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Looking the Devil in the Eyes: Totalitarianism and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's Humanitarian-Personalist Concept of Socio-Political Life

SUMMARY This article aims to expose the specificity of the theory of totalitarianism in the context of the humanitarian-personalistic concept of the socio-political life of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. It allows for a unique insight into the nature of both totalitarian systems – both into the essence of German Nazi Hitlerism and Communism. Presenting the above issues from the point of view of personalist Christian praxeology exposes their unprecedentedly criminal tendencies. In this context, the presentation of the primary topics of the paradigm of both totalitarian systems reveals their perverse specificity as well as their anti-human and anti-Christian character. Thus, it allows one to demythologize the ideology of communism and Nazi-national socialism as well as present both concepts as degenerated “syndicate of crimes” leading to the negation of human dignity and – as a consequence – to the collapsing of humanity’s civilization as well. Moreover, it is also associated with an absolute opposition to the frequent attempts to justify, legitimize and even authenticate them in the eyes of world public opinion.

KEYWORDS totalitarianism, Stefan Wyszyński, fascism, Nazism, Communism, personalism

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Introduction

Along with the systemic transformation of the post-war People's Poland and the change of the paradigm of power, the offensive of totalitarian ideology – in this case, communist – was aimed at changing the standards and principles of social and political life and “remodeling” the world view and mentality of Poles based on the concept of “new socialist morality” rooted in the ideals of Marxist-Leninist materialist ideology. Moreover, official propaganda emphasized the importance of “pluralism” and “democracy” but understood only in terms characteristic of communist ideology, typical of the so-called “People's democracy,” entirely subordinated to the totalitarian system of power. Therefore, the interdependence of “people's democracy” and socialism was a central dimension of efforts to implement the political assumptions of the People's Republic of Poland.

However, the period preceding that epoch, i.e., the period of World War II, was for Poland an immeasurably traumatic experience of another cruel totalitarianism. In this case, he emphasized the collectivist concept of man in terms of “Nazi National Socialism” (Paxton, 2005; Redles, 2005). Referring to the Nazi-Nazi concept of man, Wyszynski states with a specific dose of sarcasm: “The greatest disgrace for man would be any relationship with God, especially in the Christian sense. Is Man a creature of God? The wording alone was enough to draw upon him all the hatred he harbors for God. A universal contempt for the image of God in man is proclaimed. It is easier to perpetuate that people try to do everything not to resemble God in anything. A man stripped of the remnants of his relationship with God is considered directly to be a fertilizer that will be thrown to future generations” (Wyszynski, 1993, p. 47).

Thus, it is demonic to understand social life as presented by the ideologues of the Third Reich, especially in relation to “racially inferior” communities. “Man lives a purely animal life; he nourishes himself to live and has the strength to work, works for the masses, exhausts his strength, and when he becomes less and less useful – he should go away so as not to overeat the young. His highest value is race and pureblood, which he should pass on to the coming generations. Belonging to a chosen race proves the real value of a man. If he lacks a specific blood type, he is not human and has no right to life. He is a parasite! It is a merit to remove the parasite so that the so-called full people could live and develop without any obstacles” (Wyszynski, 1993, p. 47). A characteristic feature

of the above ideology was, above all, an aversion to all kinds of personalistic values, both intellectual and moral, especially in the Christian version.

At this point, the author of this piece poses the primary research question: how does the personalistic vision of the human person presented by Wyszyński define the basic assumptions of social anthropology in correlation to the doctrine of German “national socialism” and the materialist communist ideology? The issue of the so-called “Anthropological error”. In the context of the tragic legacy of both totalitarianism, the question of the role that the humanitarian-personalistic concept of socio-political life presented by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński played in the political *praxis* of Poland’s post-war history is also essential? The issue of the legacy of primate teaching for modern times is also significant.

The author seeks answers to the above questions in an attempt to reinterpret the doctrine of totalitarianism, using the concepts of Christian personalistic praxeology. It is crucial, however, in the context of the influence of the above totalitarian regimes on modern times. It is about the impact of the anti-human and anti-Christian totalitarian doctrine and its paradigm, which defines, legitimizes, and even authenticates the most terrible and degenerate systemic forms of the 20th century. It is particularly important, especially today, when emerging trends often trivialize the criminal nature of these systems and even treat the “totalitarian model” – especially in the context of communism – as a “specific historical phenomenon” aimed at resolving many complex phenomena of socio-political nature, cultural as well as economical.

The primary source of this article is primarily Stefan Wyszyński’s public statements: speeches, sermons, homilies, pastoral letters, as well as book publications. In addition, many contemporary studies on multidimensional issues related to the doctrine of totalitarian systems of the twentieth century were used. The analysis of the primate’s teaching concerning the issue of totalitarian regimes places the issues mentioned above not only in the broader context of the complex situation of post-war Poland but also takes into account the dynamic development of the Church’s doctrine on these issues in an international and timeless dimension. Therefore, the way of presenting the presented issues, as well as its scope, makes this article very original and shows the subject matter, which is a significant novelty in the literature on the subject. The analysis of the topics discussed allows us to reveal the nature of totalitarian systems of repression, taking into account the complicated and challenging situation of the Catholic Church, forced not only to fight for survival but also to preserve human dignity and the Christian identity of the Polish Nation. Reinterpretation of issues relating

to totalitarian systems from the point of view of Christian personalistic praxeology reveals their unprecedentedly destructive and macabre character.

Primate Wyszyński, as the leader of the Catholic Church in Poland, was aware of the necessity to change the structures of public life in the country, but he did not consider it the primary and most urgent task of the Church. There also felt to be called to fight and change the entire political system. His criticism concerned the anthropological and moral dimensions of social life primarily. Wyszyński, however, was aware that the destructive elements of the state's political system must change for the proper moral order to exist. Therefore, he repeatedly spoke of a "social disposition" that favors socio-political changes. However, the social disposition – in his opinion – should be based on the canvas of the Christian vision of social life, the aim of which is to change the human heart (*metanoia*). In this way, only morally transformed people (*homo Dei*) can become proper subjects and an appropriate foundation for the "common good" (Wyszyński, 1979, pp. 889–891).

