

WOJCIECH KUCHARSKI, PH.D.

“Remembrance and Future” Centre

## **WESTERN AND NORTHERN LANDS AS POLISH REASON OF STATE IN THE THOUGHT AND ACTIVITIES OF PRIMATE STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI IN THE YEARS 1948-1972 (WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON ARCHDIOCESE OF WROCŁAW)**

The establishment of permanent, Polish Church organisation in the Western and Northern Lands belonged to the most significant tasks, which Stefan Wyszyński set up before his Primateship. He regarded the Polish presence on these areas as the Polish reason of state. The objective of this article is the demonstration of activities he did on the point of stabilising the Polish Church in the Western Lands and the presentation in what way he proved the Polish rights to these lands, with particular emphasis on Wrocław and the archdiocese of Wrocław. The chronological scope of the study presented is related to, on the one hand with his Primatial nomination, and on the other hand, with the announcement of the apostolic constitution *Episcoporum Poloniae coetus*. The notes from Primate Wyszyński's diary *Pro memoria*, the published texts of his speeches and sermons delivered in Wrocław and the notes in „Annuario Pontificio” constitute the source reference of this article.

Primate Stefan Wyszyński inherited responsibility for the Church in the Western and Northern Lands after Primate August Hlond, who already in 1945 caused that the foundations of Polish Church

structures were formed in this area<sup>1</sup>. It is worth noticing that re-Polonisation was also followed by re-Catholicisation of this area<sup>2</sup>. We should add here that when the current bishop of Lublin succeeded to a Primatial capital, the situation of the Church in the Western Lands was still very difficult. A big number of sanctuaries was destroyed, too small a number of priests made the organisation of priesthood difficult, and lack of final legal-canonical regulations was used by the communist authorities as a pretext to take over the property rights to Church properties in these areas.

Primate Wyszyński incredibly briefly formulated his view on the Western Lands during one of his first visits in this area. After confirmation of youth in Cybinka to the Oder on 10 XI 1951, he wrote about the reason of his visit in this place: “I am responsible before God, the Church and the Holy Father for Your path to God. [...] The Holy See ordered me to care about the Western Lands of Poland. Not only Christian love, but also justice tell me to be here”<sup>3</sup>. Already then Primate formulated a concept, alternative for the communist authorities, of legitimising the Polish presence on these former German areas. He based it not on historical arguments (the Piast past), but on religious ones. “The voices on the German part against the rights of Poland to the Western Lands are becoming more and more intense for long. [...] The response only worth the nation, certain of its rights, is peaceful work each day. The more of this work – the stronger the rights”<sup>4</sup>.

Primate also thought that the Western Lands are the relevant compensation for the losses incurred by Poland during the war. He wrote the words about this issue to Mons. Domenico Tardini: „When the Polish society recollects today the terrible war experiences

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<sup>1</sup> J. Pietrzak, *The comprehensiveness of Primateship: last years of Primate of Poland cardinal August Hlond 1945-1948*, Poznań 2009, vol. 2, passim.

<sup>2</sup> Cz. Osękowski, *The society of Western and Northern Poland in the years 1945-1956. The integration and disintegration processes*, Zielona Góra 1994, p. 210-234.

<sup>3</sup> S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, ed. P. Skibiński, Gniezno -Warszawa 2017, vol. 1 (1948-1952), p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.

of the nation under German occupation, when it looks at its demolished towns and cities and camp cemeteries, then it is confirmed in its opinion that the return of Poland to old Polish lands by the Oder and Neisse is an expression of divine justice and compensation for the damage experienced”<sup>5</sup>.

The authorities attempted to take advantage of the unregulated legal-canonical status of the Church organisation in this area to stir a conflict between Polish bishops and the Holy See. On 26 I 1951 the government announced “the liquidation of the state of temporality in the Church administration in the Western Lands in the form of apostolic administrations”, relying on non-fulfilment of decisions of the agreement from April 1950 by Polish Bishops’ Conference<sup>6</sup>. As a result of this decision all apostolic administrators (priest Karol Milik was in Wrocław<sup>7</sup>) were forced out of the area of administrations. The vicar capitulars were nominated in lieu of them, who were ready to cooperate with the authorities<sup>8</sup>.

