

DR HAB. PAWEŁ SKIBIŃSKI
Uniwersytet Warszawski

TO WHAT EXTENT COULD THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC BE CONSIDERED A POLISH STATE? THE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF VIEWS OF PRIMATE WYSZYŃSKI

The Polish People's Republic (in this way i will refer to the form of a state existing in Poland throughout the period 1944-1989) as well as the attitude of Polish citizens to this form of state and those living in Poland after the end of this chapter of history of our country is of great significance when it comes to evaluating this historical epoch, and indirectly also our present time. In the case of Primate Stefan Wyszyński, we are dealing not only with one of the spiritual leaders of the Catholic Church in our country and the Polish nation, but also with a insightful analyst and keen observer of the social reality. Admittedly, his attitude and assessments are certainly of exceptional importance.

It should be noted that Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was a man thoroughly educated in classical philosophy and Catholic theology¹. Considering the problem in these terms, the state was regarded by him as a tool in the hands of the nation, t.i. a political community, whereas the sovereignty of the state was recognized by him as a necessary condition. It should be noted that the Primate assumed

¹ J. Lewandowski, *Naród w dziejach zbawienia*, Warszawa 2001.

that this sovereignty is gradual in its nature and one can not think about achieving absolute sovereignty².

Admittedly one may pose a question, on the basis of what kind of sources we can examine the position of the Primate with regard to the then communist state. This seems to be a challenging task, because one should refer both to the public statements of the Primate (thousands of his homilies and speeches) and put them together with non-public statements delivered at the Polish Bishop's Conferences, as well as those included in his correspondence, private conversations, and in personal notes. Since insightful study of the whole of this material is beyond the capabilities of one researcher, it is therefore necessary to make a selection of the examined resources, focusing primarily on the aspects, which may be essential from the political point of view, with regard to which Cardinal Wyszyński took a clear position on the issue, which is of interest to us.

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was born in 1901, t.i. as a citizen of a country still dependent by Tsar of Russia and in 1918 he became an independent citizen of the Second Polish Republic. He was a witness of regaining independence by Poland and lived as a conscious citizen for twenty years in the independent Republic of Poland³. During the war and occupation he was a soldier of the Polish underground state – he was sworn in as a chaplain of the Home Army, in which he was attributed the pseudonym „Radwan III”⁴. In the post-war reality, the Primate of Poland was also a citizen of the Polish People's Republic, he had his identity card, passport etc⁵.

² Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Miłość i sprawiedliwość społeczna. Rozważania społeczne*, Poznań 1993, ed. ks. Piotr Nitecki.

³ P. Nitecki, *Włocławskie dzieje ks. Stefana Wyszyńskiego (1917-1946)*, Ząbki 2008, p. 21-194.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 228-233.

⁵ One of the identity cards of Primate Stefan Wyszyński (donation of father Bronisław Piasecki), in which information about the death of the Primate in 1981 was indicated, is now part of the collection of the Museum of John Paul II and Primate Wyszyński in Warsaw.

If we now reflect on the question about the possible attitudes of the Polish citizens of the generation of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński with regard to the communist state, we can distinguish two extreme attitudes – the unconditional acceptance of the PRL, which was an attitude chosen not only by members of the communist party (PPR and PZPR respectively), but later also adopted, among others, by Catholics collaborating with the communists.

On the other hand, it was possible to reject it unconditionally – this attitude was usually related to the identification of representatives of this attitude with the ideal of state continuity of the government and the Polish state in exile. The latter one, which was not only typical of soldiers of the independence underground but also of many expatriate politicians, was represented its extreme form by the radical anti-Communism of Józef Mackiewicz.

It seems that the Primate took a stand that was different from both „model” attitudes – fitting into a broad third category of people who on one hand accepted the post-war state of Poland, and at the same time criticized the communist regime that wielded power in the PRL, its policies, and socio-political system. Cardinal Wyszyński participated loyally in the social life of communist Poland, and at the same time he spoke critically about its authorities and the political system in Poland.

In our deliberations we start from the remark formulated by Rafał Matyja, who notices that „the extremely important intellectual context of these attitudes (in relation to the state, which was the PRL – author’s remark) consists, on the one hand, of the attitude to the state, visible in the concepts of legalism, while on the other – of the vision of a political community that we owe our loyalty to”⁶. It can be said that the attitude towards the PRL as a state was then determined by, firstly, the opinion on the legitimacy of the communist state, and second – by the means of defining the political community belonging to which the Poles at that time declared.