In this sense, the personalistic and community concept of the state proposed by Stefan Wyszyński was against both the absolutization of the state and its depreciation. According to him, a properly functioning state should not be a welfare state or a neutral state. Therefore, the essential task of the state is to care for the destiny of its citizens, especially those in difficult life situations. In other words, Christian personalism adopts the concept of a subsidiary that respects the subjectivity of citizens and supports their multifaceted commitment to the good of the entire Nation.

Totalitarianism: Origins, Agenda, and Practicalities

Nowadays, totalitarianism is understood primarily as a government or political system concept that prohibits opposition parties, limits individual disapproval to the state and its claims, as well as exercises an extremely high degree of control over public and private life. In this sense, totalitarianism is considered the most extreme and wide-ranging form of authoritarianism. In totalitarian states, however, political power is often exercised by autocrats. They conduct multi-level and autocratic political campaigns in which propaganda is broadcast through state-controlled media (Traverso, 2001, pp. 173–186).

Moreover, totalitarian regimes are often characterized by extensive political repression, dictatorship, highly undemocratic government structures, widespread individual worship, absolute control of the economy, censorship, mass

surveillance, restricted freedom of movement, widespread intimidation, and – not infrequently – state terrorism. Other aspects of a totalitarian regime may include internment camps, secret police, religious persecution, theocracy or state atheism, the widespread practice of execution (death penalty), rigged elections, possible possession of weapons of mass destruction, the possibility of state-sponsored mass murder or genocide, and the possibility of engaging in war, annexation or colonial occupation against other countries. In this context, Robert Conquest defines a totalitarian state as one that recognizes no restrictions on its power in any sphere of public or private life and extends it to every possible area of human life (Conquest, 2001, p. 74).

As a political ideology, totalitarianism's genesis was shaped in the context of historical circumstances. The historian and philosopher Karl Popper sought the roots of totalitarianism in the ancient philosophy of Plato, the concept of the state of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and the political philosophy of Karl Marx (Popper, 2013). The above statement remains controversial, meeting with severe criticism from the academic community (Wild, 1964, p. 23). Other experts on the subject, such as Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, see the beginnings of totalitarian doctrines in the Age of Enlightenment, especially in the idea of human empowerment as an autonomous and ontically independent being (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002).

From the beginning of its existence, the term “totalitarianism” had negative connotations. Giovanni Amendola first used the above phrase in May 1923 to denounce fascist efforts to monopolize state power and impose on Italian society a new political mentality with the hallmarks of a secular religion (Gentile, 2008, pp. 9–11; Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, 2016, pp. 15–17). Nevertheless, a positive sense was given to the above idea by Benito Mussolini. He expressed the essence of totalitarianism, among other things, in words: “For a fascist, everything is a state, and there is nothing – human or spiritual – nothing of value except the State. In this sense, fascism is totalitarian” (Bobbio, 2008, p. 51).

On the other hand, the first “philosopher of totalitarianism” was Giovanni Gentile. Using terminology borrowed from Hegelianism, Gentile not only justified the political concepts of Italian fascists but also constructed an image of a totalitarian state that resembled the demonic visions of Hannah Arendt and George Orwell in the late 1940s (Gentile, 1933). As early as the 1920s, Carl Schmitt developed a framework of a theoretical doctrine enabling the transition of Germany from the formula of a republican to a totalitarian state. As a National Socialist state theorist, Schmitt rejected the liberal and individualist tradition

of the 19th century in favor of a state dominated by a new “Allgemeiner Wille” (General Will), reflecting the unified uniformity of modern industrial society (Bookbinder, 1981, pp. 133–145).

The communist version of totalitarianism, referring to the idea of Russian social democracy, presented a slightly different specificity. In this context, the beliefs of the “Bolsheviks” were characterized by extreme radicalism, unlike their opponents, the Mensheviks. They sought to make the Russian workers’ movement similar to the Western European, liberalized model of the socialist movement. At the root of the ideological sources of Bolshevism is, above all, radical Marxism in its Leninist version, which emphasizes the fundamental role of the party. According to Lenin, the Bolshevik party (anti-democratic, highly disciplined, hierarchical, and centralized) brings together determined revolutionists, leads the working-class masses, and makes them politically aware. It constitutes the political elite to which the working class owes its achievement of “proletarian and revolutionary consciousness” since the labor movement, without the creative role of the elite, reaches only the organizational level of the trade unions. Thus, without the inspiring part of the Bolshevik Party, the working class, the potential leader of the socialist revolution, could not carry it out victoriously. However, it is plainly an anti-Marxist view (Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, 2016, p. 20; ИВИНА, 1981, pp. 24–25).

Therefore, taking into account the specificity of totalitarian systems that influenced the Polish reality, it should be noted that the above ideological concepts – deep-seated in the dreadfulness of the events of the 20th century, the terrifying nightmare of two modern world wars, the Bolshevik revolution, terror, genocide, and, from 1945, also the danger of total nuclear extermination – are a conglomerate of incredibly vague and contentious issues in the whole field of sociology, political science, as well as political theology. Simply put, the above ideas suggest that despite fascist/Nazi “particularism” (the central place of a nation-state or “master race”) and communist “universalism” (the pursuit of egalitarian, worldwide collective “comradeship”), both systems shared conjoint characteristics. However, it does not mean that they were utterly comparable.

