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A VISION OF HISTORY IN THE TEACHINGS OF PRIMATE STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI

The past of the nation was one of the areas of the world-view clash between Primate Stefan Wyszyński (1901-1981) and the communist authorities of post-war Poland. For the primate, the history of Poland was one of the main elements of the nation's identity, on the behaviour of which its future depended. The history of the nation – starting from its founding act, i.e. the Baptism of Poland in 966 was, according to the primate, a reservoir of values from which future generations could draw. Both in the period of prosperity and, perhaps even more so, in the times of captivity, the strength to fight for independence and sovereignty has been drawn from them. That is why Cardinal Wyszyński paid great attention to the memory of the past, national heroes and places of martyrdom of Poles.

For the same reason, the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland tried to erase the memory of many events of the past, and to give a new meaning to others, especially from the most recent history. Building a „new” history was to become an important element of creating a new society without spiritual roots, without tradition and historical continuity¹, following the example of the Soviet Union.

¹ Cf. E.K. Czackowska, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Biografia (Cardinal Wyszyński. Biography)*, Krakow 2013, p. 308nn.

The Primate, on the other hand, spoke: „we must not create »history without history«, we must not forget about the millennium of our native and Christian path; we must not bring the nation to the level of »starting from the beginning«, as if nothing of value has happened here in Poland (...)”. And he admonished: „A nation without history is a tragic nation!”²

History as a science in the People’s Republic of Poland was drawn into the political propaganda system. Not without reason Cardinal Wyszyński spoke in 1963: „I’m not a historian, but I don’t believe all historians either, because although history is *magistra vitae*, not all historians are teachers of life. One can read them, but my own native and national sense makes me think for myself, even when I look at the works of historians.”³.

I.

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński emphasized that the history of the nation is strongly connected with the history of the Church in Poland. „In its historical journey from the unknown to the familiar, it [the nation – editorial note] takes an equal step with the history of the Church, which enlivens and sanctifies it, giving it the spirit of God”⁴. The church, as he assured in 1970, has „a deep respect for the history of the nation”. It diligently collects „the crumbs of history, like the gospel crumbs, because they are always nutritious”. Just as the word of the Gospel nourishes the spirit, so „the crumbs of the nation’s history are the power of its spirit”. A nation that has no historical memory dies. “A nation without history, without past,

² S. Wyszyński, *Jedna jest Polska. Wybór przemówień i kazań (Poland is one. Choice of speeches and sermons)*, Warsaw 1989, p. 40.

³ Id., „Z kurzem krwi bratniej...” W 100-lecie Powstania Styczniowego („With dust of brothers’ blood...” On the 100th anniversary of the January Uprising) in: Id., *Dzieła zebrane (Collected works)*, vol. X, Warsaw 2012, p. 92.

⁴ Id., *Rok Tysiąclecia Chrztu Polski w Bazylice Prymasowskiej (Year of the Millennium of Polish Christianity in the Primate Basilica)*, Gniezno, 1 January 1966 in: id., *Dzieła zebrane (Collected Works)*, vol. XVI, Warsaw 2016, p. 6.

soon becomes a nation without land, a homeless nation, without future!”⁵ – he observed.

In Cardinal Wyszyński’s sermons we can see a great love for the past of the homeland. „For Poland has a wonderful past, it has its history, culture, literature, art, sculpture. We must therefore constantly refer to the past! A nation without a past is worthy of compassion,” he said in 1972 to the Primate Council for the Reconstruction of Warsaw Churches⁶. Remembrance of the past is a part of what a nation constitutes, what determines its distinctness among the family of nations and what is a sign of its internal freedom. Therefore, a nation that cannot refer to its history – and with many events in the People’s Republic of Poland this was the case – which „cannot express itself in accordance with its own spirituality” is, in the opinion of the primate, a „slave nation” condemned to extinction. “A nation that separates itself from history, that is ashamed of it, that grows up a young generation without historical ties is a renegade nation! Such a nation voluntarily condemns itself to death, undercuts the roots of its own existence”⁷.

The Primate was aware of the changeability of the history of the nation, good and bad events in it, joyful and tragic experiences. “There are joyful and painful moments. Maybe there are more painful ones, or maybe they are more stuck in our memory than joyful ones, because they hurt – they are thorns, which cannot be extracted from the heart.”⁸. But, as he stressed, they cannot be thrown out of the collective memory. They all belong to it. “The past is

⁵ Id., *Z rozważań nad kulturą ojczystą (From reflections on one’s native culture)*, Poznań – Warsaw 1979, p. 145.