Primate faced a serious problem then: either to sanction a new, Church organisation in the Western Lands, imposed by the authorities, or to risk a schism and the inception of the national Church, dependent on the state. He eventually decided to sanction the nomination of the vicar capitulars. Only with reference to Wrocław, he suggested to nominate bishop Herbert Bednorz instead of priest Kazimierz Lagosz<sup>9</sup>. The authorities, however, did not agree with this request<sup>10</sup>. On

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<sup>5</sup> J. Żaryn., *The unknown letter of Primate Stefan Wyszyński to the Holy See in case of the so-called agreement with the government of 14<sup>th</sup> April 1950*, „Poland 1944/45-1989. Studies and Materials”, vol. 2 (1996), p. 306.

<sup>6</sup> P. Raina, *The Church in Polish People’s Republic. The Catholic Church and the state in the light of documents, 1945-1989*, vol. 1, Poznań 1994 p. 283.

<sup>7</sup> J. Pater, *Mitred prelate Karol Milik, PhD., as a ruler of the archdiocese of Wrocław in the years 1945-1951*, Wrocław 2012, p. 249–252.

<sup>8</sup> Z. Zieliński, *The Church in Poland 1944-2007*, Poznań 2009, p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> P. Raina, *The Church in Polish People’s Republic*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 285.

<sup>10</sup> S. A. Bogaczewicz, *Appointing priest Kazimierza Lagosz a vicar capitular and the actions of security service towards the curia of Wrocław in the years 1951–1956*, [in:] *Security service towards episcopal curias in Poland*, ed. A. Dziurok, Warszawa 2009, p. 415–417.

8<sup>th</sup> February Polish Bishops' Conference gave a statement informing that Primate gave consent for the canonical jurisdiction of the aforementioned vicar capitulars<sup>11</sup>.

In March 1951 Primate additionally issued decrees allowing the vicar capitulars to nominate Polish administrators of parishes in the Western and Northern Lands to become fully-fledged parish priests<sup>12</sup>. Benefitting from these entitlements and referring to the records of canon law – the obligation of residence (canon 188 pt. 8) priest Lagosz already on 7<sup>th</sup> March removed all German parish priests from their benefices.

In April 1951 he went to Rome, where he obtained a papal acceptance for his activities and episcopal nominations for three removed apostolic administrators: Bolesław Kominek, Edmund Nowicki and Teodor Bensch. It was decided then that Kominek will be the future bishop in Wrocław<sup>13</sup>.

Primate Wyszyński as a bishop responsible for the Church in the Western Lands was repeatedly in these areas, not only because of his visitations, but mostly to complete his episcopal duties. He participated in the ceremony of consecrating a cathedral of Wrocław in the middle of 1951<sup>14</sup>, and, at the end of the year, he was again in Wrocław to consecrate priests<sup>15</sup>.

In the middle of 1952, responding to priest Lagosz's requests, Primate made a decision related to the reactivation of a cathedral chapter in Wrocław. It was rather risky, as German cathedral canons

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<sup>11</sup> J. Pater, *Bishops in the Western and Northern Lands as vicar generals of Primate Wyszyński*, [in:] *Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński towards the Western and Northern Lands and Polish-German relations. On 100<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary of Primate of the Millennium*, ed. T. Dzwonkowski, C. Osekowski, Warszawa-Poznań-Zielona Góra 2001, p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> B. Kominek, *In the service of „The Western Lands”*, J. Krucina selected it from a post-humous file, Wrocław 1977, p. 108-109.

<sup>14</sup> W. Szetelnicki, *The restoration of churches in Archdiocese of Wrocław in the years 1945-1972. The role of clergy and the faithful*, Rome 1975, p. 116-117.