Nevertheless, totalitarianism – regardless of its regional and ideological specificity – can be characterized as a specific form of the state based on the domination of one political formation, concentrating power not only over public institutions or politics – in the broadest, traditional sense of the word – but also economics, social and cultural institutions and the personal life of individuals. The aim of such a state was not only the traditional control of society but also

to undertake wide-ranging, gigantic reform projects, following the ideological idea of a totalitarian center, whose aim was to create a “new man.” In a totalitarian state, there were no institutions independent of the state. Putting his idea into practice required an undertaking of gigantic social engineering. However, because of the active or passive resistance of the society, carrying out such a task made it necessary to develop the apparatus of terror, coupled with the structures of political control, with the simultaneous façade of the officially existing systemic institutions, the corruption of public language and omnipresent lies (Fritze, 2012).

To mobilize enormous masses of people to implement their projects, the totalitarian state usually created ideological images of a mythical “enemy,” which had to be exterminated or permanently neutralized. Hence, these countries made genocide a part of their policy. In Germany, Jews became the enemy and people who were “superfluous,” in the meaning of the Nazis: the mentally ill and incurable. Therefore, polemicizing with that concept, Wyszyński states: “The greatest disgrace to man – would be any relationship with God, especially in the Christian sense. Man, God’s creation? This wording is enough to draw all the hatred exercised toward God. There is widespread contempt for the image of God in man, even easier to perpetuate because people do everything not to remind God of anything. A man stripped of the remnants of a relationship with God is considered directly as a fertilizer for future generations. He lives purely animal life; he feeds himself to live and have the strength to work, work for the masses, wastes its strength, and when he becomes less and less useful – he should go away, not to stand in the way of the young. His highest value is race and pureblood, which he should pass to the coming generations. The entire value of a man is confirmed by belonging to a chosen race. If there is no specific blood group in it, he is not a human being; he has no right to life. He is a parasite! It is a merit to remove the parasite so that the people could live and develop without hindrance” (Wyszyński, 1993, p. 43).

On the other hand, in the Soviet Union, the public enemy was “elements alien to the class” or “hostile elements” that hindered the building of a communist society, arbitrarily defined and destroyed by the administrative will of the communist apparatus. In both totalitarianism systems of the 20th century, the category of the enemy was defined *a priori* and independent of the individual’s choice. Breaking free from the stigma of race or class was not possible. Both systems ruled out the emergence of an ethnic or class civic community. The inclusion criterion would be not stigmatization of racial origin or “flaw,” but personal merit.

Therefore, Cardinal Wyszyński's reflection on the criticism of Marxism-Leninism and, especially, the communist vision of socio-political life is, of course, based on Christian anthropology and the experience of the Church. Referring to the teaching of the popes, he states that the fundamental error of socialism is an anthropological one (Wyszyński, 1993, pp. 46–47).

In their political praxis, totalitarian ideologies repeatedly referred to the so-called “culture war” that required the total dedication of advocates for shaping the new world. The myth of rebirth was significant here. It required the formation of the paradigm of the “new nation,” “classless” socio-political conditions, as well as the composition of the “new man,” unadulterated by decadent upbringing and cultural customs relating to the traditional philosophical and theological concepts of the “old world.” Moreover, the coup d'état strategy, the constant struggle to reject “class inequalities,” the desire to defeat the “enemies of the people,” the promotion of the “proletariat of towns and villages,” as well as the constant emphasis on the need to intensify the class struggle were conducive to the formation of a revolutionary mentality among the political leaders of totalitarian regimes (Ficek, 2020a, pp. 44–51).

Contrary to democratic states, the “sacralization” of the policy implemented by totalitarian regimes, along with the dissemination of its “secular liturgies,” secular holidays, and specific cults, is marked by the deification of the leader (a particular form of charismatic legitimization combined with the cult of the individual). Moreover, the present totalitarian regimes were characterized by an idolatrous cult of the state that granted itself the exclusive and virtually unlimited right to determine right and wrong; marginalization or rejection of traditional religion; orgiastic and mass performances, political rallies and demonstrations of support, legitimizing the leading role of a political party that claimed the position of a “political demiurge”; a call to total sacrifice and even a death cult. In this context, a contemporary interpretation of totalitarian ideologies that emphasizes the role of political religion suggests that these doctrines should be understood not as specific political systems but as historical “necessities” (Ficek, 2020a, pp. 147–150).

No wonder Cardinal Wyszyński was also opposed to the totalitarian concept of German Nazism and the Marxist-Leninist materialist ideology as well. In this sense, he considered both systemic forms of the state as political deviations and the greatest threat to Christianity. Especially Communism, as an ideology proclaiming an atheistic and materialistic vision of the human person and social life, was considered particularly hostile to Christian aspirations, promoting respect

for human dignity and shaping the Christian social order in the dimension of peaceful coexistence, justice, and mutual respect. Moreover, dialectical materialism, as an idea deeply rooted in totalitarian systems, denied the existence of Christian spirituality. So it is another progressive deviation degenerating the supernatural, spiritual, and religious sphere of human life. Moreover, atheistic materialism only recognizes and approves material reality, which can only be understood through sensual experience. However, this is for blind people and thus kills the metaphysical sphere and spiritual aspirations aimed at the supernatural dimension.

Totalitarian Ideology *versus* Christian Perceptiveness

The teaching and pastoral activity of Stefan Wyszyński fell during an undoubtedly thorny period in the history of the Polish Nation, which was threatened both by unfavorable geopolitical conditions and exposed to various forms of moral deprivation and poverty. Nevertheless, Cardinal Wyszyński's opposition to totalitarian ideology, especially atheistic Communism, was based mainly on Christian tradition and personalism. In this context, as Wyszyński states: "Man has no personal value in their opinion. It is practically nothing. [...] First, people are denied their human rights: freedom of thought and action. Man is subject to unconditional and unrestricted obedience to the highest party authority. [...] Man is subject to total contempt, the brutal cruelty of the political system, and the viciousness of the great savagery, murder, and terror. In practice, citizens are enslaved by the community. Second, people are denied the freedom to believe and worship God. Eternal principles are not recognized, nor is any destiny and purpose other than temporal. Hence the prearranged, official struggle against religion is a new task in the present state. Organized hatred!" (Wyszyński, 1993, pp. 46–47).

