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PRIMATE WYSZYŃSKI TOWARDS POLISH WESTERN LANDS AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

As the consequence of the end of the Second World War and the decisions of Great Powers, Lands to the east of the Oder River and the Lusatian Neisse, which were within the borders of the Third Reich were granted for Poland, which simultaneously lost its lands of the Second Republic of Poland. Primate August Hlond, returning to Poland after the war wandering, unlike Polish political elites residing in London, immediately acknowledged the verdict of The Big Three on the Polish border as final and took up, based on special papal proxies, the formation of Polish Church administration in these areas, namely in Opole, Wrocław, Gorzów Wielkopolski and in Warmia, appointing apostolic administrators in this matter. These were very important and vital decision for the future of these areas¹. Thanks to them the Church relatively quickly organised a religious life of Polish people settling there, opened the temples,

¹ *On 20th anniversary of Church organisation in Warmia and in Western Lands*, Olsztyn 20.06.1965, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. XV, June-December 1965, Warszawa 2017, p.104.

appointed priest in priestly institutions and centred the faithful around them².

Bishop S. Wyszyński, who succeeded the office after the death of Cardinal A. Hlond, took responsibility, based on special proxies, also for the Church on the Regained Lands. He continued taking his line. He highly appreciated it in his numerous statements and documents, referring to the decisions of his predecessor in the issue discussed.³ In his opinion, Cardinal August Hlond „sensed Polish reason of state very well sending Polish priests to the temples as soon as possible and creating a new hierarchy. He bound these lands with Polish Catholic hierarchy⁴.

Being directly responsible for the situation of the Catholic Church on the Western Lands he went on visiting inspections at the invitation of the governors of these administrations. He did it twice, three times a year. Such inspections, more than dozen, sometimes taking the entire week, took place until his arrest in September 1953. He paid visits to apostolic administrators (after 1951), to vicar capitulars, during which he discussed current issues with them and was arranging the schedule of administration work⁵. He visited town, cities and villages of apostolic administrations of the Western Lands. He participated in church ceremonies, giving sermon on these occasions (there were over two hundred of them).

² *From Lubusz Land to Neisse. The conversation of the journalist Jerzy Turowicz with Primate of Poland*, Gniezno 29.11.1951, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. I, 1949-1953, Warszawa 1991, p.177.

³ *On 20th anniversary of the organisation*, op. cit., p. 104; „*Beati oculi, qui vident*”. *Te Deum of 20th anniversary in Wrocław*, Wrocław 31.08.1965, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. XV, p. 208; *In memoria aeterna erit iustus, ab auditione mala non timebit*, Rome 21.10.1964, in: Id., *The collected works*, vol. XIII, June-December 1964, Warszawa 2014, p. 372-373; *The speech delivered in St. Boniface church in Wrocław at the memorial service on 1st anniversary of the death of the late priest Primate August Hlond*, in: Id., *The collected works*, vol. 1, p. 56.

⁴ „*Beati oculi, qui vident*”, op. cit., p.208; *The speech delivered in St. Boniface church*, op. cit., p. 57.

⁵ S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. 1 1948-1952, ed. P. Skibiński, Warszawa 2017, p. 41.

The first tour of this kind already took place in October 1949⁶. In his notes during his journey in these lands in November 1951 he wrote down: „For five days I worked with clergy of the diocese of Opole: in the cathedral of Opole, in the temples of Bytom, Zabrze, Gliwice, Racibórz and in the cathedral of Neisse”⁷. After his release Primate visited the Western Lands again. He was there on the 20th anniversary of Polish Church administration, the Millennium, or on the occasion of a quarter of a century of the institution of Polish Church administration⁸. Primate made his last journey in August 1980 to Wambierzyce on the occasion of the coronation of the statue of Mother of God.

Primate was vividly interested in each symptom of solidifying life of the nation and the Church in the Western Lands⁹. Thanks to frequent visitations he knew Church, social and national reality in this area very well. On the lands assigned to Poland, he noticed an important role of the Church – the uniting mission in peace, reuniting them with “motherland”. He thought that “the Polish Church understood this historical moment for itself, this “Catholic reason of state” in the Polish reason of state. [...] it became a refreshing spirit and inspiration to work on the Western Lands”¹⁰. Although many factors assisted in integrating nine million inhabitants of these land, however, it was the Church – in his opinion – which was the most significant factor. He reminded us that the Polish settlers “did not want to take up new jobs until they did not have their priestly care guaranteed. They started their social life only when Catholic priests

⁶ *From Lubusz Land to Neisse*, op. cit., p. 176.

