

BEATA MACKIEWICZ, MA.

The Primate's Institute of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński

## **THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PATRIOTIC TEACHING OF PRIMATE STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI. THE OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM**

During the entire period of his Primate's service Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was frequently returning to the issue of the world of women. He included this issue in the context of changing socio-economic conditions. Simultaneously he did not abide at the level of analysis, pure ideas, speculative thoughts and assumptions. In each of his speeches addressed to women, Primate of the Millennium imposed particular tasks, mapped out relevant programmes, which should be realised for years. He entrusted just this social group with the most important tasks – keeping guard over the fulfilment of Jasna Góra (Eng. Luminous Mount) Vows of Polish Nation from 26<sup>th</sup> August 1956, and this task was implemented in the programme of The Great Novena. Primate believed that particularly Polish women will realise this task, will be keeping guard on the fulfilment of obligations resulting from Jasna Góra (Eng. Luminous Mount) vows, and will save our national being in this way.

Such programmes could be mapped out and realised by the priest knowing a female world. The priest-community worker, not a theoretician. Someone, who experienced himself that women should be entrusted with many tasks and may be made high demands, and simultaneously someone, who knew about dangers, which they should wisely omit. The priest, who noticed the biggest task, which God gave a woman in his act of creation, or calling for maternity, could demand so much from the female world.

Yet before World War II, as a newly ordained priest, Stefan Wyszyński faced the problem of social advancement of women, who were leaving rural environments, were living in cities and were starting to work in factories. While working among working-class youth, at Christian Working-Class University in Włocławek and in the environment of young Lublin intelligentsia, priest Wyszyński became very familiar with the problems young women had to face. In his speeches in subsequent time, he will return to these moments, which he derived from his contacts with young people. He will keep on recollecting, among other, a postulate of academicians not to create separate formative groups for male and female youth<sup>1</sup>.

Simultaneously, during his PhD. studies priest Wyszyński became familiar with work of Maria Kleniewska – one of the most famous pre-war community workers – in Dratów and the so-called „Bratek” group<sup>2</sup>. These meetings brought a young priest closer to new environments. He could see the involvement of rich female landowners in work with girls coming from villages and educational work among young female landowners. Being an editor of “Priestly Ateneum”, he wrote, under a pseudonym of “Dr Zuzelski”, a review of two books for ladies, among others for Kazimiera Berkanówna, titled: *What’s the matter? A woman in an era of crisis*. He recommended these books “mostly for women-community workers”<sup>3</sup>.

A war wandering brought a priest professor to the world of women from other environments as well. Hiding within the property of Aleksander and Jadwiga Zamoyski in Kozłówka priest Stefan Wyszyński was a chaplain of sisters assistants of the Cross. He was

---

<sup>1</sup> For instance, on a national convention of Catholic Action in Cracow (5-6 II 1934) separate youth organisations, like in Italy, were formed: Catholic Union of Male Youth (Pol. KZMM) and Catholic Union of Female Youth (KZMŻ).

<sup>2</sup> S. Wyszyński, *Prison notes*, Warszawa 2008, p. 320.

<sup>3</sup> Dr Zuzelski [pseudonym of S. Wyszyński], [Każmira Berkanówna], „Priestly Ateneum” 1935, vol. 33, p. 328.

giving lectures to sisters, surrounding intelligentsia and landed gentry a Catholic social science<sup>4</sup>.

Later, during hiding in Laski, a priest professor was invited with readings, lectures and retreat for different Warsaw environments. Maria Okońska recollects this activity among women in such a way: “Priest Wyszyński was famous in the circles of Catholic Warsaw intelligentsia as one of the leading figures. He was giving lectures on Catholic sociology (...) was contacting with many groups. Ladies from aristocracy were involved in different works for the future, «when Poland explodes» as people used to say – and freedom will come. They thought that one should get prepared and gather energy to work after gaining independence. There was a group, for example, which was supposed to deal with workmen (...) There was other group, which was supposed to implement a Catholic agricultural reform. Jadzia Zamoyska from Kozłówka was acting there (...)”<sup>5</sup>.