Additionally, reducing man to his material and natural needs only undermines the legitimacy of all religions. In other words, totalitarian ideology abolishes eternal truths; it abolishes all religion and is directly opposed to the practice of authentic faith (Gentile, 2000, pp. 48–50). "Man aspires to be brought up without God's commandments and religious morality, only based on moral norms typical of the working masses. So all religion must be destroyed. Man is the new God for the new humanity. Supreme happiness: proletarian equality. Thus, man, created in the image and likeness of God, detached from his Creator, is thrown into the abyss of godlessness and mortality. Therefore, destiny and

individual goals are rejected. There is no soul and no purpose as well as destiny.” (Wyszyński, 1993, p. 47).

Moreover, “no one can measure the goal of man, which is to pursue happiness and fulfillment in God. Man is obliged to achieve the goals that the state will show him. He must be socialized in a bodily and spiritual dimension. He must sacrifice everything, fulfilling all the commands of the community. Finally, a new goal is imposed on man, indicated by collective life. Since spiritual values are irrelevant here, the purpose of the highest human life will benefit the state, society, Nation, class, political party or economic goal, atheistic orientation, temporal and material happiness, and an earthly paradise. In other words, the deification of matter, profit, production, and technology” (Wyszyński, 1993, pp. 47–48). Beyond the human being – emphasizes the Cardinal – there is no personality, no rationality, and freedom” (Wyszyński, 1957b, p. 61).

Totalitarianism as a political system representing an extreme rejection of freedom expressed a radical ambition to subordinate the entire reality of public life to a single center of power. In other words, the overriding goal of the totalitarian political elite was power without legal and moral restrictions, without civic pluralism and party rivalry. The main point was to transform human nature “into the image and likeness” of deceptive anthropology built on the ideological premises of erroneous axiology. Therefore, the main priority was to utterly subordinate man to the then political concept of the state.

However, speaking of the so-called “erroneous” systemic concepts, Cardinal Wyszyński, first of all, pointed toward totalitarian systems. According to him, totalitarian systems – both socialism in the Nazi version and political and economic collectivism – became a catastrophe in various dimensions. In other words, neither one nor the different socio-political and economical conceptions have met society’s hopes and expectations. “It is their original sin. Hence both systems are derived from the same materialistic philosophy. Both practically sermonize the dominance of things over the person – and both do not efficiently defend man against the demon of technocratism that has put itself at the service of the financial side against the rules and vocation of the human person” (Wyszyński, 1963, p. 196).

So, totalitarianism is a form of a socio-political system whose main feature is the quest for strict subordination and complete control of all social and individual living areas in all its dimensions. Therefore, it can be concluded that totalitarian systems seem to be a specific type of political gnosis consisting in dividing reality into two dimensions: good and evil. This first dimension – comprehended

as “positive” – consists of the supporters of a given system. The second is “negative” and involves enemies of the regime. Moreover, totalitarianism is often associated with dictatorship, a significant restriction of public and personal freedoms and liberties, the abolition of the freedom of speech and religion, the rule of the inviolability of private property, and the persecution of individuals opposing the totalitarian profile of the government (Bochenski & Niemeyer, 1958, p. 633).

In other words, totalitarian ideologies always tend to turn into a kind of universal creed (a kind of *Communist Manifesto*). As a result, it is a tendency completely lacking in liberal political systems, where the rational feature of human nature is a unifying force, assuming that humanity is the sum of individual rational beings. Thus, liberal political systems distance themselves from the totalitarian understanding of “unity” and the universality of human values, thus representing a specific form of pragmatism.

Unfortunately, in the post-war history of Poland, the revolutionary, exclusive, and totalitarian ideology of real socialism advocated the destruction of the entire old order – according to communist ideologues – corrupt and discredited by social injustice. At the same time, the birth of a radically new – cleansed by Marxist-Leninist dialecticism and therefore full of fresh hope – the communist reality was proclaimed. In this context, the anti-liberal, anti-conservative, and anti-pluralist totalitarian ideology created various legends, myths, “dogmas,” cults, ceremonies, and rituals to honor and revere the fate of the elect. The cellular, fluid, network-like political party structure handed the political power to “local fighters” for new world order. As recruits and fellow believers were won over, the Communist Party increasingly became a mass populist. It was controlled by a “charismatic leader” who required recognition of his sapience, omniscience, accuracy, and infallibility, as well as the cult of the charismatic leader (Ficek, 2020a, pp. 159–162).

The primary dimension of the false vision of man presented by totalitarian ideologies is the negation of the idea that man is created in the image and likeness of God. So, he is responsible for his actions and, therefore, can direct his life in such a way as to discover his destiny and dignity as a child of God. Yes, economics and technologies would both seem to be not only very useful but also necessary. The most important question, however, is whether they serve the higher spiritual needs of man. Otherwise, even the most significant achievements of science and technology can be dangerous and even harmful. Especially when

they are used without moderation and, as such, appear to be an end in themselves (Wyszyński, 1980a, pp. 90–91).

According to the Primate, such an attitude is often expressed in the cult of corporeality, exaggerated lust for prosperity, and lack of simplicity. Moreover, “false ideologies” emphasize the uncontrolled quest for the immediate gratification of all kinds of pleasure, selfishness, and social lack of justice. In other words, it is expressed in a dangerous concept of life that is universally accepted and views human fulfillment only in terms of material well-being and down-to-earth complacency. “Although the man in his actions and hardships of controlling the land is limited, [...] nevertheless he should remember that he has a primacy before the created world. In the end, he was shaped in all his being by God Himself, the Creator who made in His nature the mark of His greatness. This greatness does not come from human giving, but it is established by the creative act of God’s love. Therefore, every human person is related to others in God alone” (Wyszyński, 1947, pp. 34–36).