⁷ S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 37-50.

⁸ *The excerpts from the speech to academic youth of Wrocław*, Wrocław 2.04.1957, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. III, 1956-1957, Warszawa 1999, p. 177; „*Beati oculi, qui vident*”, op.cit., p. 204.

⁹ *From Lubusz Land to Neisse*, op. cit., p. 176; S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 39 *The excerpts from the speech to academic youth*, op. cit., p.177.

¹⁰ *The speech delivered in St. Boniface church*, op. cit., p. 57; S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 236

were opening the temples”¹¹. In his numerous statement Primate emphasised the role of the Church in stabilisation and development of the western lands for Poland and in the creation of post-war society, in binding people together, regardless of their origin and beliefs¹². He appreciated the role of clergy. In his opinion priestly work in these areas united these lands more tightly with the entire Catholic Poland than erstwhile Bolesław I the Brave’s iron posts¹³. S. Wyszyński noticed a considerable role of Polish clergy in re-Catholicisation and in the formation of a new image of these lands settled by Polish alluvial people from different parts of Poland and from abroad as well. He was aware that priests were creating social bonds of these alluvial people at the churches¹⁴. The task for the Church in these areas was not seen by him in the political activity, but in the developed priestly work in favour of these Catholics¹⁵. He appealed to the priests of Lower Silesia to work peacefully, to be faithful to old Polish traditions “of uniting the nation by Christly faith”, staying most of all at the altar and pulpit, because it is the right place and task of the Polish priest. They will contribute best to “souls and nation”¹⁶. He also encouraged them

¹¹ *A pastoral letter of Polish bishops on the occasion of 20th anniversary of the institution of Church life on the Western and Northern Lands*, Warszawa 23.06.1965, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 379.

¹² *On 20th anniversary of the institution of the Church organisation on the Western and Northern Lands*, op. cit., p. 106; *A pastoral letter of Polish bishops on the occasion of 20th anniversary of the institution of Church life on the Western and Northern Lands*, Warszawa 23.06.1965 r., in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 380.

¹³ *To the clergy of Lower Silesia*, Warszawa 4.11.1950., in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 122

¹⁴ *The speech delivered in St. Boniface church*, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 57.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 58; *On 20th anniversary of the Church institution in Warmia*, op. cit., p. 106.

¹⁶ *To the clergy of Lower Silesia*, op. cit., p.122; S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol.1, op. cit., p. 41.

to be supportive for this community of the Western lands stepping into the future¹⁷.

Primate was not doubtful that these lands fairly belonged to Poland¹⁸. His view on these lands were expressed by him in numerous pastoral letters, speeches and sermons¹⁹. He perceived the assignment of these lands to Poland as not only the acceptance of historical rights, but also as „Divine restitution”, as an expression of justice for Poland being harmed by the German occupier, and not a political game. It – in his opinion – give back to us, in return for destroyed temples of Warsaw, the churches built by our great-grandfathers in the Western Lands”²⁰. He saw a warning for „vicious nations” in this fact [...] so that these nations refrained from their war efforts, because they will not avoid punishment. German Catholics must understand that justice for the harm done to the world during the war will not be painless²¹. He perceived the return to these lands as the return of homeland to “its inherited rights”²².

Raising an issue of the western lands, he was referring to Piast past of these lands – „Our fathers on the Piast land of Lower Silesia – Piast princes and knights – erected mountainous temples for God. And You came back to them, as if children after a long wander to the doorsteps of your habitation”²³. In his other statement he emphasised that „Poland returned to its Piast trails, where it was a fixture of its existence, its work and its culture”²⁴.

¹⁷ *On 20th anniversary of the Church institution in Warmia*, p. 105.

¹⁸ *A pastoral letter of Polish bishops*, op. cit., p. 379.

¹⁹ S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol.1, op. cit., p. 79.

²⁰ *The letter to the Holy Father, Rome 8.04.1951*, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol.1, op. cit., p. 145; S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol.1, op. cit., p. 49.

²¹ *From Lubusz Land to Neisse*, op. cit., p.179.

²² *Ibidem*, p.101.

