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# Totalitarianism versus humanitarian-personalist concept of socio-political life according to Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński

**Totalitaryzm a humanitarno-personalistyczna koncepcja życia społeczno-politycznego według kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego**

**Summary:** This paper studies the multifaceted and definitude specificity of totalitarianism in the context of the humanitarian-personalist concept of the socio-political life of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. The analysis of the discussed topics provides a unique insight into the nature of totalitarianism, in both the version of German Nazism and in Communism with the Soviet origin and provenances. However, the reinterpretation of the above systems from the perspective of Christian personalist praxeology allows one to notice and present the fundamental assumptions of these concepts' entirely anti-human and anti-Christian paradigm. Moreover, unveiling the entire agenda of totalitarianism makes it easier to interpret these concepts in terms of not only defining but also legitimizing, and even authenticating, some of the most terrifying and degenerated systemic government-ruling forms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is of crucial importance, especially nowadays, when the emerging trends often downplay and soften the criminal nature of the above systems and even consider the "totalitarian model" as a "specific historical phenomenon" attempting to resolve many crucial but complex issues of political, cultural, and economic nature.

**Keywords:** totalitarianism, Stefan Wyszyński, fascism, nazism, communism, personalism

**Streszczenie:** Głównym celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie złożonej specyfiki totalitaryzmu w kontekście humanitarno-personalistycznej koncepcji życia społeczno-politycznego Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego. Analiza poruszanych kwestii umożliwia wyjątkowy wgląd w naturę totalitaryzmu, zarówno w wersji niemieckiego hitleryzmu, jak też komunizmu o proveniencji sowieckiej. Co więcej, reinterpretacja powyższych systemów z perspektywy chrześcijańskiej praxeologii personalistycznej pozwala zauważyć i zapre-

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zentować fundamentalne założenia absolutnie antyludzkiego i antychrześcijańskiego paradygmatu tych koncepcji. Ponadto przedstawienie fundamentalnych założeń powyższych totalitaryzmów ułatwia zinterpretowanie tych koncepcji w kategoriach nie tylko definiujących, ale także legitymizujących, a nawet uwierzytelniających jedne z najbardziej przerażających i totalnie zdegenerowanych systemowych form ustrojowych XX wieku. Ma to kluczowe znaczenie zwłaszcza dziś, kiedy pojawiające się tendencje często bagatelizują zbrodniczy charakter powyższych systemów, a nawet traktują „model totalitarny” – zwłaszcza w kontekście komunizmu – jako „specyficzne zjawisko historyczne” mające na celu rozwiązanie wielu skomplikowanych kwestii natury politycznej, kulturowej i gospodarczej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** totalitaryzm, Stefan Wyszyński, faszyzm, Nazizm, komunizm, personalizm

## Introduction

The ferocious concept of German National Socialism, as well as the *Mephistophelic*-monolithic vision of sociocultural and civic life represented by the communist system, have become leading trends representing the totalitarianism that the world has had to deal with over the last century. Central and Eastern Europe in general (along with many other countries around the world), and Poland in particular, over many decades, has experienced a struggle against both the cruel expansion of Nazi doctrine (the period of war and occupation) and Marxist totalitarian atheism and its political, social, and moral consequences that dominated the lives of the people of that country in the post-war period. Along with the systemic transformation of post-war People's Poland and the shift in the paradigm of power, the ideological offensive aimed at changing the standards and principles of social and political life and “remodeling” the worldview and mentality of Poles based on the concept of a “new socialist morality” rooted in the ideals of Marxist-Leninist materialist ideology began to gain traction. Moreover, official propaganda emphasized the importance of pluralism and democracy but understood only in terms specific to communist ideology, typical of the so-called “People's democracy,” entirely subordinated to a totalitarian system of power. Therefore, the interdependence of the “people's democracy” and socialism was a central dimension of efforts to implement the political assumptions of the People's Republic of Poland.

The above analyses presented here indicate that the personalist and civic-communal concept of the state offered by Stefan Wyszyński was against absolutization and its depreciation. According to Wyszyński,

a properly functioning state should be neither an “artificially appealing” state nor a neutral one regarding world views. Therefore, the state’s primary task is to care for the fate of its citizens, especially those in difficult life situations. In other words, personalism adopts the concept of a subsidiary state that respects citizens’ subjectivity and supports their multi-faceted commitment to the “common good.” And so, this article identifies and analyzes essential aspects of Stefan Wyszyński’s teaching and pastoral service in the context of his fight against the multidimensional forms of totalitarian enslavement.

Moreover, the humanistic and personalist legacy of Wyszyński’s teaching seems to be still valid. As a result, it can be used to analyze contemporary manifestations of totalitarian enslavement such as destructive concepts of reviving fascism and Communism, hedonistic consumerism, postmodern intellectual relativism (art, culture, education, etc.), nihilistic voluntarism, or dangerous forms of militant ecologism and anti-religious populism. Instead of calling for a revolutionary change in the political system, Cardinal Wyszyński opposes the message of courageous involvement in a moral revolution for which freedom of conscience is an inalienable human right.

Nevertheless, severe threats to social life resulting from geopolitical conditions, numerous systemic shortcomings of the communist totalitarian state, and dangerous addictions and moral defects required strong resistance from all social structures. As Cardinal Wyszyński emphasized, it was not only about overcoming some “Polish national defects” but also about a comprehensive and multidimensional moral change. This kind of process may become a religious and social program for the rebirth of the Polish Nation in a broader context. “The life of a nation or state is so complex and demanding that it requires the joining of hands, hearts, and brains of all children of the Nation, all citizens of the state, without distinguishing between their social and professional backgrounds. Then, it is possible to steer the boat of our common homeland, which we all have to take care of”<sup>1</sup>.