⁶ R. Matyja, *Państwowość PRL w polskiej refleksji politycznej 1956-1980*, Kraków 2007, p. 15.

Educated in the tradition of the Catholic Social Teaching of the interwar period, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński proposed particular interpretation of the concept of the state and its relation to the Polish nation, which he certainly recognized as a community in both political and cultural as well as spiritual and religious terms. In his work entitled *Kazania Świętokrzyskie* in 1976 he claimed the following:

„What does the Nation expect from the State? It expects from it to accept political reality as it is. It is difficult to fight indefinitely, because it could lead to anarchy, which is harmful not only to family, national and religious life, but also to public-public life (...) „[Church and Nation] we expect from the State to skilfully coordinate the rights and responsibilities of all social strata. (...) To protect the rights of citizens, family, Nation, State. (...) So that the State does not impose any kind of ideology on its citizens”⁷.

It was therefore very important for the Primate Wyszyński to make a clear distinction between the nation, the state, its system and the ruling camp.

On the occasion of the appointment of priest Stefan Wyszyński as bishop of Lublin in 1946, the future Primate did not swear allegiance to the state. This kind of oath could be regarded as a commitment to submit to the ideology of the Polish People's Republic⁸, which was the case with regard to the next generation of bishops. However, at that time Primate Wyszyński represented an attitude of relative acceptance of the post-war reality. As late as in 1947, he was preparing the theoretical background of the position of the Polish bishops with regard to the elections to the Legislative Sejm, which imposed on Catholics a moral requirement of the participation in elections,

⁷ S. Wyszyński, *Kazania świętokrzyskie. U podstaw ładu życia i współżycia*. Warszawa, Kościół św. Krzyża (11-18-25 I 1976), Rzym 1976, p. 56-62.

⁸ Detailed comments on the assignation of Stefan Wyszyński to the Lublin diocese cf.: P. Nitecki, „*Wiem jak godną stolicę obejmuję w dziedzictwie*”. *Biskup Stefan Wyszyński Pasterz Kościoła Lubelskiego*, Lublin 2012, p. 63-71.

leaving them however the choice with regard to who they should vote for⁹.

In the years 1948-1949, unlike his predecessor Cardinal August Hlond, he was ready to meet with President Bolesław Bierut, however, his openness met with the rejection of the communists.

„I was not far from beginning my work by making a visit to the President of the Republic. (...) Harassment of the police during my ingress to Gniezno, the behavior of the press, etc. – made me to adopt a waiting attitude „- he wrote after less than five years of his primacy, already imprisoned by the communists¹⁰.

In April 1950, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, in point 8 of the agreement with the government, accepted the following statement:

„The Catholic Church (...) will also fight the criminal activity of underground bands and will punish and stigmatise with canonical penalties clergy who are guilty of participating in any underground and anti-state action”¹¹

This confirms with no doubt that he accepted the actual exercise of power by the communists.

Let us remind you that the Holy See considered the controversial already the mere fact of the Polish Bishops' agreement with the communist government. The Primate of Poland explained his attitude in the following way: in this case the main objective was to conclude a *modus vivendi* with authorities who held actual power in Poland, not a permanent agreement with the state¹².

In the passage quoted above, as we can see, his *Prison Notes* included the analysis of the circumstances of the agreement of April

⁹ *Orędzie Episkopatu Polski w sprawie wyborów do Sejmu*, in: *Listy pasterskie Episkopatu Polski*, Paris 1975, p. 40-45. cf. remarks of P. Nitecki, „*Wiem jak godną stolicę*”, op.cit., s. 181.

¹⁰ Notes from September 27, 1953, S. Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne*, Warszawa 2006, p. 16-27.

¹¹ Agreement concluded between representatives of the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Polish Bishops, Kraków, 14 April 1950.

¹² Notes from September 27, 1953 r., S. Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne*, op. cit., p. 16-27.

1950 made by the imprisoned Primate, as well as a summary of its results. The Primate's conclusions seem to be as follows:

- a. the Primate did not question the legality of the communist authorities, he maintained contacts with them, considering them as legitimized Polish state authorities;
- b. he questioned however the ideological attitude of the authorities to the Church and society, and he also condemned their dependence on the USSR.

The analysis of this passage also confirms that Primate Wyszyński considered the priority of his actions to protect the Church and the Nation, for which the state (in this case the communist state) was on the one hand a form and an instrument of exercising power and at the same time an institutional partner.