²³ *To the clergy of Lower Silesia*, op. cit., p.122; *The speech delivered in St. Boniface church*, *Ibidem*, p. 57.

²⁴ *In momoria aeterna erit iustus*, op. cit., p. 372.

At the beginning of his Primatial service, Primate repeatedly gave expression to the conviction that he believed in the future of Poland in the Western Lands²⁵.

He realised that often helpless people, mistreated by years of captivity, terror and wanderings arrived on these lands and settled them. They were afraid of the unknown future²⁶. He admired them and their tough life. He understood their fears, loss of their current little homeland. He saw effort new residents made in rebuilding and domestication of these areas after 1945²⁷ and breaking their fear and gaining confidence in their further future on these lands, overcoming their mental temporality thanks to the service of the Church²⁸. Therefore, he motivated priests to a priestly effort for these people²⁹.

During his visits on these lands in his speeches and sermons he reassured and encouraged these alluvial people³⁰. He appealed so that here, on these old Piast lands they lasted, subdue this land and build a better future³¹. He called them to believe in „historical moment of the nation on these lands” and to love this land³². He appealed to inhabitants to recognise this historical moment and take advantage of this opportunity and fulfil their task (not only on their personal life but also for their nation). He called for responsibility, faith in the future, ability to sacrifice, spirit of offering, efficiency of work³³. He sensitised the Catholic community to social, professional and economic duties. He called this community to work for the better future of Poland, as the fulfilment of love of their homeland, whose borders reached the Oder River and Lusatian Neisse and to use so much “power so that by their will and work and love it could be

²⁵ *From Lubusz Land to Neisse*, op. cit., p. 177

²⁶ „*A pastoral letter of Polish bishops*”, op. cit., p. 377.

²⁷ *The excerpts from the speech to academic youth*, op. cit., p.177.

²⁸ „*A pastoral letter of Polish bishops*”, op. cit., p. 377.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *To the clergy of Lower Silesia*, op. cit., p. 122.

³¹ S. Wszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol.1, op. cit., p. 235.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 236

³³ *From Lubusz Land to Neisse*, op. cit. p. 180.

rooted in their Piast land, which was faithfully storing the ashes of our history”³⁴.

He also paid attention to the young generation of Poles. During the meeting with youth in Wrocław he addressed them with this message: “you are this generation, which will be planting a new grain in the regained Polish land in the next millennium of the Polish nation and in the millennium of Polish Christianity”³⁵.

Primate’s view on the case of the Western Lands was the same as the society’s, that they belong to us, following our innate justice, and that they are integrally related to our Homeland³⁶. They were repeatedly preaching that „the case of the territory of Homeland is a condition of the very existence of the country. He never questioned the case of the border on the Oder River and the Neisse River, regarding this state of the current possession as “to be or not to be” of this country” It was also confirmed in the third point of the agreement between the state and the Church of 14th April 1050 – “Polish Bishops’ Conference states that both economic, historical, cultural, religious rights and historical justice require that the Regained Lands belonged to Poland forever”³⁷.

Primate, in his interview for *The Catholic Weekly* published on 16th December 1951, said that his attitude as well as Polish Bishops’ Conference in the case of the Western Lands of Poland is identical as the one expressed by the government or the society³⁸. He noted in his diary – „We accomplished historical pacts, which we consider beneficial for Poland by the River Oder and the Neisse. They cannot be erased from history”³⁹. The nomination and installation of the renewed chapter of Wrocław on 29th May 1952 was the evidence of the approval

³⁴ *Primate S. Wyszyński’s letter to the editorial office of The Catholic Weekly, Gniezno in November 1952*, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 208.

³⁵ *The excerpts from the speech to academic youth*, op. cit., p.178.

³⁶ *On 20th anniversary of the Church institution in Warmia*, op. cit., p. 104.

³⁷ *From Lubusz Land to Neisse*, op. cit., p.177.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p.178

³⁹ S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol.1, op. cit., p. 80.

of the Western Lands as Polish ones. Primate realised that it was a very brave step and that it would be the subject of tensions in the country and in Germany⁴⁰.