The pastoral service and the spiritual leadership of Primate Wyszyński took place during the post-war period of Polish histo-

1 S. Wyszyński, *Przywódcą ludu rolniczego. Poświęcenie tablicy ku czci Wincentego Witosa*. Warszawa 28.12.1975, [in:] „Nie rzucim ziemi...”: z przemówień do rolników, Warsaw 1984, pp. 23-24.

ry, in a country whose existence had been seriously threatened by the most immoral totalitarian systems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Nazi National Socialism and the Marxist-Leninist system of real socialism. Thus, the complicated socio-political context as well as the conditions of the international situation, required the Catholic Church to be very prudent and act decisively<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, Primate Wyszyński, as the leader of the Catholic Church in Poland, realized the need to change the structures of public life in the country. However, he did not consider it the primary and most urgent task of the Church. He also did not feel that he had been called to change the entire political system. His criticism primarily concerned the anthropological and moral dimensions of social life. Wyszyński was aware that the critical elements of the state's political system would have to change if a proper moral order was to exist. He repeatedly spoke of a "social disposition" to favor a social change in this context. However, the social disposition – in his opinion – should be based on the canvas of the Christian religion, the aim of which is to change the human heart (metanoia). In this way, transformed people (*homo Dei*) will become suitable subjects and a foundation for adequately shaping the common good<sup>3</sup>.

## 1 Totalitarianism: origins, specificity, and definitions

There is no consensus among political scientists regarding the explicit definition of the concept of totalitarianism. For some, it is a "kind of comparative concept" or the so-called "Theory of totalitarianism"<sup>4</sup>. In this context, Lewis Coser referred to the above concept as a "model" or a Weberian ideal type of construct, while other scholars do not explicitly name what kind of a tool it is meant to be. The latter is the more common occurrence, although it would be safe to assume that this notion of "totalitarianism" is a comparative concept for use in social science in general, and in political science in particular<sup>5</sup>. It is,

2 Ibidem.

3 S. Wyszyński, *Czas to miłość. Podczas uroczystości Wniebowzięcia Matki Bożej (Jasna Góra, 15.08.1979)*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981*, Warsaw 1990, pp. 889-891.

4 R. Tucker, *Towards a Comparative Politics of Movement-Regimes*, "American Political Science Review" 1961, vol. 55, p. 281.

5 W.D. Jones, *Toward a Theory of Totalitarianism: Franz Borkenau's 'Pareto'*, "Journal of the History of Ideas" 1992, vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 457-458.

therefore, accepted here that the scholars on totalitarianism are attempting, as Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski claim they are, to “delineate, based on factual data, the general model of totalitarian dictatorship and the society which it has created, and that such a conceptualization is to be used for comparative work<sup>6</sup>.

However, Franz Neuman sees totalitarian dictatorship as a political system “where it may be necessary to control education, the means of communication, and economic institutions and thus to gear the whole of society and the private life of the citizen to the system of political domination”<sup>7</sup>. The most explicit definition that Hannah Arendt offers is that it is a “form of government whose essence is terror and whose principle of action is the logicality of ideological thinking”<sup>8</sup>. Arendt’s vagueness is counterbalanced by the rigidities offered by Carl Joachim Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski in their definition of a syndrome of interrelated characteristics<sup>9</sup>. As they put it, “six basic features, which we think constitute the character of totalitarian dictatorship form a cluster of inter-related traits, inter-twined and mutually supporting each other, as usual in an ‘organic’ system”<sup>10</sup>.

Similarly, French analyst Raymond Aron outlined five criteria for considering a regime as totalitarian, which is – in fact – a description of the critical socio-political features of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia<sup>11</sup>. In this context, totalitarianism involves the presence of an elaborate ideology consisting of an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of man’s existence to which everyone living in that so-

6 C. Friedrich, Z. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, New York 1965, p. 22.

7 F. Neumann, *Notes on the Theory of Dictatorship*, [in:] *The Democratic Authoritarian State*, F. Neumann (ed.), Glencoe 1957, p. 236.

8 H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London 1967, p. 20.

9 According to them, the totalitarian system has the following six mutually reinforcing and defining features: (1) Elaborate guiding ideology; (2) Single mass party, typically led by a dictator; (3) System of terror, using such instruments as violence and secret police; (4) Monopoly on weapons; (5) Monopoly on the means of communication; (6) Central direction and control of the economy through state planning – C. Friedrich, Z. Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 22.

10 Ibidem.

11 As Raymond Aron stated, these include: (1) A one-party state where one party has a monopoly on all political activity; (2) A state ideology upheld by the ruling party that is given status as the only authority; (3) State information monopoly that controls mass media for distribution of official truth; (4) State controlled economy with major economic entities under the control of the state; (5) Ideological terror that turns economic or professional actions into crimes. Violators are exposed to prosecution and to ideological persecution – R. Aron, *Democracy and Totalitarianism: A Theory of Political Régimes*, London 1968.

ciety is supposed to adhere, at least passively. This ideology is characteristically focused and projected toward a perfect state of humanity<sup>12</sup>. Both Friedrich-Brzezinski and Arendt, however, tend to define doctrine in dynamic terms, insisting that it is mainly a general formula for social change.

Therefore, in the most general terms, totalitarianism can be defined as a political system in which all social behavior is controlled by an arbitrary state authority that implements a closed and non-evaluable ideological vision put into practice through mass-scale terror. It is commonly believed that the fascist and communist states were totalitarian in their nature (e.g., Stalinism, the “Khmer Rouge” regime in Cambodia, the rule of Kim Jong-un in North Korea, etc.). In totalitarianism, what distinguishes it from authoritarianism is that all centers of political decision are effectively controlled by one easily identifiable group. In other words, totalitarianism is a form of multiple dictatorships. It is, thus, no coincidence that totalitarian dictatorship is referred to as an entirely new quality, very different from traditional authoritarianism. It also makes a big difference whether and to what extent the autonomy of subsystems and the independence of subgroups (in areas other than politics) are allowed or tolerated. While non-totalitarian dictatorships pursue a policy of separation against outside groups, totalitarian dictatorships have the power and the incentive to push for destroying all subsystems. Therefore, under totalitarianism, the state authorities do not limit themselves to political domination but try to exercise total supervision over all manifestations of public and private life.