These considerations should be complemented by the Primate's reflection on the temporary nature of a particular form of government – including the communist regimes. Already in prison – on January 17, 1954 – he wrote the following remarks, held in a kind of Aesopian style:

„A crow sat on the forehead of a haughty fir tree. (...) she gave a shout of victory. [...] this impertinence of crow is admirable. But the fir will not even budge. It does not seem to notice the crow. [...] after all [...] so many migratory birds stopped here. – Yet they are gone now and you will be gone too. This is not your place, [...] you make up for lack of bravery by shouting [...] You've got to suffer peacefully. You will crow out your boring, soulless, poor song and then sail away. [...] I will stay to calmly rise up. [...] Before you came here, there was a forest, and when you will be gone, there will still be a forest¹³”

It is clear, therefore, that the Primate was aware of the impermanent character of the system and ideology of the communist state.

In 1952, the Primate took part in elections to the Sejm, although he was fully aware that the general elections were a pure farce during the communist period. He made the following remark with regard

¹³ Notes from January 17, 1954, S. Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne*, op.cit., p. 67.

to this issue: „I vote as my conscience tells me. Because among the candidates whose names are on the electoral list I know only Mr. Bierut, I eliminate all other names. (...) It seems to me that this man „wants real Poland”. Although I have a fundamental objection with regard to the presence of the head of state during an event in Moscow. (...) I am coming back from the „elections” in an extremely sad mood. For people who have never understood the idea of elections – it’s all the same, they have never voted in a different way. But for people who know political life and programs, it’s a real slap”¹⁴.

Later he voted again in 1957, although in the following years he decided not to participate in these electoral acts, which were responsible of legitimization of the regime. As for the election act in 1957, let us quote characteristic passages of the daily notes of Card. Stefan Wyszyński. Commenting on the meeting with Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz, he wrote as follows: „Citizens are to fulfill their moral obligation and take part in the elections on that day. The clergy will guide the services in such a way so that everyone can fulfill their religious and civic obligation”¹⁵. Then he described the very circumstances of taking part in the election:

„Today is a day of elections to the Houses of Parliament. In the strict sense. However, society has a sense of opportunity. Voting cards were accepted, put into envelopes and then into electoral polls, without the use of curtains or partition screens, without elimination of particular names on the voting cards. I decided to go to the polling station in the evening. (...) I did not want to let it become a subject of sensation. With the consent of the Commission, the voting place was changed to the Palace of Pac. And here at 20.30 I placed my card to the ballot box. I have definitely eliminated the names of the Masons

¹⁴ Note from October 26, 1952, in: S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria 1948-1949, 1951-1952*, Warszawa 2017, p. 377.

¹⁵ Archiwum Archidiecezjalne Gnieźnieńskie (abbrev. AAG), S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, 14 January 1957.

and enemies of the Church. So i left the photo-reporters high and dry, although three of them managed to come”¹⁶.

It is worth noting that the Primate believed that it was justified that the communist politicians (including the Boleslaw Bierut, so valued by him, and whom he voted for in the 1952 election) by their dependence on the Soviet Union were rightly „exposed to the accusation of treason.” As the Primate had it: „Moscow creates governments in foreign countries, it undermines the sovereignty of these states, and by subordinating them to itself, it exposes people to the accusation of” treason”¹⁷.

Being aware of the ideological and moral threats that were associated with the domination of communists in the Polish state, Primate Wyszyński did not however urged Catholics to withdraw from holding public offices in the PRL – to introduce some Polish equivalent of the Italian non-expedit principle, despite the fact that he was aware of the consequences resulting from this fact for Catholics, that is their conflicts of conscience. In his speeches addressed to judges and soldiers – especially those from 1957 – in which he demanded that they should perform their duties in accordance with objective moral norms, with all the awareness of the ideological limitations they have been subjected to, have been preserved until today ¹⁸.

As indicated by his colleagues – Primate Wyszyński never publicly criticized Polish authorities abroad, and also carried out „self-censorship” of his homilies issued abroad, removing from their content all criticisms with regard to the Polish communist authorities.

However, the Primate was not indifferent to the fact which of the communists would exercise public powers in the PRL. In

¹⁶ AAG, S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, 20 January 1957.

¹⁷ Note from October 7-12, 1952, in: S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria 1948-1949, 1951-1952*, op.cit., p. 369.