There is an interesting way of impact a young priest had on particular groups of women, their involvement in the community work programmes, which were created in a difficult period of our national history. A young seminary professor and women, meeting secretly together and relying on Catholic social education, were bravely outlining future work after the war, as well as preparing such risky and energetic programmes.

One other example of the priest Stefan Wyszyński's impact on the young generation of women is a spiritual support over „A group of eight” (Pol. „Ósemka”), young girls from Sodality of Our Lady<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *An unusual guest. Priest Stefan Wyszyński hosted by Aleksander and Jadwiga Zamoyska in Kozłówka*, Kozłówka 2000.

<sup>5</sup> M. Okońska, *Through Mary everything for God. Memories 1920–1948*, Warszawa 2008, p. 127–128.

<sup>6</sup> The imprisoned Primate Wyszyński was writing on 31 v 1956 from Komańcza do father Alojzy Wrzalik: „I would like to give an authoritative statement in this letter than since 1942 a team is under my spiritual supervision, and I am informed about any important activities of the team” in ” [in:] S. Wyszyński, *Collected works*, vol. II, Warszawa 1995, p. 170.

Several days before the outbreak of Warsaw Uprising the girls from „A group of eight” (Pol. „Ósemka”) came to Laski, so that through seeking light in a prayer and conversation with priest Wyszyński, to make a decision about their participation in the Uprising. Maria Okońska was recalling – “I had terrible second thoughts and a complete darkness in making up my mind. I was sure of one thing that if are to join the Uprising, then not in the military force or in the sanitary service, but only in a religious and apostolic service, in compliance with our volitions and life task. But how? But what? After a long internal struggle, after never-ending prayers and meetings apparent and decisive certainly occurred: we are joining the Uprising with the visage of Black Madonna of Częstochowa. We will be telling people about Her, in tragic moments we will build confidence and hope (...) we will create a prayer unit in the Uprising”<sup>7</sup>.

Priest Wyszyński did not influence the decision the girls made<sup>8</sup>. When they asked, however, about his opinion, he told them that in 1920 he was doing his apostolic work, „walking as a seminary student from door to door with words of encouragement and hope, with images of Mother of God”<sup>9</sup>. The girls felt that a priest professor approved of their decision.

Many years later Primate Wyszyński during the retreat run for the Institute was recollecting the moment of joining the Uprising: “there was a dilemma, I remember, with weapon, or without it. (...) And, of course, we told one another: God forbid, without any gun in hand. – Because so many girls were going with guns and there were groups of wonderful girls, who simply learnt to shoot, to throw grenades, make them and other things, which caused death. I told a beautiful and wonderful girl (...) «after all you are chosen to bring new lives, how will you be shooting people. Is it possible at all?» (...) then, one thing was the most important, *primum vivere* – as they say – so we need to shoot everyone, and afterwards we will start

---

<sup>7</sup> M. Okońska, *Everthing through Mary*, op. cit., p. 151–152.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 150–151.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 153.

living. But this was something against nature, and Marysia's statement was right: we, as girls, take Her to our hand, the One we call *Vita, Dulcedo et Spes nostra* and we go to tell them about life. Our girls went from Laski and joined the Uprising with the image of Black Madonna of Częstochowa"<sup>10</sup>. Many memories of priest Primate also preserved from the period of the Uprising, how he helped wounded female runners in Kampinos Forest<sup>11</sup>.

In 1956 the imprisoned Primate Wyszyński noted down his memories from the beginnings of his community work. "I was boasting then in front of father Kornilowicz that I was carrying out work among men: I was teaching alumni in seminary, I was running Sodality of Kuyavia-Dobrzyn Landowners, I was working among Trade Unions. Maybe Father Kornilowicz perceived it as disapproval for him, as he said: «Beggars can't be choosers». (...) I understand it today even better, when all men in my vicinity fell silent – he was writing in Komańcza. I have not heard from them during my imprisonment"<sup>12</sup>.