⁶ Id., *Fundamenty narodu przyszłości (Foundations of the nation of the future)* Do Prymasowskiej Rady Odbudowy Kościoła Warszawy (To the Primate Council for the Reconstruction of Warsaw Churches), 25 May 1972, in: Id., *Nauczanie społeczne (Social teaching) 1946-1981*, Warsaw 1990, p. 501.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Id., «*Vratislavia*» – wróciła sława. («*Vratislavia*» – the fame returned). Podczas uroczystości jubileuszowych we Wrocławiu 31 VIII 1965 (During the jubilee celebrations in Wrocław on 31 August 1965) in: Ibidem., p. 250.

not an archive for us. Happy or painful, triumphant or crucified, is the past of one and the same nation”⁹ – he spoke. He also knew that history is a certain continuity, that “the past, the present and the future are genetically linked, just as branches are connected by juices with tree trunk”¹⁰. The whole past determines the present. The history of a nation and its culture is created by glorious and tragic events, which are “so interconnected that Poles with a sense of historical synthesis will not part with any of these fragments, because their presence in the history of a nation is determined by a proper evaluation of the spirit”¹¹

II.

Formulation: For Primate Wyszyński, „proper evaluation of the spirit” is an essential category of evaluation of the past. The Primate looks at the history of the nation from a metaphysical perspective, from a perspective that probably allows to see more and deeper, but is alien to the historical methodology. This „evaluation of the spirit” also seems to have consisted of this „own native and national sense”.

Cardinal Wyszyński did not criticize the history of Poland, but those who did it in the post-war period. In the year of the 50th anniversary of regaining independence on September 15, 1968, the Primate said at Jasna Góra that „we have no reason to practise some “crusade” against our national history and nation’s past”, that „we cannot be ashamed of the history of our homeland and we do not have a need for it! Today is not the time to be fastidious about

⁹ Id., «Ale nie deptacie przeszłości ołtarzy...». («But do not trample the past of the altars...») Podczas poświęcenia ołtarza w kościele Świętego Krzyża w Warszawie 19 I 1969 (During the consecration of the altar in the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw on 19 January 1969) in: *Ibidem*, p. 378- 379.

¹⁰ Id., *Trwały wzór miłości narodów* (*Permanent model of love of nations*). Do kombatantów 5 I 1979 (For veterans 5th January 1979) in: *Ibidem*, p. 877- 878.

¹¹ Id., *Kamienie wołać będą* (*Stones will call out*). Ku czci Stefana Starzyńskiego (In honor of Stefan Starzyński), Warsaw 1 March 1981, in: *Ibidem.*, p. 1020.

one's own history (...)". The word "today" is particularly important for understanding the thoughts of the primate. People's Poland denied the achievements of the Second Polish Republic and its heroes, falsified the history of post-war Poland and Polish-Soviet relations, did not allow for example to celebrate the anniversary of 11 November, the Constitution of 3 May, highlighting the negative phenomena and figures from the eighteenth-century Republic, which supposedly were the only reason for the partitions. This "new" Poland, as the Primate emphasized, did not create a "better" history of the nation: "we have not created something better today than what we, as a nation, grew up from, and what gave us the full and unbeatable right to be born in a new era of freedom of the homeland"¹².

III.

It should be noted that although Cardinal Wyszyński emphasised that all events – joyful or painful – are part of the common Polish past, he quoted examples and referred mainly to the victorious, glorious and upbuilding ones. This choice was as conscious as possible. The Primate was told by his "own native and national sense". Even more when the history of a nation was criticised by contemporary historians-ideologists engaged in the creation of „new history”, i.e. the creation of history without history. Why did the Primate do this? In order "to nourish the present generations and those who are going"¹³. This phrase "to nourish the present generations and those who are going" – is the third element, essential for understanding the thoughts of the primate, referring to the past of the nation.

¹² Id., «*Ojczyznę wolną zachowaj nam Panie!*» («Keep your homeland free for us, Lord!») *Z okazji 50 rocznicy odzyskania wolności, Jasna Góra 15 IX 1968 (On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of regaining freedom, Jasna Góra on 15 September 1968)* in: Ibidem., p. 369.

¹³ Id., «*Vratislavia*» – wróciła sława. («*Vratislavia*» – the glory returned). Podczas uroczystości jubileuszowych we Wrocławiu 31 VIII 1965 (During the jubilee celebrations in Wrocław on 31 August 1965) in: Id., *Dziela zebrane (Collected Works)*, vol. XVI, Warsaw 2015, p. 250.