¹⁸ Cf. eg. homily to soldiers, Card. S. Wyszyński, *Słowo Prymasa Polski do obrońców Ojczyzny*, Warszawa, 14 April 1957, in: idem, *Uświęcanie pracy zawodowej*, Paryż 1964, p. 324-330. Homilies to lawyers: idem, *Ład Niepokalanego Serca*, Częstochowa, 2 November 1957, in: idem, p. 258-264 and idem, *Duch męża sprawiedliwego*, Częstochowa, 3 November 1957, in: idem, p. 265-273.

a later period – specifically in December 1970, in the context of the communists' bloody suppression of workers demonstrations on the Coast – the Primate did not hesitate to criticize Józef Cyrankiewicz, the chairman of the Council of State, directly responsible for the armed intervention on the Coast: „After issuing the decree of the Presidium of the Government, Mr. Cyrankiewicz should hide [...]. Since he is black stain on this period of the workers' movement, against which he commanded to use military force. This can only be compensated by the complete resignation of Mr. Cyrankiewicz. Appointing him to the position of head State Council is tantamount to further provoking the workers.”¹⁹.

While a day later he added:

„In principle, he should have not accepted [the position of the chairman of the Council of State – remark of P. S.] because he is too discredited in the eyes of the society. It seems to me that this „president with bloody hands should not remain in power for a long time”²⁰.

In these fragments one can see very clearly the distinction between: society (Nation) and the Church on the one hand, the communist party, as the ideological force, which exercises power in the country and controls the state – on the other, and the state structures themselves. Though Primate Wyszyński met personally with the prime ministers of the government of the PRL, he clearly avoided meetings with the first secretaries of the Central Committee of the PZPR (although there were exemptions from this rule), as he considered this kind of activity as a form of legitimization of party structures.

Already in December 1970, the fear of Primate Wyszyński of the Soviet intervention clearly manifested itself – it was also visible at the next political crisis of the Polish People's Republic in the years 1980-1981. This could be partially explained by the fact that the Primate believed that Poland couldis not strong enough to stand another bloodshed intervention. He had maintained this conviction

¹⁹ AAG, S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, December 23, 1970, b. 576.

²⁰ AAG, S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, December 24, 1970, b. 579b.

from the beginning of his primacy²¹. At least since the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the Primate was also sure that the West would not intervene in Poland against the possible invasion of the Soviet army on a larger scale (on a smaller scale Soviet garrisons, after all, were already present on Polish territory). He was convinced, therefore, that the possible armed intervention of the Polish citizens against the communist regime is pointless.

During the „Solidarity” period, in a complicated situation caused by among other the Bydgoszcz crisis, on March 28, 1981, Primate Wyszynski, expressing reasonable fear of the Soviet intervention, in his speech to the representatives of the Nationwide Liaison Commission of NSZZ „Solidarity”, spoke about the ruling communist regime as follows:

„People who have incurred guilt, so to speak, can be given a moratorium, that is to say: we will get even with you later.”

While, with regard to the then situation of the communist Polish state, he claimed that:

„We abstain from using expensive means, as for example a general strike, which is easy to start, but it is very difficult to end. It is not possible to predict its consequences (...). For now we are still at home, but who will guarantee how long it will last? (...) Yet we have a moral obligation to be at home. We are responsible to assure our homeland, families, national culture, social peace and economy, that we can stay on our own for as long as possible. Unfortunately, we are dependent on the system. (...) These people are ready to defend their political systems in their countries, even at the expense of Poland”²².

²¹ He returned to this issue many times, cf. eg in 1953 he wrote: „I was of the opinion that today we need a different kind of martyrdom – the martyrdom of work, not the martyrdom of blood”(Notes from September 27, 1953, S. Wyszynski, *Zapiski więzienne*, op.cit., p. 16). He also held a similar position during the „Solidarity” period.

²² S. Wyszynski, *Wezwanie do odpowiedzialności i cierpliwości. Do przedstawicieli KKP „Solidarności”*, Warszawa, Miodowa, March 28, 1981, in: idem, *Kościół w służbie Narodu*, Rzym 1981, p. 255-258.

Basically, as we can see, the Primate distinguished between the regime of Polish communists and possible Soviet occupation, which he regarded as the ultimate evil. Although it must be noted that Cardinal Wyszyński set strategic goals for 'Solidarity' and its leaders: the necessity of building a just order consistent with the Church's teaching and expanding the state sovereignty of Poland, which of course was impossible within the structures of communist state, so the Primate probably assumed that a profound change in this matter could be made.