Therefore, in a situation where very influential and, at the same time, hostile forces of totalitarian systems sought to degenerate and corrupt the moral tissue of the Nation, Wyszyński saw it as an absolute obligation to awaken the nation’s conscience in order to prepare it to fight the harmful effects of social demoralization. “Nowadays, the world is converting into a kind of stable, where the alchemy of life is limited to the process of consumption, and people are left without perspectives, without ideas and ideals, without sentiments and exaltation, but with a strange distrust of the human mind and spirituality, as if they were not worthy to touch God. Man is devoid of confidence in the power of human will, which can transform himself. Distrust towards the human heart is stimulated, a sphere so important not only in sociology and pedagogy but also in politics” (Wyszyński, 1973, p. 570).

Therefore, the large-scale struggle against religion and the Church resulted also from the specificity of the “cultural war” – an essential factor in the political strategy of totalitarian power – which was aimed at depriving man of dignity, independent thinking, and, consequently, of freedom itself. Analyzing the harmful effects of totalitarian propaganda, Cardinal Wyszyński emphasized: “This spiritual deflation, moral and cultural unfussiness led to impudence, which implies determined crackdown on the human person’s religious aspirations, desires, emotions, passions, and ambitions” (Wyszyński, 1974, p. 7). Thus, Christian humanism, which proclaims the dignity and authentic freedom of man in terms of “*imago Dei*,” by its very nature contradicts the spirit of totalitarianism.

In this sense, the personalist idea of social life as understood by Wyszyński requires a firm opposition to the concepts referring to dialectical materialism. It is also essential to break with the wrong and bogus conception of man and the world, which dehumanizes and degenerates social life in all its dimensions. In other words, a rejection of the atheistic-materialistic vision of life is required, entailing various forms of desacralization and dehumanization of human activity, which seems to be not only an expression of a false ideology but also a real threat to both man and the whole world. By rejecting his relation to God concerning the world and not fully recognizing the laws governing this realm, man radically turns against the world, leading to the destruction of the human person (Ficek, 2020a, pp. 44–51).

Therefore, the modern world requires the rehabilitation of man, which means giving him his rightful place in the whole socio-political life. The need to heal social life and restore its proper hierarchy of values implies that our socio-political thinking may permanently preserve man's primacy (Wyszyński, 1976b, pp. 679–680). "This is possible only when the entire complex structure of social life has its roots in God who created man in His likeness and called him to the dignity of God's child" (Wyszyński, 1976b, p. 681). It is crucial in the face of the threats posed by totalitarian systems that fight God in the name of man. Only an integral vision of man and society, rooted in God who is Love, can save man and give meaning to his life and actions. When a man loses his relationship with God when he is no longer the son of God, he ceases to be a human being (Wyszyński, 1993, p. 48).

Arranged Atheization and Secularization as Organized Exertions Threatening the Moral Existence of the Nation

Although a significant part of the modern world has been secularized, nevertheless the Catholic Church, both during World War II and in the post-war reality of People's Poland, underwent a harrowing experience of atheization and a quest to remove manifestations of religiosity from the social consciousness of Poles led by the communist regime. Historical changes – especially in post-war Poland – were marked by a desire to weaken as well as marginalize religion and the Church. The above idea was fueled by the systemically imposed and conducted process of transformation of the identity of the Polish nation, where atheistic education and upbringing played a significant role, as well as attempts to subordinate the broadly understood cultural life of the godless ideology of communist

totalitarianism. Virtually all structures of public life were to serve the atheistic concept of a state without God.

In such a socio-political climate, religion was suppressed and treated as a form of human alienation. This kind of ideological orientation represented the desire of the official socialist establishment to create, in line with its views on religion. This social environment embodied the Marxist understanding of religion as “opium for the people.” In line with the regime’s official attitude to religion, cooperation between various religious communities was deliberately impeded, and the cultivation of inter-religious culture and dialogue was almost absent. Some liberalization of the regime’s relationship to religion did not begin until the early 1980s, with the gradual bankruptcy of the ideology of real socialism.

No wonder Wyszyński and the Polish Episcopate intensely highlighted that “[...] compulsory laicization aims to create a man who would be convinced of the validity of the materialistic philosophy and everything that it proclaims. Ultimately, it is about spreading a specific type of atheism” (*List Episkopatu Polski*, 1975, p. 522). In this sense, the programmed process of secularization and atheization, carried out by various means and methods, posed a considerable threat both to native cultures as well as the Nation’s religious and moral life. Aware of the seriousness of the situation, Wyszyński warned: “The Church warns the Nation against the consequences of forced atheization, against the collapse of the religious and moral unity of society, against the inevitable nihilism that creates ideological emptiness and the negation of all spiritual values” (*List Episkopatu Polski*, 1968, pp. 619–126; Wyszyński, 1975c, pp. 669–672).

The adverse effects of secularization and atheization of moral life exerted a particularly destructive influence on the Christian model of marriage and family, causing their demoralization and, consequently, their decay. At the root of this phenomenon lies a distortion of the very understanding of marriage and family, leading them to “institutions of use, liberation from ethical norms, responsibility, and burdens” (*Orędzie*, 1945, p. 25). It is expressed not only in a false vision of love – reduced only to shallow affection or only to the satisfaction of the sex drive – but is also a severe and stern distortion of the truth about man and his fundamental call to responsible love.