The primate talked about the nation's revitalising power that is rooted in its past in a homily delivered in the Warsaw Cathedral in 1974 on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the death of Father Stanislaw Konarski, the founder of the National Education Commission. The fact that "the nation was resurrected" in 1918, after 200 years of annexation, was the merit of the past, of "what the nation once lived, what it did, what was its noble ambition, although perhaps not always free from mistakes, like any individual or social action"¹⁴.

The Primate trusted that when a nation would draw on those forces, the values that have been co-created by faith in it for centuries, when it would activate its spiritual forces, it would be aware of its identity and would have the strength to regain its sovereignty. Just as he regained independence in 1918¹⁵. And this, as it seems, was a fundamental motive for the primate to recall events and figures from the past that could "nourish" and "revive" contemporary generations and those that will come.

IV.

Cardinal Wyszyński, deploring the fact that in the times of the People's Republic of Poland "a terrible vivisection and national and historical alienation of the young generation took place, depriving them of historical knowledge about the nation"¹⁶, he placed the signs of glorious past in the Warsaw Cathedral, which was rebuilt after the war in the 50s of the 20th century. The cathedral, as the Primate said, became "the monument of worship to those who, serving the people in the Christian spirit, deserved their names

¹⁴ Id., *Sapere Ausuris...!*, op.cit., in: Id., *Nauczanie społeczne (Social teaching)*, op. cit., p. 610.

¹⁵ Cf. E.K. Czaczkowska, *Prymas Wyszyński (Primate Wyszyński)*, op. cit., p. 309.

¹⁶ S. Wyszyński, *Kamienie wołać będą (Stones will call out)*. Ku czci Stefana Starzyńskiego (In honour of Stefan Starzyński), Warsaw 1 March 1981, in: id., *Nauczanie społeczne (Social teaching)*, op. cit., p. 1018.

to prefer from the walls of this temple: *Clamate lapides de patriete*¹⁷. The stained-glass windows of the cathedral, the installation of which was completed in 1978, contain the whole glorious past of Poland – the “historical review of our history”¹⁸ – starting with Mieszko and Dobra and ending with Fr Maksymilian Kolbe. It was also a wish of the primate that the cathedral should house the epitaph of the three-time Prime Minister of Poland, Wincenty Witos, unveiled in 1975 on the centenary of the birth of the “brilliant son of the nation”¹⁹.

The history of Poland, its heroes and saints, the monuments of the past, the whole history and culture of the nation, which lasted in spite of changing circumstances, in spite of changes in borders or periods of lack of statehood, was in the understanding of Primate Wyszyński an important element of unification of the nation and repolonisation of the Western Territories. “The simplest and most effective way is to refer to temples. Looking at the Piast temples, feeling their meaning, we know: it is certainly not “post-German good”, it is the Polish soul! (...) These are our own traces of the royal Piast tribe!”²⁰ – said the Primate in 1965 in Wrocław.

V.

In the history of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński had a special honour towards those who shed blood in defense of their homeland – fighting for its freedom and independence. And through his sermons and speeches he wanted to consolidate or inculcate such an attitude in others. Many of the national uprisings – he said – were “perhaps unsuccessful and seemingly ineffective”, but still fruitful. He believed that the uprisings woke up the “falling asleep spirit of the nation, that

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ S. Wyszyński, *Trwały wzór miłości narodów (Permanent model of love of nations)*. Do kombatantów 5 I 1979 (To veterans 5 I 1979), in: Id., *Nauczanie społeczne (Social teaching)*, op. cit., p. 879.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 879.

²⁰ S. Wyszyński, «*Vratislavia*» – wróciła sława («*Vratislavia*» – the glory returned), op. cit. p. 253.

it might rise and live". The blood of the insurgents, "which was used to fertilize Polish fields, gave rise to freedom in the Homeland"²¹. Another time he confessed: "Although the realists regretted the blood they thought had been shed in vain, I had never thought so. I have always believed that each of these uprisings – the November Uprising, the January Uprising or the Warsaw Uprising – had its own profound meaning, it was a wake-up call to consciences"²². Awakening the consciences of the nation and the "international conscience", reminding us of "our nation"²³. They were also a proof of the fact that „Poland wants to live, that it has the right to live and the ability to live on its own strength"²⁴. The insurgents' "work, effort and sacrificial sacrifice gave such a result that we are now" – he said²⁵.

