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INTERNAL FREEDOM AS A FOUNDATION OF STRENGTH AND SOVEREIGNTY OF THE NATION IN THE THOUGHT OF PRIMATE STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI

God created man as a rational being, giving him the dignity of a person who can decide and control his actions. So man was created by God as a free being.

Freedom is deeply inscribed in the nature of man and inextricably linked with his dignity, which is also reflected in the statutory law. Freedom refers not only to the individual as a person, but also to communities, societies, nations and states. However, its basic and most important dimension concerns above all what takes place inside, in the soul of man. Internal freedom is at the heart of all human freedom, in every dimension. This truth was present with all its clarity in the thought and teaching of Primate Stefan Wyszyński.

He expressed it not only with his pastoral teaching – as a priest, and then as a bishop of Lublin, then the Metropolitan of Gniezno and Warsaw – but also, and perhaps above all, through the testimony of his life – a steadfast man, who will not hesitate to go even to prison. This was, one might say, the deepest catechesis which, despite external imprisonment, the Primate of the Church in Poland addressed.

At this point it is impossible not to refer to those special „Pro memoria” of the Primate, which are his „Prison notes”. The Cardinal expressed his deep faith and true love even for his enemies in

Warmian Stoczek, the second place of his internment, as well as in other places of imprisonment. He wrote: „I renew my best feelings for all people. For those who now are closest to me. And for those far away who think that they decide about my fate, which is completely in the hands of my Heavenly Father. I have no feelings of aversion, hatred or a spirit of vengeance towards anyone in my heart. I want to defend myself from these feelings with all my efforts of will and the help of God’s grace. It is only with this disposition and feeling that I have the right to live. For only then will my life build the kingdom of God on earth”¹.

It can be seen that the imprisoned primate remained an internally free man. Man declasses himself, ceases to be a full man when he accepts captivity. The Cardinal emphasized that man is a sacred thing. There is the primacy of man over the thing. A human being cannot become a slave of things, nor can he become a slave of another human being or of any power.

In a deep and complete knowledge of the nature of man and understanding who man actually is, Primate Wyszyński saw salvation for the modern world. For this will lead him to know that man, although he is not the truth himself, is hungry for the truth, for he comes from the Truth. Even though he may be a slave, bound by chains of his passions, he is nevertheless created for freedom and by his nature cherishes its desire. The Cardinal taught that man is not freedom, and yet he is free, because the Father of man is Free of those who are free, who serves no one. Freedom transcends man and allows him to get closer to God. Thanks to freedom, man becomes fully human and is capable of transforming the world.

A free person can share his or her freedom, creating a family, a kind of human medium existence between the individual and the community. One is fully being a person mainly thanks to the family and becomes a true family thanks to proper serving the person – wrote

¹ S. Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne*, Warsaw-Ząbki 2001, p. 52.

Fr. prof. Bartnik². Families move indirectly into a larger community, into a family of families, i.e. the nation. It exists on a temporal, secular level as well as entering the world of salvation history. Cardinal Wyszyński considered a nation as „a social organism of which we are members (...). Through the nation we draw all the content of our national life”³. A nation is not formed by means of a contract, but is a consequence of the social nature of man. The Primate supported the spontaneous and natural origins of the nation.

In his statements, Cardinal Wyszyński emphasized the existence of subjective and objective elements in the ontological structure of the nation. The earth, human society, and the state are the subjective elements of the nation, while the primate included historical memory of the past, ethnic tradition, and culture in a broad sense among the objective elements⁴. He emphasized that knowledge of one's own history is the material of the identity of the individual and of each community. He believed that a nation without history is a poor nation, and a nation that has its own history and respects that history is a nation that believes in its own future.

The fundamental material of every nation is its culture. Primate Wyszyński has drawn attention to this many times. By culture he understood language and literature, art, music, ethics and religion⁵. He appreciated the significant influence of material and economic culture,

² Cf. Cz. Bartnik, *Personalizm społeczny kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego (Social personalism of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński)*, in: *Personalizm (Personalism)*. Prawda, dobro, piękno 7/2004, p. 59.