Nevertheless, totalitarianism – regardless of its regional and ideological specificity – can be characterized as a specific form of the state based on the domination of one political formation, concentrating power not only over public institutions or politics – in the broadest, traditional sense of the word – but also economics, social and cultural institutions, and the personal life of individuals. The aim of such a state was not only the traditional control of society but also to undertake wide-ranging, gigantic reform projects, following the ideological idea of a totalitarian center, whose aim was to create a “new man”. In a to-

12 C. Friedrich, Z. Brzezinski, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

talitarian state, there were no institutions independent of the state. Putting this idea into practice required an undertaking of gigantic social engineering. However, because of the active or passive resistance of the society, carrying out such a task made it necessary to develop the apparatus of terror, coupled with the structures of political control, with the simultaneous façade of the officially existing systemic institutions, the corruption of public language, and omnipresent lies<sup>13</sup>.

To mobilize masses of people to implement their projects, the totalitarian state usually created ideological images of a mythical “enemy”, which had to be exterminated or permanently neutralized. Hence, these countries made genocide a part of their policy. In Germany, Jews became the enemy, and also people who were “superfluous” in the meaning of the Nazis: the mentally ill and incurable<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, in the Soviet Union, the public enemy was “elements alien to the class” or “hostile elements” that hindered the building of a communist society, arbitrarily defined and destroyed by the administrative will of the communist apparatus. In both these 20<sup>th</sup>-century totalitarianisms, the category of the enemy was defined *a priori* and independent of the individual’s choice. Breaking free from the stigma of race or class was not possible. Both systems ruled out the emergence of an ethnic or class civic community. The inclusion criterion would not stigmatize racial origin or “flaw” but rather personal merit. Therefore, Cardinal Wyszyński’s reflection on the criticism of Marxism-Leninism and, especially, the communist vision of socio-political life is, of course, based on Christian anthropology and the experience of the Church. Referring to the teaching of the popes, he states that the fundamental error of socialism is an anthropological one<sup>15</sup>.

In their political praxis, totalitarian ideologies repeatedly referred to the so-called “culture war” that required the total dedication of advocates for shaping the new world. The myth of rebirth was significant here. It meant the creation of a new nation or world without classes and forming a fair-minded “New Man”, untainted by decadent cultural habits referring to the traditional philosophical and theological systems

13 L. Fritze, *Anatomie des totalitären Denkens. Kommunistische und nationalsozialistische Weltanschauung im Vergleich*, Munich 2012.

14 S. Wyszyński, *Miłość i sprawiedliwość społeczna. Rozważania społeczne*, Poznań 1993, p. 47.

15 *Ibidem*, pp. 46-47.

of the old world. The strategy of the coup d'état, the constant struggle to defeat the "enemies of the people", and the constant emphasis on the need to intensify the class struggle favored the formation of a similar mentality among the political leaders of totalitarian regimes<sup>16</sup>.

Contrary to democratic states, the sacralization of politics implemented by totalitarian regimes, along with its liturgies, holidays, and cults, is marked by the leader's deification. Moreover, it is characterized by the idolatrous cult of the state, which gives itself the exclusive right to determine good and evil; the marginalization or destruction of traditional religion; orgiastic mass rallies and demonstrations, emphasizing the leading role of a political party assigned the role of a "political demiurge"; a call to sacrifice and a death cult. In this sense, a modern interpretation of totalitarianism that emphasizes political religion has one important implication; it suggests that totalitarianism should be understood not as a specific political system but as a historical "eventuality" that also carries particular threats to the modern world<sup>17</sup>.

No wonder Cardinal Wyszyński was opposed to the totalitarian concept of German Nazism and the Marxist-Leninist materialist ideology as well. In this sense, he considered both systemic forms of the state as political deviations and the greatest threat to Christianity. Especially Communism, as an ideology proclaiming an atheistic and materialistic vision of the human person and social life, was considered particularly hostile to Christian aspirations, promoting respect for human dignity and shaping the Christian social order in the dimension of peaceful coexistence, justice, and mutual respect. Moreover, dialectical materialism, an idea deeply rooted in totalitarian systems, denied the existence of Christian spirituality. So, it is another progressive deviation degenerating the supernatural, spiritual, and religious spheres of human life. Moreover, atheistic materialism only recognizes and approves of material reality, which can only be under-

16 Such experts on the subject as Raymond Aron, Albert Camus, Ernst Cassirer, Norman Cohn, Waldemar Gurian, Jacob Talmon, and Eric Voegelin emphasize the mythological component of totalitarianism. Thus, they mention "substitute religions", "political religions", "myth of the state", "sacralization of politics". In their opinion, political religion is an essential element of totalitarianism as well as a dangerous and lethal weapon in the ideological arsenal of totalitarian systems – R. Ficek, *Christians in Socio-Political Life: An Applied Analysis of the Theological Anthropology of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński*, Toruń 2020, pp. 44-51.

17 *Ibidem*, pp. 147-150.



stood through sensual experience. However, this is for blind people, and thus kills the metaphysical sphere and spiritual aspirations aimed at the supernatural dimension.