A very significant danger, posing a direct threat to the biological survival of the Nation’s structures, was related to the anti-population policy of the state. Thanks to the law permitting the termination of pregnancy and large-scale anti-natalist propaganda, a terrible manipulation of Polish society was carried out. Among its significant parts, as Prymas Wyszyński emphasized: “There

is a erroneous belief that a child in the womb is not yet a human being and – as such – is deprived of all rights (*Głos*, 1970, p. 625). Moreover, the anti-population policy of the state also made negative changes in the social mentality. Society has been infected with an unprecedented fear of reproduction. Childhood was considered almost anti-social. The spouses began to renounce more offspring not only because of difficult living conditions but more often for fear of condemning the public. Therefore, in the common crimes of infanticide committed in Poland “in the majesty of the law,” Wyszyński saw the causes of biological and moral degradation that threatened the Polish Nation (Wyszyński, 1975a, pp. 619–626; 1975c, pp. 669–672).

Questioning all traditional authorities and undermining basic moral principles posed a severe and austere risk of demoralizing society, especially the young generation. The tangible manifestation of this process is the popularization of such attitudes as agreeableness towards evil, mockery of fundamental values and authorities, selfishness and comfort, consumerist attitude to life, sexual debauchery, fornication, drunkenness, and drug addiction (Wyszyński, 1957d, pp. 75–76; 1963, pp. 198–200; 1968, pp. 343–348). In this sense, the above aberrations cause a deep and widespread moral crisis related to the weakening of faith, contributing directly to the progressive degeneration of the system of fundamental moral values and thus undermining the biological and cultural foundations of the nation's existence (Ficek, 2020a, pp. 309–312).

The above facts are particularly evident in the social scourge of alcoholism and the preference for a hedonistic lifestyle. They affect specific people – degenerating them both biologically and spiritually – and destructively disturb the family, nation, and other social life structures. Unsettling so many people, alcohol abuse damages both the economic and socio-political spheres and also degrades the mental and spiritual dimensions of Polish social life. The disappearance of the attitude of responsibility, the degeneration of family, professional and national consciousness is the basis for the development of various types of social pathologies: sexual promiscuity, related diseases, increased criminality, acts of vandalism and hooliganism, road accidents under the influence of alcohol and other pathologies of social life. In this context, dishonesty, jealousy, and alcoholism appear as a severe threat to the moral and spiritual life of a society that requires a special kind of stigmatization and constructive defense response (Wyszyński, 1972b, pp. 491–492; 1978b, pp. 843–844).

Describing the moral situation of Polish society, Stefan Wyszyński stated: “Our moral weakness and instability, despite our strong faith, our moral

relativism, willing to succumb to bad examples and currents, paying attention to various errors, sometimes absurd, the collapse of marital morality, adultery, promiscuity, and drunkenness. All of these make the social division so shaky. We can last for hours in temples and stand on Jasna Góra square like old oak wood, but we easily succumb to even the weakest excitement to all sins and vices. We are spiritually split, mentally broken, and, then, deprived of a lifestyle and national character” (*List Episkopatu Polski*, 1968, p. 508).

Additionally, many destructive threats to social life were stimulated by a programmed process of inciting and fueling selfishness and social hatred (Zacharias, 2004, pp. 48–59). “It is significant – expresses Wyszyński – that in the aspirations for the proletariat’s liberation, a lot of room is occupied by spiritual and moral matters as well as the fight against the Christian religious worldview” (Wyszyński, 1993, p. 103). As a false assumption of a totalitarian ideology, hatred is recognized as the driving force of communist “progress,” applying the principle of “divide and rule.” The Christian spirit of forgiveness and peace declares war in the name of supposed justice and, above all, pagan hatred (*List Episkopatu Polski*, 1968, p. 507). Therefore, the spread of egoism and social hatred appears as an austere distortion of the spiritual and moral culture, harming the dignity of the human person and the unity of the Nation.

Programmatic hatred, destroying manifestations of justice, loyalty, or merciful love – i.e., fundamental values understood as the basis for shaping unity and social integration – has become a dangerous threat to both the human person and the family, and the Nation internally divided and whose prospects are broken. “An illusion that causes many misfortunes for nations and nations is the belief that it is possible to build on unbelief, atheism, and class struggle while – in fact – our world can be created only through brotherly love and friendship. If today’s world needs anything, it is to believe that we come from God, who is Love and does everything in love” (Wyszyński, 1976a, p. 748).

As a result, underlining the deep-seated menaces to social life and promoting fundamental religious and moral values becomes an essential dimension of the teaching of the primate of Poland. Its goal, however, was not the theoretical analysis of attitudes and problems but shaping the moral awareness of Polish society. Therefore, the pastoral teaching of Stefan Wyszyński becomes a unique and still relevant expression of the prophetic mission of the Church as well as a call to conversion and moral renewal of the entire nation.

A New Man in Christ: Toward the Socio-Moral Renewal

Primate Wyszyński implements the broad-based idea of healing the entire reality of social life in his moral and spiritual renewal concept, which is expressed primarily in the program of the “Vows of Jasna Góra Shrine” preceding the “Great Novena.” This program was to prepare the Nation for the “Millennium Jubilee of the Baptism of Poland.” The very fact of taking the vows at Jasna Góra was a massive event in the life of the Church and the Nation. Based on faith in God’s Providence and commitment to work on the moral and spiritual transformations of individuals, families, and society – despite their religious nature – they defended man and the entire Nation (Ficek, 2020b, pp. 239–242; Wójcik, 2006, pp. 259–278).

Nevertheless, the essence of this program was to show the anthropological truth about man as a person created in the image and likeness of God, receiving an explicit command from the Creator authorizing him to change the hitherto reality of the temporal world. By this fact, the human person becomes God’s partner-collaborator in His creation. In turn, the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption of the Son of God emphasizes this aspect of human life even more, making it an essential dimension of the relationship with God, bearing the mark of immortality (*homo Dei*). Participation in God’s creative work leads to discovering man occupying a high position in the entire created world. As a person who is the subject, purpose, and meaning of all social life, he has an absolute priority in the whole reality of the temporal world, through which he carries out the work of creation. Therefore, the personalistic nature of his activities requires responsibility not only for his individual and social development but also for the proper shape of man’s relationship to the world and the world to man.