For this reason, in 1963, on the centenary of the outbreak of the January Uprising, he polemicised about it with Stanisław Stomma, chairman of the Znak Parliamentary Club, who saw the reasons for the outbreak in the supposedly „Russian complex” of Poles in the Russian partition. The Primate, who was born in that partition, grew in an environment that cared for the memory of the January insurgents, in 1963 in the Warsaw cathedral he said that the uprising "was not a result of one or another "complex" (...) – only of a healthy aspiration for freedom, violated and taken away from us". The insurgents – he emphasized – wanted freedom, which "was their right and duty. They had to fight for it". That is

²¹ Id., „Z kurzem krwi bratniej..." ("With dust of brothers' blood..."), op. cit., p. 88, 89.

²² Id., *Trwały wzór miłości narodów (Permanent model of love of nations)*, op. cit. p. 878, 879.

²³ Id., *Wychowawca narodu polskiego (the Educator of the Polish nation)*. Ku czci Błogosławionego Wincentego Kadłubka w Jędrzejowie 30 VIII 1964 (In honour of Blessed Vincent Kadłubek in Jędrzejów on August 30, 1964) in: Id., *Nauczanie społeczne (Social teaching)*, op.cit., p. 240.

²⁴ Id., *Z rozważania nad kulturą ojczystą (From reflections on one's native culture)*, op. cit., p. 196.

²⁵ Id., *Wychowawca narodu polskiego (the Educator of the Polish nation)*, op. cit., p. 240.

why, although the uprising was lost, it was of great importance: “it gave a great service to all three partitions, because the work of Polish thought began, which exceeded the cordons”. This thought and sacrifice of the insurgents prepared “the nation for the revolt of freedom, which we survived in the years 1917-1919”²⁶. Therefore, as the primate emphasised, none of the uprisings must be condemned, but – on the contrary – one must “thank God that he gave such power to the nation”²⁷.

VI.

The bloody sacrifice of the ancestors on the altar of the freedom of their homeland, of “those who had the courage to give their own lives so that we could live,” was for the Primate a commitment to overcome themselves, to be ready “for everything, to fight against all hopes”. How much the Primate valued the sacrifice of blood shed out of love for freedom and homeland, what importance it had in his eyes in the history of the nation, proves that Cardinal Wyszyński sacralised it. He compared it to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross made out of love “to the Father and his children”. „We can see how effective and useful it was [Christ’s sacrifice – editorial note]. We can think similarly about little boys and girls, about young people from the Warsaw Uprising, about soldiers without weapons, who wanted to win over the steel invader with the power of their spirit. We know that this sacrifice was fruitful, because the horror of burning Warsaw, in which Pius XII saw a crucible glowing for her children, has shaken the conscience of the nations. (...) Our homeland gained its voice in international treaties, through the blood of its children and sons spilled in burning Warsaw”²⁸, he said.

²⁶ Id., „Z kurzem krwi bratniej” (“*With dust of brothers’ blood...*”), op. cit., p. 207.

²⁷ Id., *Kamienie wołać będą* (*Stones will call out*), op. cit., p. 1021.

²⁸ Ibidem., p. 122-124.

Stefan Wyszyński, a defender of all national uprisings as being supposed to awaken the consciences of Poles and international consciences, at the same time as the primate of Poland, was very afraid that there would be a fraternal bloodshed in post-war Poland. For this reason, in October 1956 he agreed, without making excessive demands, to return from Komańcza to Warsaw and influence the calming of tense social moods. Similarly, in August 1980 he tried to alleviate the tense situation, pointing to the responsibility for the homeland, which applies to all Poles. “I prefer to claim that intervention of foreign forces – Soviet tanks – is possible, even if I was to make a mistake, than to expose myself to the fact that at least one Polish boy would die, excited by the certainty that the Moscow would not violate the borders of Poland”, he wrote²⁹. The cult of national uprisings and at the same time the fear of bloodshed in 1980, as Paweł Skibiński, PhD, rightly pointed out, do not contradict each other. One thing is moral recognition and respect for the insurgent sacrifice, “solidarity with the suffering and fighting community”, and another is “the moral duty of prudent choice made in difficult situations by those in power”³⁰. It can be added that the concern to prevent bloodshed in the already heavily bleeding nation was the conclusion of history drawn by the primate, guided by the “proper evaluation of the spirit” of history, which he treated as *magistra vitae*. He spoke: “from the past, lessons must always be learned for the present, for the upbringing of the nation in the hope that a nation brought up on the basis of past experiences will secure the country’s normal and peaceful spiritual, moral, social and economic development”³¹.