³ S. Wyszyński, *Miłość i sprawiedliwość społeczna (Love and social justice)*. Rozważania społeczne (*Social considerations*), Poznań 1993, p. 124.

⁴ Cf. S. Kowalczyk, *Nauczanie Prymasa Wyszyńskiego na temat suwerenności narodu z perspektywy integracji europejskiej (Lecture of Primate Wyszyński on the sovereignty of the nation from the perspective of European integration)*, in: *Człowiek – naród – Kościół. Prymas Tysiąclecia odczytany dziś (Man – nation – church. The Primate of the Millennium read today)*, Radom 2012, p. 88.

⁵ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Jedna jest Polska. Wybór z przemówień i kazań (Poland is one. Choice from speeches and sermons)*, Warsaw 2000, p. 43-47.

but the primacy in the life of the nation granted to the intellectual and humanistic culture.

The circle of Christian culture, whose essential elements are respect for the truth, the idea of love and mercy and the dignity of man, has been the part of Poland for over a thousand years. The Primate of the Millennium as an ardent patriot was far from chauvinism and economic and cultural isolationism. He believed that every nation was bound to some kind of dependence on another nation because nations complement each other and must follow a line of mutual coexistence and service, which is particularly evident in the field of culture⁶. However, the nation must not lose its identity in this.

The influence of the Church makes a nation a Christian nation, sanctified by the sacraments. It is the Church that has fought and is fighting for human dignity throughout its history. Every man, before he came into contact with society, said Primate Wyszyński, met God when in his act of creation he took an immortal soul from him; together with it, he received God's voice, which paved the way for his earthly calling and ultimate destiny. From that moment on, man has followed his own path to God, who has set it for him and through which he is heading for salvation⁷.

It is precisely the human right to the ultimate goal, as well as the right to life and to have the means necessary for life, that constitute, in the Cardinal's thought, the framework within which God's greatest gift to man, freedom, can circulate and develop. In the Church's understanding, freedom is not God, but is God's first gift to man, elevating him above all creatures. „Because freedom is not God, one cannot sacrifice everything, but one can strive for it through grace, which is administered by the Holy Church. It guarantees the best use of freedom, combining it with responsibility for human acts”⁸, taught the primate.

⁶ Cf. Id., *Miłość i sprawiedliwość (Love and justice)*, op. cit., p.119-120.

⁷ Cf. Ibidem, p.193.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 194.

The foundation of freedom in Cardinal Wyszyński's life was faith. He conveyed this truth, teaching that freedom of spirit is constantly gained through living in accordance with the Decalogue and teachings of Jesus, that is, being faithful to God, the Church and the Gospel. The Primate saw the guarantee of internal freedom in the things seemingly opposite – namely in the surrender to slavery. However, in the Primate's opinion, it was slavery which was giving true freedom – that is, slavery to love, sacrificing for the freedom of the Church to God and His Mother. He said that he wanted to replace this terrible, heavy slavery of modern man with sweet, maternal slavery in Mary's arms⁹. In this, he saw the salvation of a nation in political enslavement, enslavement to the pressure of atheistic morality, social and economic enslavement, as well as enslavement to sins and addictions. The way out of this multifaceted enslavement was to voluntarily surrender to the motherly slavery of Mary, Mother of the Church. Cardinal Wyszyński believed that the voluntarily accepted enslavement to the consistent Christian life, guided with the help of Mary, would become a ransom for the freedom of the Church in Poland and in the world.

A special expression of devotion to Mary was the Millennium Act of Devotion of May 3, 1966, made on Jasna Góra. The intention to dedicate Poland to the Blessed Mother of God was born in the Primate already during the imprisonment in Komańcza. When he was writing the Vows of the Polish Nation, he immediately outlined the programme of the Great Novena, preparing the celebrations of the Millennium together with the Act of Commitment of Poland to the motherly slavery to Mary – for the freedom of the Church. This Act – by virtue of a decision of the Polish Bishops' Office – is solemnly renewed every year on 3 May at Jasna Góra.