## **2. German Nazi socialism and communism as cruel examples of totalitarian heresies distorting the Christian concept of socio-political life**

Due to the adoration of political power and domination as well as the idea of “racial purity” associated with the apotheosis of “national superiority” (extreme nationalism inscribed in the “salvation history” theory of the dominance of the “master race”), Nazism can be described as a reclaimed form of neo-paganism, selectively referred to traditional models of Christian European culture<sup>18</sup>. The above system seemingly presents a coherent worldview using racial chauvinism, extreme social Darwinism, and nihilistic existentialism aimed at creating the idea of a superman (*Übermensch*). The history of the world is presented here as an arena of competition between “human races” to gain adequate living space (*Lebensraum*). In this context, war is treated as a necessity and a necessary element of “progress” understood in terms of social evolution based on the advancement and domination of one – chosen – human race over others. In other words, wars are inevitable because the will and ability of one dominant race to rule and conquer other (inferior) races will logically and inevitably develop, causing military conflicts with neighboring nations in order to dominate them<sup>19</sup>.

Human beings’ identity and dignity concerning this neo-pagan Nazi ideology is only an illusion. In the opinion of Nazi ideologues, a man must find his identity in the nation (*Volk*). In turn, the “nation” understood in this way – consisting of individuals of “pure,” that is, German blood – becomes a new “god” who demands both remarkable and great sacrifice from his followers. Also, individual human rights

18 S. Wyszynski, *Miłość i sprawiedliwość społeczna...*, p. 47; R. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, London 2005, pp. 24-54; I. Tavilla et al., *The rise of fascism and the reformation of Hegel's dialectic into Italian neo-idealist philosophy*, “XLinguae” 2019, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 139-150.

19 D. Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation*, New York 2005, pp. 46-76.

are purely an illusion. Moreover, they even seem to be in some way dangerous. However, most important here is media propaganda and the manipulation of the “unconscious” masses in order to make them valuable tools in promoting the prosperity of the “master nation”<sup>20</sup>.

In summary, if the term “human person” is an illusion, man must find his identity in the “Volksstaat” (people’s state). If the state (*Reich*) is predisposed to shape and form society as well as the individual, all respect for human rights is replaced by manipulation, forgery, and propaganda. In other words, manipulation and “social engineering” make people what the power elite requires (*ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*)<sup>21</sup>.

However, following the menace of Germanic Nazi Socialism during World War II and the German occupation (1939-1945), an equally dangerous – “far left” alternative emerged in the form of atheist Marxist-Leninist ideology. Paradoxically, this concept – albeit in a modified form – still seems to be attractive and intellectually inspiring. Hence, for many left-wing intellectuals and their academics, Marxism continues to be the “fashionable enough” and ever-desirable secular version of the proclamation of the “atheistic Kingdom of God”, where politically emancipated and ideologically liberated “humanity” is going to replace God’s position and status. As a result, universal “salvation” will be reorganized and fulfilled only in the temporal dimension<sup>22</sup>.

In fact, there are significant parallels between Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Christian message of salvation. No wonder this way of understanding Marxist-Leninist ideology is described as a typical “Christian heresy”<sup>23</sup>. The Marxist-Leninist “homo faber” is called to conquer nature and create a new world reality, just as – according to the Christian understanding of the human person – man created in the image and likeness of God is a covenant partner with his Crea-

20 R. Ficek, op. cit., pp. 147-148.

21 D. Redles, op. cit., pp. 108-159; R. Ficek, *Collectivism, Individualism, and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński’s Personalist Concept of Man*, “Roczniki Nauk Społecznych” 2020, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 12-18.

22 S. Wyszyński, *Nasze dezyderaty. Do profesorów katolickiej nauki społecznej, Jasna Góra 22 I 1963*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, p. 196; G. Ermak, *Communism: The Great Misunderstanding*, New York 2016, pp. 30-34.

23 S. Wyszyński, *Inteligencja w przedniej straży komunizmu*, Katowice 1939; S. Wyszyński, *Katolicki program walki z komunizmem*, Włocławek 1937; S. Wyszyński, *Socjalistyczna własność wspólna w ocenie „Rerum novarum”*, “Ateneum Kapłańskie” 1931, vol. 28, pp. 470-486; S. Wyszyński, *Pius XI o walce z komunizmem*, “Ateneum Kapłańskie” 1937, vol. 39, pp. 466-478.

tor in the work of changing temporal reality<sup>24</sup>. In Marxism-Leninism, the category of sin was replaced by the alienation caused by the “unfair” division of labor. Ruthless criticism of religion and the personalistic concept of man replaces the Christian prophetic struggle against idolatry and sin. The hope of the coming eschatological reality is replaced by the expectation of “the complete liberation of the proletariat” (the ideal of a communist state). The international “class consciousness” in Marxism has a direct parallel and relates to the global vision of the reality of the “new heaven and a new earth” taken from the messianic vision based on Matthew 28: 18-20<sup>25</sup>. The dogmas of the Church are replaced by the so-called “Laws of scientific materialism” and the ideological dogmas of the communist party. Also, infallibility in matters of the Roman pope’s faith refers to the “infallible” ideology of the communist “politburo”, so it is not subject to any discussion or doubt. Likewise, repentance for sin is replaced by overcoming false consciousness and liberation from the shackles of trivial religiosity<sup>26</sup>.

In line with this holistic interpretation of reality (i.e., a secular and materialist historical meta-narrative), the class struggle becomes a fundamental element permeating the dynamics of human history (a parallel to Christian salvation history). The revolution is, therefore, the only and inevitable way to achieve a “classless society” in which man’s alienation on socio-political and existential grounds is overcome<sup>27</sup>. In the so-called “scientific Marxism”, the discourse of catastrophic historical development conditioned by class conflict – culminating in the dramatic collapse of capitalism – acquires the status of an indisputable “law of history”. As indicated above, this kind of discourse is today referred to as a “meta-narrative”, that is, an intellectual construct that tells of the revolutionary transformation of the fallen human

24 S. Wyszyński, *Spółeczność przyrodzona i nadprzyrodzona. II Konferencja Akademicka. Warszawa – kościół św. Anny 16.02.1957*, [in:] idem, *Kazania i przemówienia autoryzowane 1956-1981*, Archiwum Instytutu Prymasowskiego w Warszawie, vol. 2, p. 61.