<sup>15</sup> S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 79.

were still alive<sup>16</sup>. It was not a secret either that priest Lagosz aimed at obtaining an episcopal consecration<sup>17</sup>, and before the Second World War a cathedral chapter of Wrocław was entitled to elect a bishop. Primate was of the opinion, however, that the needs of the Church and the Polish reason of state required this act<sup>18</sup>. After appointing a chapter, Primate forced the cathedra canons to elect priest Lagosz to be their provost and a vicar capitular, legalising status quo<sup>19</sup>.

After arresting Primate in 1953, the actions regarding the stabilisation of the Church administration in the Western Lands slowed down considerably.

On the rise of October thaw in 1956, as a result of the agreement with Polish Bishops' Conference, on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1956 the government adopted a resolution allowing for filling in apostolic administrations in the Western and Northern Lands with legitimate bishops. Then, Bolesław Kominek became a bishop in Wrocław<sup>20</sup>. On the same day Primate issued nomination decrees for the afore-mentioned bishops, calling them 'special delegates'<sup>21</sup>. Although it was not defined whose delegates the nominated bishops became, there is no doubt that they were Primate's delegates. The Holy See adopted a similar clarification. It is explained by the footnote next to the entry 'Wrocław' – published in 'Annuario Pontificio' of 1958, in which it was emphasised that the Holy See, due to the unregulated legal and international situation

<sup>16</sup> J. Pater, *Bishops in the Western Lands*, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> S. A. Bogaczewicz, *The episcopal consecration of priest Kazimierz Lagosz*, op. cit., p. 419.

<sup>18</sup> S. Wszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>19</sup> W. Szetelnicki, *The metropolitan chapter in Wrocław in the years 1952-1993*, Wrocław 1994, p. 29-31; In 1951 priest Kazimierz Lagosz was elected vicar capitular under coercion by one of the canons of a cathedral chapter – priest Franciszek Niedźbała. Therefore, Primate considered this election invalid and weakening the legitimacy of the Polish Church authorities in Wrocław.

<sup>20</sup> Z. Zieliński, *Church in Poland 1944-2007*, op. cit., p. 108–110.

<sup>21</sup> *The executive decree of Monsignor Primate of Poland Electing His Excellency Priest Bolesław Kominek, PhD. Bishop in Wrocław*, „Wrocław Church News”, 5-12 (1957), no. 1-2, p. 1-2.

in the lands of western and northern Poland, assigned a task for Cardinal Wyszyński to take appropriate priestly care in this area and it nominated four bishops to fulfil this tasks, namely: Franciszek Jop in Opole, Tomasz Wilczyński in Warmia, Bolesław Kominek in Wrocław and Teodor Bensch in Gorzów Wielkopolski<sup>22</sup>.

Apart from administrative and priestly activities, Primate repeatedly described the situation of the Church in the Western and Northern Lands, particularly on the occasion of subsequent anniversaries of the institution of the Polish Church organisation in this area. The celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Polish Church administration in the Western Lands was organised in Wrocław in 1965<sup>23</sup>. The sermon delivered by Primate in the cathedral of Wrocław on 31 VIII 1965 reverberated throughout the world. Primate based the evidence of the rights of Poland to these lands mostly on historical arguments<sup>24</sup>. He presented the relations of Wrocław with Poland since 1000 until the present. He saw these events mostly in the context of the task of the Church as „a national bond”. Simultaneously, he described the heritage of Wrocław very polocentrically: „Look at the wonderful temples we are surrounded by in Ostrów Tumski. These are the witnesses of our primeval presence here”. On the other hand, when Wrocław was under a strong influence of German culture, he called this period „a painful moment of religious dichotomisation”. Referring to modern times, he said: „Looking at the Piast temples, tuning into their purport, we know: certainly, it is not a former German good”. Primate’s words were taken were critically in Germany. He was accused of presenting views similar to the communist propaganda<sup>25</sup>. During the same celebration, archbishop Bolesław

<sup>22</sup> „Annuario Pontificio”, 1958, p. 167.