The Primate emphasized that the freedom of the nation is supported by the freedom of the human person, and the freedom of the person is the beginning of the freedom of the nation and the state. "A free man",

⁹ Cf. Id., *Na drogach zawierzenia (On the paths of entrustment)*, Warsaw 1996, p. 117.

said Cardinal Wyszyński, “may feel trapped in his own homeland. He then mobilizes all forces to bring about the freedom of the nation. If the effort of people endowed with freedom by the Creator becomes universal, there is no power that is capable of overcoming the collective, mobilized will of free people. Sooner or later, they will lead to the freedom of the nation. The cradle for the freedom of the nation is therefore the freedom of the human person”¹⁰.

Already after the loss of freedom, Poles also made all the efforts of the spirit to regain freedom. They were connected with every idea of freedom, placing their hopes either in the Napoleonic epic, in the uprisings or in the rallies of freedom of their own nation, from the first to the Warsaw Uprising. The Cardinal, if he lived today, would certainly also recall the figures of the Indomitable Soldiers who wanted a truly free Poland.

The Primate emphasized that the fights of Poles on all continents are so well known in the world that they give the Poles the name of the nation that loves freedom the most¹¹.

True and lasting freedom is not only gained through weapons and armed struggle, but above all through efforts in the internal life of the nation. They are often more significant and fruitful as constituent factors of the later regained freedom than the armed uprisings. The freedom of the Polish nation did not erupt immediately, but matured slowly. The Cardinal said that „it was the fruit of a long historical hardship, worn in the great loving womb of a nation like a foetus that a mother carry under her heart and must give birth to when the moment of maturity of the new life already formed in her comes”¹².

¹⁰ Institute of Primate Wyszyński, S. Wyszyński, *Kazania i przemówienia autoryzowane* (Sermons and authorised speeches) *Ojczyznę wolną zachowaj nam, Panie* (Keep our homeland free, O Lord). The Deum of the Episcopate for 50 years of regaining freedom, Jasna Góra, 15 IX 1968 r. vol. XXIX, p. 352-361.

¹¹ Cf. Ibidem

¹² Ibidem

In the womb of the Polish nation a new power of freedom was growing. And when the historical effort of whole generations, undertaken for over a hundred years, ripened to the fullness of life, there had to be a liberation, as a new man had to be born, as a grain growing from ears, ripe for fruiting – said the Primate.

Addressing the secondary school and academic youth in St. Anne's Church, he opposed the forced, imposed slavery resulting from disbelief, hatred and the weakness of the voluntary slavery of love. „It binds – he taught – two in the family to serve the children, thanks to which a soldier gives his life to defend his Homeland; it puts in people's conscience the reliability of the calling and profession, to fulfil the task of the day in an honest manner; it also raises people to the heights of heroism. Today there are more and more of such people. And you, the Youth of the Second Millennium, are not called to a soft life; on the contrary, you are called to a difficult, heroic life”¹³.

Slavery of love is an indispensable element of man's inner freedom and is realised, among other things, in reliable work and conscientious performance of everyday tasks and duties. Stefan Wyszyński particularly clearly and precisely wrote about it in 1946 in his book entitled „The spirit of human work”. According to the later Primate of Poland, work shapes love of neighbour. Human activity at work is an opportunity to realise the virtue of love of neighbour, because work itself is love, it is a manifestation and testimony of love. It is through work that people establish close contact with their fellow human beings, because work directed towards the good aims to satisfy personal and social needs. It is also becoming the basis for the creation of interpersonal ties thanks to the specific power that unites people. The openness of work to love of neighbour encourages every person who wants to give his or her actions a proper value

¹³ Institute of Primate Wyszyński, S. Wyszyński, *Kazania i przemówienia autoryzowane* (Sermons and speeches authorized) *Wyzwolenie z niewoli nienawiści przez niewolę miłości...* (Liberation from the bondage of hatred by the bondage of love...) Church of St. Anne, 5 V 1968, vol. XXVIII, p. 352.

to fight against every manifestation of selfishness.¹⁴ It is therefore a help in sanctification and in gaining inner freedom.