25 R. Ficek, *Irrational Rationality of Individualism, Tortuous Logic of Collectivism, and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's Integral-Humanist Concept of Socio-Political Life*, “Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny” 2021, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 286-292.

26 S. Wyszyński, *Miłość i sprawiedliwość społeczna...*, pp. 93-94; R. Ficek, *Collectivism, Individualism...*, pp. 14-18.

27 N. Bierdiajew, *Marksizm, czyli fałszywa religia*, [in:] *Krytycy marksizmu*, M. Bankowicz (ed.), Cracow 2014, pp. 44-45.

species from a prehistoric state of primitive and tribal “cooperative” towards a “classless” society<sup>28</sup>.

### **3. Planned de-christianization as methodical exertions threatening the survival of the nation**

Especially in the first decades after World War II, an essential dimension of the official political strategy of the communist party taking power in Poland was to suppress the presence of all forms of religious life by imposing severe restrictions on the Catholic Church and other religious institutions. However, the above idea was fueled by the systemically imposed process of atheization and secularization of the identity of the Polish nation, in which atheistic education and upbringing played an important role, as well as attempts to subordinate the broadly understood cultural life of the godless ideology of communist totalitarianism. In other words, all structures of public life were to serve the atheistic concept of a state without God. Therefore, the communist political authorities sought to marginalize the activities of the Catholic Church because it was against the “proletarian revolution” associated with the class struggle. Moreover, the Christian faith integrated the Polish mentality and defined the national identity of Poles. Therefore, it became a serious rival to the communist aspirations to impose total control over society. Thus, religion and all forms of practicing it were defined as “reactionary superstitions” and “opium to the people”.

Wyszyński shared the evaluation of the Polish Episcopate that “[...] imposed laicization aims to form a man who would be convinced of the validity of the materialistic philosophy and everything that it proclaims. Ultimately, it is about spreading a specific type of atheism”<sup>29</sup>. In this sense, the programmed process of secularization and atheization, carried out by various means and methods, posed a considerable threat both to native cultures and to the religious and moral

28 J. Bocheński, G. Niemeyer, *Handbuch des Weltkommunismus*, Fribourg–Munich 1958, p. 633; I. Dec, *Humanizmy i ich roszczenia w wyjaśnieniu człowieka*, [in:] *Błąd antropologiczny*, A. Maryniarczyk, K. Stępień (eds.), Lublin 2003, pp. 58–64.

29 *List Episkopatu Polski o laicyzacji. Warszawa 22 III 1968*, [in:] *Listy Pastorskie Episkopatu Polski 1945–1974*, Paris 1975, p. 522.

life of the Nation. Aware of the seriousness of the situation, Primate Wyszyński warned: “The Church warns the Nation against the consequences of forced atheization, against the collapse of the religious and moral unity of society, against the inevitable nihilism that creates ideological emptiness and the negation of all spiritual values”<sup>30</sup>.

The adverse effects of the secularization and atheization of moral life exerted a particularly destructive influence on the Christian model of marriage and family, causing their demoralization, dejection, and – consequently – their decay. At the root of this phenomenon lies a distortion of the understanding of marriage and family, which leads them to [be seen as] “institutions of use, liberation from ethical norms, from responsibility, and burdens”<sup>31</sup>. It is expressed not only in a false vision of love – reduced only to shallow affection or only to the satisfaction of the sex drive – but is also a severe and stern distortion of the truth about man and his fundamental call to responsible love. An extreme danger, even threatening the biological survival of the nation, was also associated with the demographic and anti-population policy of the state. Terrible manipulation of Polish society was attempted thanks to the law on the termination of pregnancy and large-scale anti-natalist propaganda<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, the demographic and anti-population policy of the state also made negative changes in social mentality. In the common crimes of infanticide committed in Poland “in the majesty of the law” and the anti-population policy, Wyszyński saw the cause of biological and moral degradation that threatened the Polish nation<sup>33</sup>.

Querying all traditional authorities and undermining basic moral principles posed a severe risk of demoralizing society, especially the young generation. The tangible manner of this type of activity

30 *List Episkopatu Polski do duchowieństwa o moralnym zagrożeniu narodu. Warszawa 25 I 1968*, [in:] *Listy Pasterskie Episkopatu...*, pp. 619-626; S. Wyszyński, *Problemy życia społecznego w Polsce. Do duszpasterzy młodzieży męskiej 29 XII 1975*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, pp. 669-672.

31 *Orędzie Episkopatu Polski w sprawie małżeńskiej. Jasna Góra, 7.12.1945*, [in:] *Listy Pasterskie Episkopatu...*, p. 25.

32 *Głos biskupów polskich w obronie zagrożonego bytu Narodu. 4 IX 1970*, [in:] *Listy Pasterskie Episkopatu...*, p. 625.

33 S. Wyszyński, *Apel Synodu w obronie praw człowieka. Po powrocie z Synodu Biskupów, Warszawa 26 I 1975*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, pp. 619-626; idem, *Problemy życia społecznego w Polsce...*, pp. 669-672.

was the popularization of such attitudes as agreeableness towards evil, mockery of fundamental values and authorities, selfishness and comfort, consumerist attitude to life, sexual debauchery, fornication, drunkenness, and drug addiction<sup>34</sup>. Then, the above aberrations cause a deep and universal moral crisis related to the weakening of faith, contributing directly to the progressive degeneration of the system of fundamental moral values and thus undermining the biological and cultural foundations of the nation's existence<sup>35</sup>. The above facts are particularly evident in the social scourge of alcoholism and the preference for a hedonistic lifestyle. They affect specific people – degenerating them both biologically and spiritually – and destructively disturb the family, nation, and other social structures. Worrying so many people, alcohol abuse damages the economic and socio-political spheres and degrades the mental and spiritual dimensions of Polish social life. The disappearance of the attitude of responsibility and the degeneration of family, professional, and national consciousness, is the basis for the development of various types of social pathologies: sexual promiscuity, related diseases, increased crime, acts of vandalism and hooliganism, road accidents under the influence of alcohol, and other pathologies of social life. In this context, dishonesty, jealousy, and alcoholism appear as severe threats to the moral and spiritual life of a society that requires a special kind of stigmatization and constructive defense response<sup>36</sup>.