On April 2, 1981, he also addressed the representatives of „Solidarity” of Individual Farmers in the following words: „You must organize your structures, (...) train people for these tasks (...). And continue to work. Sooner or later, there will come the time, that not only social and professional objectives, but also the other ones will certainly be met by the powerful „Solidarity” movement.”²³.

An attempt to emphasize the need to expand the autonomy of the state with regard to communist party structures, which were dominating it ideologically – is also visible in a very interesting analysis of January 8, 1981, carried out by Cardinal Wyszyński for John Paul II²⁴.

The Primate regarded the issue of deep political change in the long term – he considered it possible, when taking into account the weakening of the Soviet domination and ideological domination of the Communist Party inside the country. He stressed, however, that one should not underestimate the brutality of the system, which was undergoing a mortal crisis. He compared it to the dying animal, which, however, can still bite painfully²⁵.

²³ Id., *Nie dać sobie wydrzeć ziemi! Do „Solidarności” wiejskiej rolników indywidualnych*, Warszawa, Miodowa, 2 kwietnia 1981 r., w: Tamże, s. 278.

²⁴ Archiwum Archidiecezjalne Warszawskie, Sekretariat Prymasa Polski, Korespondencja między kard. Stefanem Wyszyńskim a papieżem Janem Pawłem II, *List kard. S. Wyszyńskiego do Ojca św. wysłany przez kard. Dziwisza*, Warszawa, 8 stycznia 1981 r., k. 1-8.

²⁵ Ibidem.

So we can say that Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński distinguished in the public life of the Polish People's Republic between the state and its institutions, which he considered to be a form of the Polish state, an ideological apparatus of the Communist Party that controlled the state which he regarded as alien and hostile to both the Church as well as to the nation and the society, which was represented of course, by the Church itself, but also, for example, from August 1980, also by the activists and leaders of NSZZ „Solidarity”, legitimized through free elections within the trade union.

Though the distinction between the state and people, who actually held the power allowed him to accept the participation of Catholics in the public life of communist Poland, he was not able to accept their membership in the structures of the Communist Party.

Considering the Polish People's Republic as impaired and dependent, but nevertheless the as the form of the Polish state (leaving aside the question of bloody victims of a possible armed conflict), Primate considered the threat of Soviet intervention (or collective intervention of communist bloc states similar to the intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968) as the extreme danger. He divided the Communists into those more or less harmful (let us recall only the questions he posed in August and September 1980 about whether the successor of Edward Gierek would be better candidate for the position of a first secretary of PZPR). Primate Stefan Wyszyński regarded the Polish People's Republic as an imperfect form of the Polish state, but certainly not a sovereign state, because the stake was – in his opinion – to undertake continuous efforts in order to regain its sovereignty.

Summary

Card. Stefan Wyszyński, being both the Primate of Poland and the highest social authority, in the period of People's Republic of Poland, independent of the communist authorities, was an important point of reference influencing public opinions and social attitudes in our country. His attitude towards the state, which was the People's

Republic of Poland, is extremely important for understanding not only his decisions at particular stages of relations between the communist state and the Church, but also allows us to better understand the specific character of the PRL as a political system, its relationship with the communist party and with the Soviet center of the communist bloc, and to what extent it represented the Polish nation as a political community. Analysis of the Primate's attitude with regard to important political events (elections to the communist Sejm, his attitude to political breakthroughs and social events – especially social resistance against communist regime), supplemented with an analysis of the Primate's homiletics, allows me to formulate the thesis that the Primate of the Millennium considered the PRL as a Polish state, however he regarded it as degenerated through the structures of external dependence on the USSR and the ideological domination of the communist party – PZPR.

In conclusion, the People's Republic of Poland was a Polish state that fulfilled some of the needs of the Polish nation, regarded as a fundamental political community, but it was still far from being perfect. However, the fact that – in his view – People's Republic of Poland was actually the Polish state, was highly significant. It imposed on Catholics a moral obligation to participate in social life, in a space inaccessible to the communist party, and to undertake all efforts to prevent the threat of external military intervention of the USSR and its allies.

Key words: Card. Stefan Wyszyński, People's Republic of Poland, sovereignty, state-church relations

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Note about the author

dr hab. Paweł Skibiński (born in 1973) – historian, specialist in the history of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century and the recent history of Spain. Assistant professor at the Historical Institute of the University of Warsaw. Head of the Editorial Team of the publishing house of Card. Stefan Wyszyński's „Pro memoria”. He lives in Józefów, married with three children.