Work also has a redemptive dimension and helps to shape moral virtues.

In his teaching, Cardinal Wyszyński emphasized the fact that love has a fundamental influence on human work, making it a means of meeting and union with God, i.e. achieving internal freedom. For a Christian, work, in the thought of the Primate, is the realisation of his calling to holiness.

Cardinal Wyszyński put emphasis in his work on achieving internal freedom on combating national imperfections, among which he mentioned laziness, recklessness, wastefulness, drunkenness and promiscuity. Overcoming these imperfections is the way to internal freedom. The Primate encouraged to gain virtues such as frugality, diligence, perseverance, being faithful to duties, purity. He emphasized that these are virtues that shape spiritually and enable people to live together in society.

One will not achieve true freedom – both man and nation – without the ability to forgive. Primate Wyszyński spoke about it many times. He wrote in his Testament: “I consider it a grace that I was able to bear witness to the truth as a political prisoner through a three-year imprisonment and that I protected myself from hatred towards my fellow countrymen in power in the state. Conscious of the harm done to me, I forgive them from the heart all the slanders with which they honoured me”¹⁵.

Taking care of the inner freedom from hatred, Cardinal Wyszyński often evoked the request of the prayer „Our Father” – „Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”. „When we seek forgiveness,” he said, „we must be ready to forgive. When we expect mercy, we must learn mercy ourselves. Maybe it is the mercy

¹⁴ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Duch pracy ludzkiej (The spirit of human work)*, Warsaw 2001, p. 42.

¹⁵ A. Rastawicka, *Maryjne drogi wolności Prymasa Tysiąclecia (The Marian Ways of freedom of Primate of the Millennium)*, Częstochowa 2018, p. 59.

received from God that gives us an opportunity to understand the taste and meaning of mercy¹⁶.”

An example of forgiveness was also given by the Primate when he signed the Letter of Polish Bishops to the German Bishops in 1965, which opened the way to mutual forgiveness and reconciliation of our nations.

One of the important factors in achieving internal freedom is – in the primate’s opinion – liberation from anxiety. A nation living in fear, intimidated, will never be free. The Primate of the Millennium believed that the prerequisite for the reconstruction and proper functioning of social life was never to give in to hopelessness and the preservation of freedom of thought.

It is of great value to understand freedom for a nation, what a great good and property it is, that no nation can give up its rights to freedom and its own tasks. The Primate emphasized that these laws must not be surrendered to anyone, that defending them is a moral duty, and giving up on them – betrayal¹⁷.

The surest programme that guarantees the nation’s true freedom and sovereignty is the commandment to love God and neighbour. This is the message that the fighting Warsaw sent to Fr. Wyszyński on a piece of a burnt newspaper during the war. You will love... Therefore, as the first pastoral program in the second millennium of faith in Poland, the Cardinal proclaimed the Social Crusade of Love. He believed that love is the only winning power. “I will walk the earth with a loving heart; it may be martyrdom, but martyrdom for love is better than hatred¹⁸.” The Primate saw the best way to unite the nation in the Eucharist, which in the deepest way unites people with Christ, but also among themselves. A nation that is united with God through communion will not perish, for it is strengthened by God’s grace.

On the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Cardinal Wyszyński in the Holy Cross Cathedral of Opole, he pointed to this holy symbol,

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 60.