Additionally, many destructive threats to social life were stimulated by a programmed process of inciting and fueling selfishness and social hatred<sup>37</sup>. “It is significant – expresses Wyszynski – that in the aspirations for the proletariat's liberation, a lot of room is occupied by religious and moral matters or the fight against the Christian religious

34 S. Wyszynski, *To jest nasz program prymasowski. Do wiernych w bazylice prymasowskiej w Gnieźnie 2 II 1957*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, pp. 75-76; idem, *Nasze dezyderaty. Do profesorów katolickiej nauki społecznej, Jasna Góra 22 I 1963*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, pp. 198-200; idem, *O zagrożeniu moralności narodu. List pasterski na wielki post 1968*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, pp. 343-348.

35 R. Ficek, *Christians in Socio-Political Life...*, pp. 309-312.

36 S. Wyszynski, *Jakiej chcecie Polski? Do młodzieży akademickiej w Warszawie 22 III 1972*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, pp. 491-492; idem, *Ratujmy życie w rodzinie. List pasterski na XXXIV Tydzień Miłosierdzia 26 VII 1978*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, pp. 843-844.

37 R. Zacharias, *The Real Face of Atheism*, Grand Rapids 2004, pp. 48-59.

worldview”<sup>38</sup>. As a false assumption of a totalitarian ideology, hatred is recognized as the driving force of communist “progress”, applying the principle of “divide and rule”. The Christian spirit of forgiveness and peace declares war in the name of supposed justice and, above all, in the name of pagan hatred<sup>39</sup>. In this context, the spread of egoism and social hatred appears as an austere distortion of the spiritual and moral culture, harming both the dignity of the human person and the unity of the Nation. Programmatic hatred, destroying manifestations of justice, loyalty, or merciful love – i.e., fundamental values understood as the basis for shaping unity and social integration – has become a dangerous threat to both the human person, the family, and the Nation, internally divided and whose future prospects are broken<sup>40</sup>.

So, emphasizing the fundamental threats to social life and promoting basic religious and moral values becomes an essential dimension of the teaching of the Primate of Poland. Its goal, however, was not the theoretical analysis of attitudes and problems but more about shaping the moral awareness of Polish society. Therefore, the pastoral teaching of Stefan Wyszyński becomes a unique and still relevant expression of the prophetic mission of the Church and – also in our modern times – is a call to the conversion and moral renewal of both an individual and the entire nation.

## **4. Looking the devil in the eyes: toward the socio-moral renewal**

The polar opposite of totalitarianism seems to be a systemic political reality characterized by principles such as individualism, respect for human and civil rights, democracy, liberalism, and even rationalism inscribed in the humanistic-personalist concept of the human person. According to Wyszyński, therefore, in the modern world, there is a tendency to build a socio-political order based on the principles of a democratic system. However, it is recognized that such a political system is most suited to both human nature and the requirements of justice,

38 S. Wyszyński, *Miłość i sprawiedliwość społeczna...*, p. 103.

39 *List Episkopatu Polski do duchowieństwa o moralnym zagrożeniu narodu...*, p. 507.

40 S. Wyszyński, *Dobrzy bracia. Podczas uroczystości 250. rocznicy przybycia bonifratrów do Warszawy 26 IX 1976*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, p. 748.

freedom, and social solidarity. Since society is made up of people, and man is a rational and social-political being, the fundamental human and citizen's right is to allow every person to participate in the political power of his state. In this sense, democracy understood in this way is to guarantee – at least indirectly – the participation of citizens in governments.

Many supporters of the post-war so-called “socialist democracy” advocated a “civic rebirth” aimed at building a “communist state” while rejecting, however, traditional Christian morality. It meant a commitment to the rather conventional ideological goals in the “Communist Manifesto.” In any case, the overriding goal of this challenge was to promote civic involvement in the communist spirit (social activism inspired by the social commitment to building a communist state) and did not inspire ideological transformation or moral or even cultural renewal of the nation.

In this context, however, the entire pastoral activity of Stefan Wyszyński was in line with the broad-based idea of healing the whole reality of the nation's social life. Specific moral and spiritual renewal initiatives were expressed primarily in the “Vows of Jasna Góra” program preceding the “Great Novena”. The above endeavors prepared the nation for the Millennium Jubilee of the Baptism of Poland. The very fact of taking vows at Jasna Góra was a great event in the life of the Church and the nation. Based on faith in God's Providence and commitment to work on moral and spiritual transformations of individuals, families, and society – despite their religious character – they defended man and the entire nation<sup>41</sup>.

Nevertheless, the essence of this program was to show the anthropological truth about man as a person created in the image and likeness of God, receiving an explicit command from the Creator authorizing him to change the hitherto reality of the temporal world. By this fact, the human person becomes God's partner-collaborator in His creation. In turn, the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption of the Son of God emphasizes this aspect of human life, even more, making it an

41 R. Ficek, *Mariological Dimension of the Theological and Pastoral Concepts of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland*, “*Studia Sandomierskie*” 2020, vol. 27, pp. 239-242; M. Wójcik, *Religijna odnowa Narodu w Jasnogórskich Ślubach Ks. Prymasa Stefana Kardynała Wyszyńskiego*, “*Studia nad Rodziną*” 2006, vol. 10, no. 1-2, pp. 259-278.



essential dimension of the relationship with God, bearing the mark of immortality (*homo Dei*). Participation in God's creative work leads to discovering man occupying a high position in the entire created world. As a person who is the subject, purpose, and meaning of all social life, he has an absolute priority in the whole reality of the temporal world, through which he carries out the work of creation. Therefore, the personalistic nature of his activities requires responsibility for his individual and social development and the proper shape of man's relationship to the world and the world to man.