The imprisonment period was the time that allowed Primate Wyszyński to get to know women better – female patriots, female Christians. Three years showed that there are dedicated women<sup>13</sup>.

Priest Wyszyński's sister, Stanisława, demonstrated great fortitude. She was sending letters and parcels<sup>14</sup>, was taking care of their sick father<sup>15</sup>, was getting passes to Komańcza<sup>16</sup>. The imprisoned Primate was very grateful for her: „While recollecting last two years, I see very well how far-reaching the letters from my younger sister, Stanisława, were for my spiritual balance and for my peace. God gave

<sup>10</sup> Archive of The Primatial Institute of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (hereinafter: AIPSKW), files: Retreat 1966, *Christly and Marian Church, Church of two hearts*, Warszawa, 19 VIII 1966, typescript, bp.

<sup>11</sup> S. Wyszyński, *Collected works*, vol. X, Warszawa 2012, p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, *Prison notes*, p. 320.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 322.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 146–147, 223–224, 285–287.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 184–185.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 325–326.

her incredible spiritual balance and female wisdom, with a great dose of bravery and great faith. All these values were radiating from her letters. Evidently, she must have been making lots of efforts to send me letters and parcels. I don't know how it looked like, but I realise it must have been related to huge risk and perhaps humiliations"<sup>17</sup>.

During priest Wyszyński's imprisonment Maria Okońska's team also were continually trying to contact priest Primate, e.g. by sending a creche for Christmas<sup>18</sup>.

Primal teaching directed to women may be described in three points: demonstrating appreciation of woman by the Christian world, tasks facing Polish women and social advancement and dangers related to it.

Cardinal Wyszyński often reminded that over the centuries only Christianity constituted a great field of public activity for women. He was giving examples, enumerating great foundresses of orders and congregations, worship expressed for saint female martyrs and virgins, e.g. enumerated in The Canon of Holy Mass, in Martyrologium, and mostly the role of Mary – Mother of God. He was talking about women, who were for long involved in Church missions, charity activities, catechisms and education.

He often reminded that Church as the first institution, provided social advancement for women<sup>19</sup>, emphasising her role and tasks. They were defined in the Book of Genesis. A woman, in God's mind, was equalized in rights with a man. Both received a mutual task from the Creator „to fill the earth and subdue it” [the Book of Genesis 1,28]. The generations found it challenging to reach this „heavenly benefit programme”<sup>20</sup>.

On 28<sup>th</sup> August 1957 in the paper *Christian and neopagan concepts of women*<sup>21</sup>, presented at the John Paul II Catholic University

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 285–286.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 61.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Collected works*, vol. XIII, Warszawa 2013, p. 190–193.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ibidem, p. 396.

<sup>21</sup> S. Wyszyński, *Collected works*, vol. III, Warszawa 1999, p. 399–412.

of Lublin, Cardinal Wyszyński analysed different dangers the female world faced, which he called pagan ones, among others, the influence of decline of religiousness on the distortion of the concept of woman. He also enumerated capitalism, which searched for cheap workforce, so it found work of women, „because of which a woman was hated in production environment, where interests of a male worker and a female worker intersect”<sup>22</sup>. Old, capitalist assumptions of industrial revolution – Primate Wyszyński stated – were updated also in the post-war era. They were taken over by the communist world, boasting about success in activating the female world. Primate Wyszyński was warning about the fashionable slogan in 1950s: “Women on tractors”, against work in heavy industry, because it caused occupational diseases, which will not allow a woman to transfer life, so realise her main volition. In talks with the government, he asserted about women’s good – decent work conditions <sup>23</sup>.

