powszechny* and *Znak*.

The first period of Tischner's philosophical biography is marked by his dispute with Ingarden's interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology. According to Tischner the Ingardenian phenomenology ultimately leads to idealism. Confronted with the Marxist ideology, Tischner would now and again approach the problems of human labour. Philosophical inquiries into the problem of values led him to ethical questions. For him – like for Plato – the highest value and the metaphysical foundation of reality was goodness. In regard to social questions it means that ethics is the first pillar of democracy. Tischner's inquiry into the destiny of human beings resulted in his reflections on such categories as „meeting” (*spotkanie*) and „dialogue” (*dialog*). The immediate outcome of these reflections can be seen in his systematically developed „philosophy of drama”. Last but not least, we must mention his reflections on human freedom. Freedom has to be seen not only in the philosophical but also theological horizon. Moreover, since 1989 he confronted and formulated both the problem of human labour and that of human freedom and connected them with the analysis of political, social and economic situation in contemporary Poland. It was the time of the deep transformation-processes not only of the Polish society but also of the societies in another eastern European countries.

Tischner was a man of profound christian faith, inspired by the philosophical authorities, not because they were famous but because he found their lives and thinking to be an inspiration for contemporary observation of the world. Perhaps that is why Thomas Aquinas did not fascinate him as much as did Plato, St. Augustin or the grand Christian mystics. In the „horizon of faith” he extensively studied the philosophical works of P. Ricoeur and F. Rosenzweig.

From 1989, a steady stream of essays on widely diverse social, religious and philosophical topics followed. Tischner aimed at recording the ongoing dialogue of philosophical inquiry in a perspicaciously written exposition. This is visible in the dialectical composition of his articles and in the use of succinct language. Tischner's writings are pleasant and they are meant for the general public.

However, he seemed to be most at home discussing philosophical subjects personally, face to face with his colleagues and students. From the very beginning of his academic career Tischner was well-known for his abilities as a teacher. During the philosophical seminars that he

conducted we, his students sensed his passionate interest not only in such thinkers as G.W.F. Hegel, E. Husserl, I. Kant or E. Levinas, but also in poets and writers like C. Norwid, R.M. Rilke and K. Tetmajer.

Tischner has bequeathed us a new kind of thinking, dialectical and aimed at an integral understanding of the world which is common to philosophers and non-philosophers alike. In his philosophy of drama the first category is that of „meeting”. This category constitutes the background and the unexpressed thesis of his last book *Historia filozofii po góralsku* [A history of philosophy in Polish highlanders' dialect, 1997]. It is, strictly speaking, a Wittgensteinian thesis that it is not their birthplace that decides about people's identity, but everyday forms of their life (language, literature, arts, musik, ...). During his lectures Tischner would often use an analogy between music and life, an analogy that comes from M. Heidegger whom he read and commented more or less continuously since his first „meeting” with philosophy as a scientific subject.

His best known publications are: *Świat ludzkiej nadziei* [The world of human hope, 1975], *Filozofia chrześcijańska w dialogu z marksizmem* [Christian philosophy in dialogue with Marxism, 1979], *Polski kształt dialogu* [The Polish form of dialogue, 1981], *Etyka Solidarności* [The ethics of Solidarity, 1981], *Myślenie według wartości* [Thinking according to values, 1982], *Polska jest Ojczyzną: W kręgu filozofii pracy* [Poland is our motherland: Around the philosophy of labour, 1985], *Wprowadzenie do filozofii dramatu* [Introduction to the philosophy of drama, 1986], *Nieszczęsny dar wolności* [The unfortunate gift of freedom, 1993], *Spowiedź rewolucjonisty: Czytając 'Fenomenologię Ducha' Hegla* [The confession of a revolutionary: Reading 'Phenomenology of the Spirit' by Hegel, 1993], *Między panem a plebanem* [Between the lord and the parson, 1995].

Józef BREMER SJ