The above aspect significantly impacted the polemic with the "false concept of man" presented by the so-called "real socialism". In other words, the anthropological and theological analysis of human life conducted by Cardinal Wyszyński, placing the human person at the center of his considerations, emphasized that it is precisely man who is the most critical and vital link in the entire economic process: its subject, creator, and goal. It is a man, the center and purpose of the temporal world, who must always be associated with moral criteria beyond economic pragmatism. Thus, presenting the anthropological and theological foundations of socio-economic life becomes one of the important ways of humanizing this area of human activity and overcoming its perception only through the prism of pragmatic economic rationality<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, the creative commitment to socio-economic life "(...) is an instrument of salvation for every human being, and the worker's labor is connected with the joy of victory over matter and himself"<sup>43</sup>.

Nonetheless, creative involvement in socio-political and economic life is not only about the self-realization of the human person. Still, it aims to create a social energy that serves all humankind. In addition, this type of activity brings to life all gifts rooted in human nature. Moreover, it develops appropriate dispositions: reason, will, and feelings. It acquires the necessary moral skills such as patience, perseverance, solidarity, conscientiousness, etc. Therefore, human creative activity requires effort and a sense of responsibility. However, it gives the freedom to mold "oneself" as well as enables spiritual

42 S. Wyszyński, *Miłość i sprawiedliwość...*, p. 319.

43 *Ibidem*, p. 366.

growth, ennoblement, and sanctification of one's personality<sup>44</sup>. In this respect, man – both individually and socially – is a path for the renewal of the Church and a personal process of moral metanoia. The religious and moral order rooted in the human person is a condition for the individual renewal of man. In this context, however, the reform of all structures of social life is also being implemented<sup>45</sup>. Therefore, the concept of moral renewal in the teaching of Primate Wyszyński is not individualistic but takes place in the space of family and national life<sup>46</sup>. Thus, the family order must be related to the order of the heart of every inhabitant of Poland because social order is built in the family. A whole national organism is formed there because the Nation consists of families<sup>47</sup>.

Nevertheless, the question of Christian morality extends to all areas of human life. In the context of the mutual conditions of the complex structures of human life, one can also speak of the social dimension of moral renewal, which becomes the opposite of the social dimension of sin<sup>48</sup>. Thus, the basis for the moral renewal of social life is the awakening in Christ, realized through metanoia and reconciliation with God. However, this requires a radical turn towards God, which results in a change of conscience and a deepening of the awareness and moral sensitivity of the human person, family, and nation. Changing the way of thinking and appreciating Christian values results in a change of attitudes that leads to holiness and Christian perfection in Christ<sup>49</sup>.

However, the condition for the moral transformation of the whole social reality is the integral renewal of man, not a single act. Still, a permanent attitude focused on breaking with evil and sin, practicing Chris-

44 S. Wyszyński, *Duch pracy...*, pp. 107-109; C. Bartnik, *Teologia pracy ludzkiej*, Warsaw 1977, pp. 125-126; J. Mariański, *Postęp społeczny a postęp moralny*, "Życie Katolickie" 1987, vol. 6, no. 6, pp. 81-97.

45 S. Wyszyński, *Nie dać sobie wydrzeć ziemi! Do Solidarności wiejskiej rolników indywidualnych*. Warszawa-Miodowa 2.04.1981, [in:] idem, *Kościół w służbie narodu*, Rome 1981, pp. 269-230; R. Ficek, *Moral Renewal as a Socio-Religious Imperative and the Destructive Actions of an Oppressive Totalitarian State: In The Context Of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's Personalistic Concept Of Social Life*, "Roczniki Teologiczne" 2020, vol. 67, no. 5, pp. 44-52.

46 Ibidem.

47 S. Wyszyński, *Patron Polski i mąż stanu. Podczas uroczystości świętego Stanisława w Krakowie 14 V 1978*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, p. 830.

48 S. Wyszyński, *Jakiej chcecie Polski?...*, p. 490.

49 S. Wyszyński, *Kościół nie walczy z władzą, tylko z jej nadużyciami. Podczas uroczystości Świętego Stanisława w Krakowie 11 V 1975*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, p. 646; R. Ficek, *Christians in Socio-Political Life...*, pp. 315-317.

tian virtues, and cultivating supernatural life. Referring to the moral renewal of the Nation, Primate Wyszyński states: “The most important thing is to restore man”<sup>50</sup>. Therefore, it is impossible to shape moral virtues and values, both individually and as a community, without a fundamental change in the way of thinking and of the values – that is, the proper shaping of the conscience of the human person and, consequently, all social reality in the spirit of the authentically biblical truth of Christ. Hence, tragic past experiences require a vigilant attitude<sup>51</sup>. The seriousness of the threats is added to by the fact that the post-war situation in Poland was not conducive to the moral renewal of either the family or the nation<sup>52</sup>.

It can be said, therefore, that the ideological and socio-political conditions that arose after the war contributed to an increase in moral threats to the nation’s life. That is why Primate Wyszyński, emphasizing this problem, considers it necessary and even decisive for the proper shaping of the Christian society. “It is easy to pour all the wealth of a nation into the depths, but the great challenge is to lead the boat during a storm to save everything in it”<sup>53</sup>. According to Stefan Wyszyński, the processes of uprooting the nation from its cultural heritage are dangerous threats that undermine the essence of social life. They are expressed in strenuous attempts to break with the historical past and create their false and deceitful vision of history, culture, and morality, in line with the Marxist-materialist model. Conscious and deliberate falsification of the historical past of the nation, reducing its value for the current generation, resulted in the inevitable cultural uprooting of the country. The loss of identity on a cultural level has very destructive consequences that could lead to a complete disintegration of the nation<sup>54</sup>.