²⁹ S. Wyszyński, From *Pro memoria* 9 IX 1980, in: Raina P., *Kardynał Wyszyński i Solidarność (Cardinal Wyszyński and Solidarity)*, Warsaw 2005, p. 95.

³⁰ P. Skibiński, *Prymas Stefan Wyszyński i papież Pius XII o powstaniu warszawskim (Primate Stefan Wyszyński and Pope Pius XII about the Warsaw Uprising)*, in: <http://www.powstanie.pl/?ktory=29&class=text>. [access: 20 May 2018]

³¹ S. Wyszyński, *Sapere Ausuris...!*” Z okazji 200 rocznicy śmierci księdza Stanisława Konarskiego, Warszawa 21 IV 1974 (On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the death of Father Stanisław Konarski, Warsaw 21 April 1974) in: Id., *Nauczanie społeczne (Social teaching)*, op. cit., p. 610.

Therefore, in 1980, drawing conclusions from our past and the current geopolitical situation, he made it a priority to protect Poles from bloodshed.

For this reason, the responsibility for the present required the primate to awaken consciences in periods of apathy, hopelessness, moral sleep, and to ease consciences in periods of tension, saving the blood of the nation. In January 1981 he spoke in the Warsaw Cathedral: “This is how often we hear the phrase: it is a beautiful and honourable thing to die for one’s homeland. However, it is sometimes more difficult to live for the homeland. One can give one’s life on the battlefield in a heroic impulse, but it only lasts for a short time. Sometimes it is more heroic to live, to last, to endure for years [...], to persevere, to live for one’s homeland, to gain trust in it [and] to be ready to give it all out of oneself”³².

And perhaps the most important thing at the end: Primate Wyszyński looked at the history of Poland from God’s perspective. He was aware that it is God who governs the world, nations and its history. He is the Lord of history. So he spoke: “We must have a deep understanding of the inner connection between the great natural forces and God’s supernatural forces in the life of a nation”³³.

Summary

According to Primate Stefan Wyszyński, the history of the Polish nation was an important element of its duration and vitality. In the primate’s vision of the past two perspectives were present: historical and theological. The metaphysical evaluation of the past allowed Cardinal Wyszyński to extract from the history of Poland deposits inaccessible to the historian’s methodology. Cardinal Wyszyński

³² Id., *Sumienie prawe u podstawy odnowy życia narodowego (Righteous conscience at the basis of the renewal of national life)*. Do wiernych w archikatedrze warszawskiej, 6 I 1981 (To the faithful in the Warsaw Cathedral, January 6, 1981), in: id., *Nauczanie społeczne (Social teaching)*, op. cit., p. 990.

³³ Id., *Bóg rządzi narodami (God rules the nations)*. Podczas uroczystości maryjnych w Malborku 18 VIII 1960 (During the Marian celebrations in Malbork on August 18, 1960), op. cit., p. 142.

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applied to the past – as he put it – “the proper evaluation of the spirit” and “his own native and national sense”. This allowed him to bring out of the past such figures and events that gave the spirit of the nation strength and courage to stand by the values co-shaped by faith and the Church for centuries, including those building internal freedom, the effect of which, as he believed, would be the sovereignty of the nation.

Abstract

For Primate Stefan Wyszyński, the past of the nation was an important element creating the identity of the nation, on whose behaviour its future depended. Maintaining the memory of the history of the nation, which, in the primate’s thought, was constituted when Mieszko I was baptised in 966, was one of the priorities of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński’s teaching. For this reason, it was also a part of the world-view dispute between the Primate and the communist authorities of post-war Poland, whose aim was to erase many pages of history from national memory or to give them a different meaning as a condition for creating a „new” society based on the Soviet model. In the evaluation of the past, falsified in the People’s Republic of Poland, the Primate used „his own domestic and national sense” and „proper evaluation of the spirit”. The theological perspective allowed the Primate to look at the painful and tragic pages of history, including the lost national uprisings, as a sacrifice modelled on the sacrifice of Christ, necessary for the resurrection of Poland. According to Primate Wyszyński, the history of the nation was a reservoir of values, co-shaped by faith and the Church, from which future generations could draw in the struggle to regain independence in 1918 and regain sovereignty.

Keywords: history, Wyszyński, vision, past, nation

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