<sup>23</sup> J. Krucina, *The celebration of 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Church*, [in:] *The Church in the Western Lands. Quarter-century of the Polish Church organisation*, ed. J. Krucina, Wrocław 1971, p. 101-112.

<sup>24</sup> „*Beati oculus que vident...*”. „*Te Deum*” of 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Wrocław, „Wrocław Church News”, Yearbook 20 (1965), no. 11-12, p. 271-277.

<sup>25</sup> B. Kerski, R. Żurek, *The Proclamation of Polish bishops and the response of German Bishops’ Conference from 1965. The Genesis, historical context and impact*, [in:] B. Kerski, T. Kycia, R. Żurek, „*We forgive and ask for forgiveness*”,

Kominek, similarly to Primate, while defending the Polish rights to the Western Lands, also concentrated on the German heritage<sup>26</sup> and already then, the idea of reconciliation with Germans was evidently resulting from his speech<sup>27</sup>. These two speeches are contrasted. In my opinion, it is erroneous.

In order to understand Primate's intentions, we need to focus on the circumstances accompanying the Wrocław celebrations: that is, the approaching millennial celebrations and the Proclamation of Polish bishops to German bishops. The celebration of the millennium of the Baptism of Poland necessarily were directing our thought towards the Piast Poland, it was related to the searching for the beginnings of the Polish state and nation in Christianity. In Primate's teaching, Roman Catholic faith was the constitutive element for the nation<sup>28</sup>. The history of the Proclamation to German bishops seems to indicate that in terms of the Western Lands Primate's word should be read mutually with Bolesław Kominek. It is known that archbishop Kominek was the author of the final version of the Proclamation. However, he was writing this text following the patterns ordered by Primate. None of the preserved documents indicates that Primate had any doubts related to the way of demonstrating the Polish-German relations (breaking the stereotype of long-time hostility) and the form of the reconciliation with Germans, described in the Proclamation. It seems that Primate, similarly to archbishop Kominek, perceived the reconciliation with Germany as an essential condition for the final solution of the problem of the Polish-German border. There was no discrepancy for Primate between the celebrations of 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary

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*The Proclamation of Polish bishops and the response of German Bishops' Conference from 1965. The genesis, context and heritage*, Olsztyn 2006, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> W. Kucharski, *The Western Lands in the literature of Cardinal Bolesław Kominek*, [in:] *The Western Lands – history and perspectives*, ed. W. Kucharski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2011, p. 211.

<sup>27</sup> B. Kominek, *In the service of the Western Lands*, J. Krucina selected it from a post-humous file, Wrocław 1977, p. 177.

<sup>28</sup> J. Lewandowski, *The nation in the teaching of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński*, Warszawa 1982, p. 30-36.

of the Polish Church in the Western Lands and the Proclamation to German bishops. Both events were the realisations of the Polish reason of state.

During the millennial celebrations in Lower Silesia Primate delivered a series of speeches and sermons<sup>29</sup>. Primate presented his view on the Western Lands in the sermon opening the celebrations: *The Millennium in the Lands regained after centuries*<sup>30</sup>. Primate treated these areas as the regained lands, regardless of the notions used to define them – „the Western Lands” or „the Regained Lands”. In Primate’s opinion the necessity to return to these lands resulted from “Saint beginnings” of Poland, so important for Polish identity<sup>31</sup>.

Similarly, in 1970, during the national celebrations of 2<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the functioning of the Polish Church administration in the Western Lands, in Wrocław on 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> May<sup>32</sup>, Primate referred to the historical argumentation as well. The juxtaposition of two dates: the year 1000 and 1945, which was “the institution and the renewal of the Polish Church organisation in the Regained Lands” constituted the core of the narration in his sermon during “The hour of the nations’ appeals”. Remembering, however, about the German reactions to the celebrations organised five years ago, he supplied the historical argumentation with the Polish rights resulting from the position of the victim of the Second World War<sup>33</sup>. Reminding

<sup>29</sup> S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. XVIII (September-December 1966), editorial board: I. Czarcińska, B. Mackiewicz, A. Rastawicka, Warszawa – Częstochowa 2016, p. 159-196.