¹⁷ Cf. Ibidem, p. 64.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 123.

which during over a hundred years of captivity had grown strongly in the soil of Poland and thanks to which the nation had been cleansed. He spoke: „Our Nation needed such a school of experience and transformation. For not always and not at every moment it understood the spirit of the Gospel, the spirit of social and fraternal love, even though the Church has been embedding it in the life of the Nation for centuries. It was therefore necessary for it to be internally reborn in the fire of suffering and to enter into glory through the cross.”¹⁹ The Primate emphasized that not so much the wonderful and powerful times of the „golden age” of our Homeland and the period of the Jagiellonian superpower glorified our nation in the world, but rather the times of captivity and humiliation. „We have gained glory,” he said, „through faithfulness in suffering, by patiently enduring national anguish, by heroic efforts to regain lost freedom. By its torment, the nation has internally matured and developed deeply in such a way that it was obvious that it could not remain in captivity and rightly deserves full freedom in the family of peoples and nations.”²⁰ The independence of Poland was won, suffered, worked out and prayed out by several generations of Poles. The Primate pointed out that a nation has the right to exist, to live and to self-determination, and whoever deprives it of existence and independence commits a great evil in the human aspect. He called the partitions of Poland the sin of elementary injustice against the nation which for eight centuries of its history confirmed the right to independent existence.

Cardinal Wyszyński also called for an attitude of service to personal and social life, to serve one another in love, justice and peace. For where there is „a demonstration of power, there is a danger of anxiety, violence, rape and the misfortunes born out of it – social hatred, class

¹⁹ Institute of Primate Wyszyński, S. Wyszyński, *Kazania i przemówienia autoryzowane* (Sermons and authorised speeches), S. Wyszyński, *Przez krzyż do radości i chwały* (*Through the Cross to joy and glory*). *W 50-lecie uzyskania wolności i patronalne święto katedry opolskiej* (*On the 50th anniversary of gaining freedom and the patronal holiday of the Opole Cathedral*), Opole, September 15, 1968, vol. XXIX, p. 371.

²⁰ Ibidem

struggle and other disasters. But where there is an attitude of service, there is no violence or rape. There is peace, love, a fruitful unity and social community of all the children of one homeland.”²¹

The Primate saw in the efforts and struggles of the whole Polish society, all its layers, states and orientations, regardless of differences in beliefs and opinions – a sign of true heroism. He believed that it is heroic to strive for a great goal among the opposite circumstances, when this aspiration often has to be paid for with a sacrifice of one’s own life. In Cardinal’s conviction, it was the faith in the martyred and resurrected Christ that was a source of special inspiration for Poles, because it taught them that the nation was not allowed to come to terms with its own death, inflicted by the injustice of others, but they should look for ways to resurrection. Freedom is a fundamental condition for the development of a nation. Only an internally free person can attain the fullness of humanity, and only an internally free nation is able to attain freedom and sovereignty, for it is love that is the true fulfilment of freedom.

Summary

Internal freedom is at the heart of all human freedom. This truth was present in the thought and teaching of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. The Primate also expressed it through the testimony of his life – a man who will not hesitate to go to prison.

The foundation of freedom in Cardinal Wyszyński’s life was faith. He conveyed this truth, teaching that freedom of spirit is constantly gained through living in accordance with the Decalogue and teachings of Jesus, that is, being faithful to God, the Church and the Gospel.

The Primate saw the guarantee of internal freedom in the things seemingly opposite – namely in the surrender to slavery. However, in the Primate’s opinion, it was slavery which was giving true freedom – that is, slavery to love, sacrificing for the freedom of the Church to God and His Mother. He said that he wanted to replace this terrible, heavy slavery of modern man with sweet, maternal slavery in Mary’s arms. In this, he saw the salvation of a nation in political enslavement, enslavement to the pressure of atheistic morality, social and economic enslavement, as well as

²¹ Ibidem, p. 373.

enslavement to sins and addictions. Cardinal Wyszyński also called for an attitude of service to personal and social life, to serve one another in love, justice and peace.

In Cardinal's conviction, it was the faith in the martyred and resurrected Christ that was a source of special inspiration for Poles, because it taught them that the nation was not allowed to come to terms with its own death, inflicted by the injustice of others, but they should look for ways to resurrection. Freedom is a fundamental condition for the development of a nation.

Only an internally free nation is capable of achieving freedom and sovereignty, for it is love that is the true fulfilment of freedom.

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