He indicated sensualism and depravity as the subsequent reasons for the distortion of the image of women. He was talking about fashion which considers beauty as what is not beauty at all. Some women uncompromisingly accept the assumptions of fashion designers. „The sentence that – priest Primate noticed – a woman has a remarkable sense of aestheticism seems to be an exaggeration. If she had it to a special extent, she certainly would not surrender to a fashion dictate, which sometimes makes a monster of her (...) When such types start walking in the city streets as if they just left a masquerade ball, then instead of interest we feel disgust”<sup>24</sup>. The afore-mentioned dangers comprise a problem of chastity, which was courageously addressed by Primate to youth in 1957<sup>25</sup>.

The speech from 15<sup>th</sup> September 1957 can be labelled as a methodical sermon to Polish women. Priest Primate entrusted them with an important task – concern about life of a nation. He stated

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 409–410.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 411.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 409.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 180–182, 436–437; Id., *Collected works*, vol. XIII, typescript, p. 257.

with anxiety that women forget about their great dignity, about being mothers of life, not death. He said then that the biggest danger for a nation is not eminent economic crisis, but this what harms life of a nation, in woman's dignity, which harms her modesty, which harms her chastity<sup>26</sup>.

Cardinal Wyszyński called Catholic women to women's crusade. Not to armed combat, army fight, but to „fight for souls, hearts, good wills, offerings and sacrifices”<sup>27</sup>. How should they fight? By the fulfilment of Jasna Góra (Eng. Luminous Mount) Vows of Polish Nation from 1956, namely, to guard a gift of grace in your heart, to protect life, inseparability of marriage, dignity of women, share soil crops and fruit of work, fight with national vices and gain virtues and continue worshiping Mother of God.

In his priestly teaching Cardinal Wyszyński was returning to the issue of social advancement of women. On 5<sup>th</sup> November 1964 in Roman Palazzo Pio he delivered a paper on international forum<sup>28</sup>. In his speech he said about the entrance of the female world into social, professional, economic and political life, about socio-economic conditions, which made women become more active. War, economic hardships after 1945 and emancipation caused that women kept leaving family environments and started their professional work, they started dealing with politics. Entering different areas of life, they had to breach “many old traditions, prejudices, reluctance, undeserved intellectual, social, professional, political discriminations, even within psychology and sexual pedagogy”<sup>29</sup>. In the Roman speech the Polish hierarch enumerated many good sides of these transitions, because certain areas of life could be entrusted only with women: upbringing, social service, psychological counselling. Women prepared by education and relevant studies became docents and professors. In 20<sup>th</sup> century – he stated – we do not have to ask if a woman is active in different areas

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, *Collected works*, vol. III, typescript, p. 427.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, , p. 428.

<sup>28</sup> Id., *Collected works*, vol. XIII, typescript, p. 387–398.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 394.



of life. The experiences of this century posed different questions: what kind of person this woman will be like, what should they offer young girls in an intellectual and spiritual formation?

He simultaneously pointed to dangers, e.g. involving women in social and political revolutions, in revolutionary activities, selecting them to be shock workers. “A lot of women – he stated – are registered in parties’ apparatuses. They are given exceptional tasks where one needs to demonstrate particular strength of feelings, passion, ardency in realising such tasks. Contemporary devotees, who were frightening during the French Revolution, are born. Women made painful recollection in the memory of their victims in many prisons and concentration camps. Liberated passions became strength destroying human life”<sup>30</sup>.

Being aware of dangers awakened in the souls of women in 20<sup>th</sup> century, Primate Wyszyński was looking for a role model, who was worth following. He was portraying Mary, Virgin and Mother to women. He was continually returning to this thought in his priestly teaching, not only in his Roman paper. He emphasised that the Church as an educator of mankind, portrays Mary and the mystery of her maternity. He warned women against degeneration of maternity, which is their highest dignity, the most precious contribution. Women must be aware of the value of maternity, they cannot be ashamed of it, they cannot destroy life, he particularly called for the protection of unborn children<sup>31</sup>.