<sup>30</sup> S. Wyszyński, *The Millennium in the Lands regained after centuries. The beginning of the millennial celebrations in Wrocław*, [in:] S. Wyszyński, *The collected works*, vol. XVIII, p. 159-167.

<sup>31</sup> J. Lewandowski, *The nation in the teaching of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński*, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>32</sup> J. Krucina, *The celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary*, [in:] *The Church in the Western Lands. Quarter-century of the Polish Church organisation*, ed. J. Krucina, Wrocław 1971, p. 37-42.

<sup>33</sup> S. Wyszyński, *The hours of the nation’s appeals in Ostrów Tumski during the celebrations of 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Church organisation in the Regained Lands*, [in:] *The Church in the Western Lands*, op. cit., p. 15.



about the German responsibility for the Second World War was much more strongly speaking to the interlocutors from behind the German border than the facts from the history of the Middle Ages<sup>34</sup>.

Despite political difficulties (the unregulated problem of the border) Primate engaged in a series of diplomatic activities, particularly with reference to the Holy See. On 22nd May 1967 Paul VI, responding to Primate Wyszyński's request, nominated bishops governing the dioceses in the western lands as apostolic administrators with full rights of resident bishops *durante munere*<sup>35</sup>.

In December 1969 Polish Bishops' Conference applied to the Holy See with *Memorandum in case of the stabilisation of the Church organisation in the Western Lands*<sup>36</sup>. Bishops postulated in it to nominate apostolic administrators as resident bishops governing the structures of the Church within this area and include them in „Annuario Pontificio”. They also suggested the division of an apostolic administration in Gorzów into smaller Church entities. The Vatican diplomacy was not willing, however, to conduct any changes before ratifying relevant political treaties. Primate responded to it with a rhetorical question: Do the important issues of Poland have to be analysed in the Vatican only by the prism of Germany?<sup>37</sup>

After signing the treaty between Polish People's Republic and Federal Republic of Germany in December 1970, Polish bishops working in the Committee of Polish Bishops' Conference for the issues of the Western and Northern Lands, prepared the preliminary proposals related to the new, Polish Church organisation in this

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<sup>34</sup> R. Żurek, *The Catholic Church and the border by the River Oder and Lusatian Nisse – the attempt to visualise the issue*, [in:] *The Western Lands – history and perspectives*, op. cit., p. 201.

<sup>35</sup> The Statement of Secretariat of Polish Bishops' Conference about the nomination of apostolic administrators in the Polish Western and Northern Lands, 2 VII 1967 [in:] P. Raina, *Cardinal Wyszyński. Primate times 1967-1968*, vol.8, op. cit., p. 55–56.

<sup>36</sup> P. Raina, *Cardinal Wyszyński. Primate times*, vol. 9, op. cit., p. 72–79.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 243.

area<sup>38</sup>, and on 23 VI 1971 the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish parliament) adopted a resolution on the obtaining of the property rights by the Church to the properties in the Western and Northern Lands<sup>39</sup>. This unilateral act on the part of the state put the Holy See in an awkward situation, because as Primate reasonably noticed: „The government of the Polish People’s Republic did something for the Church – it granted the Church the property right; now it is the turn of the Church”<sup>40</sup>.

Eventually only after the ratification of the treaty with the Polish People’s Republic by the Bundestag, the Holy See issued relevant decisions. The apostolic constitution *Episcoporum Poloniae coetus*, instituting the new, Church organisation in the Western Lands was announced on 28 VI 1972<sup>41</sup>.