The above aspect significantly impacted the polemic with the “false vision of man” presented by the so-called “real socialism.” In other words, the anthropological and theological analysis of human life conducted by Cardinal Wyszyński, putting the human person at the center of his considerations, emphasized that man is the most critical and vital link in the entire economic process: its subject, creator, and goal. A man, the center and purpose of the temporal world, must always be associated with the moral criteria that go beyond economic pragmatism. Thus, presenting the anthropological and theological foundations of socio-economic life becomes crucial for humanizing this area of human activity and overcoming its perception only through the prism of pragmatic economic

rationality (Wyszyński, 1993, p. 319). Therefore, the creative commitment to socio-economic life “[...] is an instrument of salvation for every human being, and the worker’s labor is connected with the joy of victory over matter and himself” (Wyszyński, 1993, p. 366).

Nonetheless, creative involvement in socio-political and economic life is not only about the self-realization of the human person. Still, it aims to create a kind of social energy, serving all humankind. In addition, this type of activity activates all gifts rooted in human nature. Moreover, it develops appropriate dispositions: reason, will, feelings, and acquires the necessary moral skills, such as patience, perseverance, solidarity, conscientiousness, etc. Therefore, human creative activity requires effort and a sense of responsibility. However, it gives the freedom to mold “oneself” as well as enables spiritual growth, ennoblement, and sanctification of one’s personality (Wyszyński, 1957, pp. 107–109; Bartnik, 1977, pp. 125–126; Mariański, 1987, pp. 81–97).

Thus, according to Cardinal, the economy and concern for its development prospects require immediate and constructive solutions. The primary expression is the moral order conditioned by the universal conversion process (Wyszyński, 1993, p. 401). In this sense, the homocentric vision of the Primate’s socio-political and economic life requires the appreciation and maintenance of the order of the material world, which – devoted to man – becomes an essential element of socio-economic life, subject to the dynamics of development and progress (Wyszyński, 1962, p. 189; 1976c, p. 753). However, personal dignity, natural predispositions, and the calling that God gives to man in the act of creation and redemption oblige the human person not only to be responsible for his own individual and social development but also to express concern for the complex reality of the world that is to be subordinated to him. In the name of his own development, by participating in “the work of creation,” man is obliged to act comprehensively to improve “social mechanisms” and create living conditions worthy of man. It is expressed primarily in the responsibility for the socio-economic shape of human life and functioning (Wyszyński, 1971, p. 138).

In this respect, man – both individually and socially – is a path both for the renewal of the Church and for a personal process of moral metanoia. The religious and moral order deep-rooted in the human person is a condition for the individual renewal of man. In this context, however, the reform of all structures of social life is also being implemented (Ficek, 2020c, pp. 44–52; Wyszyński, 1981a, pp. 269–270). Therefore, the concept of moral renewal in the teaching of Primate Wyszyński is not individualistic but takes place in the space of family and national

life. Thus, the family order must be related to the order of the heart of every inhabitant of Poland because social order is built in the family. A whole national organism is formed here because the Nation consists of families (Wyszyński, 1978a, p. 830). In this context, “[...] the life of the state must be determined by the order and tranquility of national life, which depends on the peace and order of family life, which in turn depends on the order of the heart” (Wyszyński, 1978a, p. 830).

Nevertheless, the question of Christian morality extends to all areas of human life. In the context of the mutual conditions of the complex structures of human life, one can also speak of the social dimension of moral renewal, which becomes the opposite of the social dimension of sin. On the other hand, moral renewal takes place “[...] in the community of the Church, in which the responsibility for the accepted faith and the experience of love is born. However, the responsibility for faith and love for others is also assumed. Through faith and love, we can acknowledge Christ and social love to people” (Wyszyński, 1972b, p. 490).

Thus, the basis for the moral renewal of social life is the awakening in Christ, realized through metanoia and reconciliation with God. However, this requires a radical turn towards God, which results in a change of conscience and a deepening of the awareness and moral sensitivity of the human person, family, and nation. Changing the way of thinking and appreciating Christian values results in a change of attitudes that leads to holiness and Christian perfection in Christ (Ficek, 2020a, pp. 315–317). In this sense, “the Church is an ally of the nation and proclaims the principles of the Gospel and healthy Christian morality when it awakens love for God and social love, when it constantly maintains moral sensitivity, awakens a sense of social, professional and cultural responsibility, and constantly reminds us all of that the life and development of a nation are not possible without a spirit of sacrifice and fraternal service” (Wyszyński, 1975b, p. 646).

However, the circumstances for the moral transformation of the entire social reality is the integral renewal of man, not a single act. Still, a permanent attitude focused on breaking with evil and sin, practicing Christian virtues, and cultivating supernatural life. Referring to the moral renewal of the Nation, Primate Wyszyński states: “The most important thing is to restore the man” (Wyszyński, 1981b, p. 1007). Therefore, it is impossible to shape moral virtues and values, both individually and as a community, without an essential change in the way of thinking and values – that is, the proper shaping of the conscience of the human person and, consequently, all social reality in the spirit of the authentically biblical truth of Christ. Hence, tragic past experiences require a vigilant attitude. Especially since “[...] nobody in the world is sure of the future. No nation can

be guaranteed a 'golden age.' And we also have no guarantee that Poland will not have to make severe sacrifices!" (Wyszyński, 1972a, p. 102). The seriousness of the threats is added by the fact that the post-war situation in Poland was not conducive to the moral renewal of either the family or the nation (Ficek, 2021, pp. 77–117).