Maternity was then laughed at, regarded as misfortune. Cardinal Wyszyński, against these tendencies, was preaching the value of maternity, because it teaches sensitivity, tenderness, protectiveness, sacrifice, which we all miss.

A woman should implement these values further into all areas of life, she should act in accordance with female nature, in a maternal way, namely she must preserve her feminine sensitivity, use properties of the psyche of female soul to make life hardships easier. She is

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 395.

<sup>31</sup> Id., *Collected works*, vol. XVII, Warszawa 2016, p. 360–361.

supposed to enrich public, social and cultural life by making it more human. All this made that Primate Wyszyński hoped for restoration of culture, so that it could become more human. “Perhaps then non-human world of steel forces will change into human world of open maternal arms, in which law will not be steel and fist, but love<sup>32</sup>. He called: „Our technology is threatened with being non-human. Reconcile people with life, and most of all keep guard – that is what we ask You about o over the future of our nature. Hold a man’s hand, who at the moment of rage would try to destroy human civilisation”<sup>33</sup>.

Priest Primate warned against building a too masculinised world. He said that war experiences distorted social relations: “Human life hardened as well as human voice, his nerves, sight and face. We cannot withdraw from it”<sup>34</sup>. Priest Primate saw a need of cooperation of male and female components to reach genuine culture in the contemporary world, more human, and simultaneously more divine. As an example, he used to provide cooperation of Jesus and Mary. He said that all virtues, personality features of man and woman must be harmonised to act jointly and guard against subsequent terrible disasters<sup>35</sup>.

Cardinal Wyszyński was also bravely talking about working time and salaries of women. He knew that well-educated women will be tempted with perspectives of new, better-paid jobs, subsequent specialisations and due to that they will not find sufficient time for family life. In 1979 he mentioned this issued again: “By accepting the necessity of work by professionally educated women and prepared for this job, I postulated that each woman could work part-time with her full-time salary, because her educating job in a family is also significant publicly, socially and nationally. And although no one will be able to pay her for her role as a mother in a family, because these are too high prices and values, then society must take it into account

---

<sup>32</sup> Id., *Collected works*, vol. XV, Warszawa 2017, p. 137.

<sup>33</sup> Id., *Collected works*, vol. XVI, Warszawa 2016, p. 151.

<sup>34</sup> Id., *Collected works*, vol. XIV, Warszawa 2016, p. 139.

<sup>35</sup> Id., *Collected works*, vol. XV, typescript, p. 136–137.

and appreciate it”<sup>36</sup>. This demand is still a challenge for economics and economy, also in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Primate Wyszyński was not only teaching but was involving women in the life of the Church. Women were working in the Secretary’s Office of Primate of Poland since 1959. The president of Polish Bishops’ Conference enabled nuns to study theology in Poland already at the beginning of 1960s. A well-educated catechistic staff was formed in this way. Wyszyński also demanded a good philosophical and theological education of women at the Second Vatican Council. On 27<sup>th</sup> February 1962 he took the floor during the proceedings over the scheme *De studiis academicis ab universitatibus tum catholicis tum ecclesiasticis provehendis*. He postulated to open new faculties of philosophy and theology for laymen, also for women, and to confer scientific titles to them: “Admission of laypersons to PhD. in theology, also women, is highly recommendable”<sup>37</sup>.

Since 1965 women were allowed to actively work in the committees of Polish Bishops’ Conference. At first to the Committee for Ministry of Families, subsequently to the Committee for Lay Apostolate. The members of the Ministrative Committee were recommended by Primate of Poland to activate “dormant female knights” in favour of the Church<sup>38</sup>.

During Christmas wafer-sharing meeting for curia employees, on 22nd December 1967, Primate Wyszyński was talking about women, who appeared in different committees, without any prejudice: „You deserve, my dear sisters and ladies, a little bit of attention, therefore, because you are a phenomenon, more and more numerous in the Church administration. You almost outclass us. (...) Today you are needed in the curial work and in the management and in doing a set of difficult and delicate tasks, which only you may honestly and

---

<sup>36</sup> Id., *Sources of Restoration*, Warszawa 1993, p. 162–163.