Although Primate expressed his opinion many times on the rights of Poland to the Western Lands in the spirit of Polish reason of state, the communists kept attacking him and accusing him of being silent in these issues⁴¹. The false ascertainments „that bishops are against Polish borders by the River Oder and the Neisse” kept frequently appearing in the press⁴². Primate was surprised and hurt by this, because the Western press agencies noticed his 17 statements in different languages about the legitimacy of granting these lands to Poland⁴³. He reproached these lies in his letters to the communist authorities⁴⁴. He profoundly expressed his views on the Western Lands in his letter to Cyrankiewicz in August 1954⁴⁵. The thought that in case of the defence of status quo the role of Polish Bishops’ Conference is not „to give declarations and speak during mass meetings, because it is rather the role of diplomats and politicians. On the other hand, Catholics as members of a national community are supposed to fulfil their duty towards the defence of the rights of Poland related to the Western Lands”⁴⁶.

Cardinal S. Wyszyński deplored the policy of the Polish communists towards the Church in these areas. In his opinion unfriendly, or even hostile activities of the communists towards

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 233.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p.76; *Primate S. Wyszyński’s letter to the Prime Minister B. Bierut, Kraków 8.05.1953*, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 254; S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol.I, op. cit., p. 79.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 79.

⁴³ *Divine forces in global policy*, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. XVI January-April 1966, Częstochowa 2016, p. 215.

⁴⁴ *Primate S. Wyszyński’s letter to the Prime Minister B. Bierut, Kraków 8.05.1953 r.*, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 253.

⁴⁵ *Primate S. Wyszyński’s letter to the Prime Minister of Polish government of the Polish People’s Republic, Stoczek next to Lidzbark Warmiński 2.08.1954*, in: S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. II, 1953-1956, Warszawa 1995, p. 240-242.

⁴⁶ *From Lubusz Land to Nisse*, op. cit., p.179

the Church, were short-term and they detracted Polish reason of state in these areas⁴⁷. The removal of apostolic administrators from these areas in 1951 by the communists at the moment when the Holy See nominated bishops there with their obligations to reside as well as not allowing them to take up their functions, was regarded by him as deadly for Polish reason of state⁴⁸. He noticed dumbness of the communists, who were informatively predicating the policy of strict relations of the Western Lands, in particular of Silesia with the rest of the country, simultaneously prohibiting to print Catholic magazines, brochures, books in Polish, so essential for re-Polonisation. In this way they forced the local people to search for religious readings in German⁴⁹. Moreover, in his opinion these lands particularly suffered as a result of liquidation of numerous social and charitable institutions. In this way they spread the worst opinion about Poland among indigenous people and provided arguments for German revisionists⁵⁰. The results of this policy quickly set in⁵¹. The return of German language was the result Cardinal Wyszyński kept warning about. It also caused anxiety among political authorities⁵². Also, in Primate's opinion, the decree of 9 II 1953 profoundly affected Polish clergy working in the Western Lands, „because priests, well-deserved here for Polishness, became its victims. They were working there since the first days of the return of Poland to the Regained Lands”⁵³.

Primate noticed the effects of confusing policy of the communists towards Silesian people in Opole region. He saw that the encounter of indigenous people with Poland by communism must have been disastrous for Poland, which identified everything, which was Polish, with communism⁵⁴. During one of his visits in this area he

⁴⁷ *Primate S. Wyszyński's letter to the Prime Minister B. Bierut*, op. cit., p. 253.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 253.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 256-257.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 253.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 256-257.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 253.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p.254.

⁵⁴ S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 255.

addressed the local priests in such a way: „Do not have regrets for the capital [...] Distinguish a confusing doctrine from Poland. Poland is not your enemy, just a blind doctrine, bluntly used by the machinery of state. Empathise with a historical moment of Poland in these lands [...] It seems that at this moment I fulfil a momentous task of tying jagged knots with Poland”⁵⁵. In his opinion – what is worth reminding – „the biggest terror for the people of Silesia is not in the shouts of German propaganda, but in the methods of governing these people”⁵⁶.

Primate was also firmly reacting to the plan of communists to liquidate the administration of Opole and Gorzów and their incorporation into Wrocław⁵⁷. Primate perceived the intention to liquidate these two apostolic administrations as lack of Polish political reason and the activity of foreign forces. He thought that „the connection of two dioceses would equal to the blight of the Polish path in the Western Lands and the return on the German path. The entire heritage of Polish clergy would be destroyed. The revisionists would gain a huge argument that Poland does not feel firm enough, because it destroys its own heritage; they would gain [...] an incentive to their speeches in Rome and in the international arena”⁵⁸.