The stabilisation of the Polish Church organisation in the Western Lands undoubtedly belonged to the most important tasks Primate Wyszyński was setting up for himself. His achievements were perfectly characterised by archbishop Kominek in the article *Roma Locuta*, published after the announcement of papal decisions in 1972: “the current Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, [...] was asking, during the fruitful years of his current Primateship, with the popes: Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI for newer and newer as well as more complete degrees of the Church organisation in the western Poland. He was asking tirelessly, and he gradually

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<sup>38</sup> K. Jaworska, *The activity of the Committee of Polish Bishops’ Conference for the issues of the Western and Northern Lands in favour of the change of the status of the Church administration in the territory attached to Poland after the Second World War*, [w:] *The way to the stabilisation of the Polish Church administration in the Western and Northern Lands after the Second World War. On 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the issue of the apostolic constitution by Paul VI, Episcoporum Poloniae coetus*, ed. W. Kucharski, Wrocław 2013, p. 60 – 64.

<sup>39</sup> Journal of Laws 1971 no. 16 item 156.

<sup>40</sup> P. Raina, *Cardinal Wyszyński. Primate times*, vol. 10, op. cit., p. 165.

<sup>41</sup> W. Kucharski, *The stabilisation of the Polish Church in the Western and Northern Lands in the light of the reports of Polish diplomats in Rome from the years 1945-1972*, [w:] *The way to the stabilisation*, op. cit., p. 135-136.

received them. His achievements are marked by the years: 1951, 1956, 1962, 1967, and finally the culmination of all efforts and attempts related to the date of 28<sup>th</sup> June 1972<sup>42</sup>.

### Summary

Primate Stefan Wyszyński engaged in a series of administrative and diplomatic activities related to the institution of the Polish Church organisation in the Western Lands. In the years 1948-1967 he exercised his authority over the Church in this area. He initially supervised apostolic administrators in Wrocław, Opole, Gorzów Wielkopolski, and in Olsztyn and Gdańsk, and after their removal in 1951 he sanctioned vicar capitulars elected by the state authority to preserved unity of the Church in Poland. In 1956 his attempts resulted in the restoration of the relevant bishops to their posts. In 1967 at his request the Pope Paul VI excluded the Church organisation in the Western Lands from the jurisdiction of Primate of Poland and subordinated it directly to the Holy See, instituting apostolic administrations there. primate repeatedly conducted negotiations with the Holy See in case of the institution of the Polish Church organisation in this area, which ended only after the ratification of the Polish-German treaty in 1972 by the announcement of the apostolic constitution *Episcoporum Poloniae coetus*. During the entire period Primate repeatedly visited archdiocese of Wrocław and supported the activities of the hierarchs governing this area, initially priest Karol Miłik, and subsequently priest Kazimierz Lagosz and since 1956 bishop Bolesław Kominek. Primate Wyszyński repeatedly emphasised the rights of Poland to these lands in his speeches and sermons delivered in Wrocław. He proved that they resulted, on the one hand from their historical embeddedness in the Polish culture (he was referring to the relations of Silesia with Poland in the Piast period), and on the other hand he pointed to the re-Catholising mission of the Church in these lands. He also indicated that these lands are the peculiar compensation for the losses incurred by the Polish nation during the Second World War. He perceived the tasks of the Church in this area during the period of the stabilisation of the Polish Church administration as the Polish reason of state.

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<sup>42</sup> B. Kominek, *Roma Locuta*, „Colloquium Salutis. Wrocław Theological Studies”, vol. 4 (1972), p. 10.

**Keywords:** Primate Stefan Wyszyński, Church in Poland, Western and Northern Lands, Regained Lands, Wrocław, apostolic administrations.

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### Author's biodata

Wojciech Kucharski, PhD. – historian and archaeologist, deals with the history of Church and the diplomatic relations between the Polish People's Republic and the Holy See. Deputy Director in “Remembrance and Future” Centre in Wrocław, teaches in the Historical Institute of the University of Wrocław. The creator and editor-in-chief of “Wrocław Yearbook of Spoken History”.