<sup>37</sup> Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, *Primate of Poland, Father of the Second Vatican Council 1962–1965. Selection of documents*, study by S. Wilk SDB, A. Wójcik, Lublin 2013, p. 126.

<sup>38</sup> S. Wyszyński, *Collected works*, vol. XV, typescript, p. 189.

diligently do with such precision and accuracy which for us, rulers of the world, is absolutely unaffordable”<sup>39</sup>.

As outlined in the introduction, Primate of the Millennium entrusted women with important tasks. He made them female wardens of vows taken in Jasna Góra (Eng. Luminous Mount), understanding that restoration of family and nation may occur mostly by means of women. He called this social group to defend life, to fight for sobriety of families, for peace, for diligence, for order of nation and family. Simultaneously priest Primate did not leave any illusions what kind of work is faced by women. He stated that they need to forget about themselves, because without sacrifice, without rejection, without ordeal, commitment, restoration will not take place. This programme for us for the future is still up-to-date. It is a challenge and a task for our conformist times.

### Summary

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in his Primatial teaching was often returning to the issue of the female world. This issue was discussed against changing socio-economic conditions. He did not remain, however, at the level of analysis, but entrusted women with specific tasks. He strongly emphasised the role of women, their tasks in a family, professional, social and even in political life. He entrusted this social group with keeping guard over the fulfilment of Jasna Góra (Eng. Luminous Mount) Vows of the Polish Nation from 1956. Thereby, he called women to defend life, accept life, to realise their main vocation – maternity. He stated that the future of nation is largely dependent on women, on the way of educating a young generation, transferred values. He also called women to fight for sobriety of their families, for order in these families. He thought that women should be involved in social and political life, although simultaneously he warned against dangers, which they have to wisely omit. Being aware of these dangers, Primate Wyszyński was looking for a role model, which would be worth imitating. He was portraying Mary, Virgin and Mother, Her cooperation with Jesus to them. He stated that the contemporary world also needs a harmonious cooperation of men and women.

---

<sup>39</sup> AIPSKW, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, *Authorised sermons and speeches 1967*, vol. XXVII, typescript, p. 460–461.

**Keywords:** Primate Stefan Wyszyński, woman, social advancement, equal rights, defence of life

### Bibliography

#### Archival sources

Archive of The Primate Institute of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, *Authorised sermons and speeches 1967*, vol. XXVII, typescript.  
Archive of The Primate Institute of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, files: Retreat 1966, typescript.

#### Printed sources

Dr Zuzelski [pseudonym of S. Wyszyński], [Każmira Berkanówna], „Priestly Ateneum” 1935, vol. XXXIII.  
Okońska M., *Through Mary all for God. Memories 1920–1948*, Warszawa 2008.  
*Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland, Father of the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965. Selection of documents*, study by S. Wilk SDB, A. Wójcik, Lublin 2013.  
Wyszyński S., *Collected works*, vol. II, Warszawa 1995.  
Wyszyński S., *Collected works*, vol. III, Warszawa 1999.  
Wyszyński S., *Collected works*, vol. X, Warszawa 2012.  
Wyszyński S., *Collected works*, vol. XIII, Warszawa 2013.  
Wyszyński S., *Collected works*, vol. XIV, Warszawa 2016.  
Wyszyński S., *Collected works*, vol. XV, Warszawa 2017.  
Wyszyński S., *Collected works*, vol. XVI, Warszawa 2016.  
Wyszyński S., *Collected works*, vol. XVII, Warszawa 2016.  
Wyszyński S., *Prison notes*, Warszawa 2008.  
Wyszyński S., *Sources of Restoration*, Warszawa 1993.

#### Studies

*An unusual guest. Priest Cardinal Wyszyński hosted by Aleksander and Jadwiga Zamoyski in Kozłówka*, Kozłówka 2000.