50 S. Wyszyński, *O moralną odnowę Narodu. Do wiernych w bazylice gnieźnieńskiej 2 II 1981*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, p. 1007.

51 S. Wyszyński, *Bez ofiar i wyrzeczeń nie ma zwycięstwa. Warszawa – kościół Matki Bożej Zwycięskiej 16 VIII 1970*, [in:] idem, *Z gniazda orląt*, Rome 1972, p. 102.

52 R. Ficek, *Patriotism as Love of the Homeland or another Form of Nationalism? Devotedness, Allegiance, and Loyalty to the Native Country in the Thought of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński*, “*Collectanea Theologica*” 2021, vol. 91, no. 2, pp. 77-117.

53 S. Wyszyński, *Sursum corda. Z kazania do górali tatrzańskich. Zakopane 1957*, [in:] idem, *Wszystko postawiłem na Maryję*, Paris 1980, p. 145.

54 R. Ficek, *Moral Renewal as a Socio-Religious Imperative...*, pp. 54-56; J.B. Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, Mahwah 2008, pp. 36-49.

Therefore, the necessary condition for moral renewal is the “awakening of conscience”, which – for a Christian – is the most sacred center and sanctuary in which they can be alone with God. “In every person, in every family, in every word of truth, in the life of the Nation and State, personal, social, and professional conscience as well as economic and political conscience, must awaken”<sup>55</sup>. Only a person with an “awakened conscience” – one in whom the most profound and complete work of spiritual liberation was accomplished – is the foundation for building the renewed reality of the temporal world. The realization of this desire is possible only through conversion to God in a spirit of faith, realizing one’s sinfulness, and making efforts to fulfill the call to holiness<sup>56</sup>. The fruit of the integral moral renewal of the entire reality of social life is, therefore, a mature approach to threats to moral life. However, it requires firm opposition not only to the dangers that resulted from geopolitical conditions and the systematic degeneration of the socio-political system of post-war Poland. The challenge addressed to the entire nation is all the more critical in the fight against moral defects destabilizing social life, destroying its basic structures, leading to general anarchy, and, consequently, to the destruction of the state<sup>57</sup>.

As a result, the return to Christ becomes the basis for the moral renewal of the entire reality of social life. It occurs through constant transformation, conversion of the hearts and attitudes of individuals and the community as a whole, and through sacramental reconciliation with God in the Church. No less critical a dimension of moral renewal, as understood by Primate Wyszyński, is an apparent Marian trait. Emphasizing the role of Mary in the work of moral renewal has some theological, psychological, and sociological justification<sup>58</sup>. “It is true that ‘I have put everything on Mary’, and I am faithful to it. It is born of a deep conviction that in our homeland, the creation and maintenance of a religious community must be done in a dimension

55 S. Wyszyński, *W godzinie wielkiego rachunku sumienia. Ołtarzew 2 X 1980*, [in:] idem, *Kościół w służbie narodu...*, p. 73.

56 R. Ficek, *Moral Renewal as a Socio-Religious Imperative...*, pp. 44-48.

57 S. Wyszyński, *Nawróćcie się do Pana*, [in:] idem, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946-1981...*, p. 488.

58 R. Ficek, *Mariological Dimension...*, pp. 229-249.

to which people are most sensitive. With us, this is done through the mediation of the Holy Mother of God”<sup>59</sup>.

## Conclusions

The rich heritage of Stefan Wyszyński’s teaching and pastoral ministry is still valid in the context of current efforts to combat the dangerous manifestations of both old and new forms of totalitarian systems. His humanitarian-personalist concept of involvement in socio-political life is part of the contemporary discourse referring to the current threats posed by various aspects of neo-Nazi-fascist as well as communist ideologies and refers to such problems as atheist fundamentalism of the “world without God”, nihilist voluntarism, hedonistic consumerism, postmodern relativism as well as many other manifestations of the lack of freedom and oppression still present in the contemporary world. The message of Primate Wyszyński emphasizes here the necessity to reject violence (the paradigm of the totalitarian revolution) and the need for a profound moral revolution aimed at shaping the “new man” (*homo Dei*).

In other words, the ruthless struggle against old and new forms of totalitarianism is taking place today through a personal “moral revolution” aimed at transforming the temporal reality and all dimensions of socio-political life in the spirit of the Gospel. A new world order built on peace and social justice is possible only through the acceptance of the integral concept of man as a person of inalienable dignity. However, this requires the formation of a society that can respect human rights, ranging from the right to religious freedom to freedom of conscience. In this sense, the human person is understood as an integrated ontic unity, combining the temporal and the supernatural dimensions.

Due to the straightforward manner of his pastoral teaching and the poignant history of life, the legacy of Stefan Wyszyński continues to be a current and valuable resource of inspiration in an unstable era

59 S. Wyszyński, *Z przemówienia do duchowieństwa diecezjalnego i zakonnego zgromadzonego, aby złożyć życzenia imieninowe ks. kard. Stefanowi Wyszyńskiemu*. Warszawa 2 VIII 1980, [in:] idem, *Prymas Tysiąclecia*, Paris 1982, p. 105.

of socio-political turmoil, increased fragmentation, and uncertainty of an epistemological, existential, and moral nature. In this context, Wyszyński reminds us that human beings are “personal beings” that have been constituted as free and responsible for their actions. However, man is essentially oriented towards living in personal, creative, and – at least altruistic – relationships with others. Human dignity is, therefore, inalienable and indisputable precisely because this human self has a transcendent source and eternal destiny – and the orientation towards transcendence is both the basis of existence and the ultimate goal of human action. Moreover, the uniqueness and dignity of each human person result from the irreducibility and uniqueness of their subjective lived experience and personal life story, woven into the existential drama of an eternally-oriented union.

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