In his opinion, such activities denote a betrayal of Polish reason of state, spiritual impairing of local community, which he could not agree with and preferred his imprisonment „than deserving to be called a traitor”⁵⁹.

He was worried, at the beginning of 1950, about the fierce revisionist and anti-Polish campaign in Federal Republic of Germany against the border by the River Oder and Nisse, in which German clergy participated together with secular Catholics⁶⁰. He evaluated

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 45.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ S. Wyszynski, *Pro memoria*, vol. 2, 1953, ed. E. Czaczkowska, Warszawa 2017, p. 93.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p.127

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ *From Lubusz Land to Nisse*, op. cit., p.178.

them in such a way in his notes: „the voices on the German parts against the rights of Poland to the Western Lands keep increasing for long. [...] The protest will not help much here, they will not block the opponents. The response is the only one: peaceful work each day, worth only the Nation, certain of its right. The more of such work – the stronger the rights”⁶¹. He thought, however, that Poles have the right to expect something else from a German nation, and particularly from German Catholics. He believed they should be aware of the enormity of harm their country caused to Polish statehood, its national culture during this war⁶². Primate’s journeys to the Western Land were also the expression of support of the Church for the rights of Poland to these lands⁶³. Against the communists, Primate assumed that the attitude of Polish Bishops’ Conference towards a German revisionism and anti-Polish activities in Germany “cannot be political, but religious”⁶⁴. The most appropriate and the most efficient way of expressing support of the Church for the rights of Poland to the Western Lands was perceived by Primate as the peaceful presence and work of the Church among these people, and not during protests or mass meetings⁶⁵.

We may find out about Primate S. Wyszyński’s attitude to the Western Lands from his activities in the Vatican in favour of Polish Church administration in the Western Lands. In his talks with Pius XII < John XXIII, Paul VI he mentioned the case of Polish presence in these areas and the final canonical regulations in this respect⁶⁶. He did not spare time to appropriately describe this in Rome⁶⁷. In „Memorial” to Pius XII in October 1950 he indicated that „the return of Poland by the River Oder and Neisse is also the return

⁶¹ S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol.1, op. cit., p. 41.

⁶² *From Lubusz Land to Neisse*, op. cit., p. 179.

⁶³ S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol.1, op. cit., p.38.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ *From Lubusz Land to Neisse*, op. cit., p. 179; S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol.1, op. cit., p. 49.

⁶⁶ *On 20th anniversary of the Church institution in Warmia*, op. cit., p. 104.

⁶⁷ *From Lubusz Land to Neisse*, op. cit., p. 178.

of the Church to the lands erstwhile influenced by Protestantism⁶⁸. He repeatedly emphasised the favourable attitude of the Holy See in case of the Western Lands and defended the Holy See in his public speeches in this respect⁶⁹. Thanks to his advances, Pope Pius XII appointed bishops for these areas, and Pope Paul VII eventually regulated this case in 1972⁷⁰.

The Western Lands of Poland were the subject of Primate S. Wyszyński's continual concern. He proved in his service and teaching that these lands were fairly assigned to Poland as the recognition of its historical rights and restitution for harm caused to Poland during the Second World War. He encouraged new Polish inhabitants of these lands and appealed to them, so that on these old Piast lands they could last and work for their development.

Summary

Primate S. Wyszyński was interested in each symptom of social and religious life of the society in the Western Lands. Thanks to his frequent visitations he knew Church, social and national reality in this area very well. He also noticed an important role of the Church in its mission to unite these lands with "homeland". Primate was not doubtful that these lands fairly belonged to Poland. The assignment of these lands to Poland was perceived by him as not only the recognition of historical rights, but also as "Divine restitution", as an expression of justice for Poland being harmed by the German occupier, and not a political game. In his speeches and sermons, he reassured and encouraged its inhabitants. He called them to last here, on these old Piast lands, and believe in „historical moment of the nation on these lands” and to love this land. Primate noticed the effects of confusing policy of the communists towards Silesian people in Opole region. He saw that the encounter of indigenous people with Poland by communism must have been disastrous for Poland, which identified everything, which was Polish, with communism.

Keywords: Western Lands, Primate S. Wyszyński, Church, German revisionism, communist authorities

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ *From Lubusz Land to Neisse*, p. 178.

⁷⁰ S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 127.

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