It can be said, therefore, that the ideological and socio-political conditions that arose after the war contributed to an increase in moral threats to the nation's life. It is a reason why Primate Wyszyński, accentuating this problem, considers it necessary and even decisive for the proper shaping of the Christian society. "It is easy to pour all the wealth of a nation into the depths, but the great challenge is to lead the boat during a storm to save everything in it." (Wyszyński, 1957c, p. 145). According to Stefan Wyszyński, the processes of uprooting the nation from its cultural heritage are dangerous threats that undermine the essence of social life. They are expressed in strenuous attempts to break with the historical past and create their own false and deceitful vision of history, culture, and morality, in line with the Marxist-materialist model. Conscious and deliberate falsification of the historical past of the nation, reducing its value for the current generation, resulted in the inevitable cultural uprooting of the country. The loss of identity on a cultural level has very destructive consequences that could lead to a complete disintegration of the nation (Ficek, 2020d, pp. 54–56; Metz, 2008, pp. 36–49).

Man redeemed in the Paschal Mystery by Jesus Christ requires further acts of liberation from the present state of sin and slavery in his actual existence. From the perspective of freedom, work takes place at the level of conscience. Therefore, a free man himself decides about the value of his involvement in socio-political life, striving to free himself from the destructive systems of authoritarian depersonalization and enslavement. Responsibility for evil and sin, which is personal, also expresses the social aspect. Thus, it becomes collective participation in the misappropriation of moral values and principles that flow from God's law. However, Primate Wyszyński warns against shifting the burden of responsibility beyond the conscience of individual people. Although human moral awareness has been severely deformed due to the relativization of concepts and values and by blunting the moral sensitivity of society, any form of degradation, deformation of feelings, or social demoralization requires active cooperation and involvement of specific people (Wyszyński, 1970, pp. 17–18; 1980b, pp. 67–73).

Therefore, the necessary condition for moral renewal is "awakening of conscience," which – for a Christian – is the most sacred center and sanctuary

in which he can be alone with God. "In every individual, in every family, in every word of truth, in the life of the Nation and state, personal, social, and professional conscience, as well as economic and political integrity and principles, must awaken" (Wyszyński, 1980c, p. 73). Only a man of an "awakened conscience" – that is, one in whom the most thoughtful and most comprehensive work of spiritual liberation was accomplished, is the foundation for building the renewed reality of the temporal world. The fulfilment of this desire is possible only through conversion to God in a spirit of faith, realizing one's own sinfulness, and making efforts to fulfill the call to holiness (Ficek, 2020c, pp. 44–48).

The fruit of the integral moral renewal of the entire reality of social life is, therefore, a mature approach to threats to moral life. However, it requires a firm opposition not only to the dangers that resulted from geopolitical conditions and the systematic degeneration of the socio-political system of post-war Poland. The challenge addressed to the entire nation is all the more critical in the fight against moral defects destabilizing social life, destroying its basic structures, leading to general anarchy and, consequently, to the destruction of the state. "Therefore, in the protection of moral freedom against the slavery of dependences, we want to use all spiritual, social, and cultural forces that can serve our vigor and spiritual freedom, which – in turn – depends on any other freedom – political or economic as well. There will be no alteration for the better in our hearts, social and state life if we do not open the door to Christ." (Wyszyński, 1990, p. 488).

Therefore, return to Christ becomes the basis for the moral renewal of the entire reality of social life. It occurs through constant transformation, conversion of hearts and attitudes of individuals as well as the community, and through sacramental reconciliation with God in the Church. No less critical dimension of moral renewal, as understood by Primate Wyszyński, is an apparent Marian trait. Emphasizing the role of Mary in the work of moral renewal has some theological, psychological and sociological justification (Ficek, 2020b, pp. 229–249). "It is true that 'I have put everything on Mary,' and I am dedicated to it. It is born of a deep conviction and assurance that in our homeland, the formation and preservation of a religious group must be done in a dimension to which individuals are most sensitive. With us, this is done through the conciliation of the Holy Mother of God" (Wyszyński, 1980d, p. 105).

Conclusions

One of the typical features of totalitarian ideology was the fascination with the “pagan” quasi-ritual, often referring to Christianity. Much of it involved an inversion of meanings, mimicking and distorting authentic Christian meaning. In other words, totalitarian systems (i.e., fascist dictatorships, National Socialism, or Marxism-Leninism in the Bolshevik version) displayed aspects of a highly amalgamated and coherent religion that sought to resolve the vital dilemmas of human life. The above totalitarianism even wished to influence those spheres of life beyond their “prophetic interest.” Both Marxist-Leninist ideology and Hitler’s “Nazism” often used peculiar quasi-religious rhetoric, repeatedly expressed in various political, economic, scientific, and philosophical statements, seemingly distant from the religious dimension. By denying humanism, individualism, and democracy in the name of universal liberation, either the “Aryan Übermensch” or the “New Communist Man,” the totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century became the orientation of the new spirit shaping the “New World Order.” However, it was a revelation of caricature “spirit” completely distorting his Christian understanding. Similarly, it was a harmful attempt to apply the “new Middle Ages” to establish a new ontical order of unity between “spirit and matter.” However, this kind of totalitarian ideology seems to be exceedingly dangerous.

Therefore, the need to defend the foundations of Christian civilization required an unprecedented and effective response. A significant response to the considerable threats resulting from the emergence of totalitarian ideologies was the personalistic concept of man presented by Stefan Wyszyński. Its main feature was a concern for the good of man in his whole personal dimension. The teaching of Cardinal Wyszyński was also expressed in a clear emphasis on the need for the active involvement of Christians in worldly reality in all its dimensions. It was necessary because the challenging period of domination of totalitarian ideologies posed a particular challenge for Christians, the implementation of which became a patriotic duty, an expression of the attitude of love for the homeland, and an add-on to the essential values constituting national identity.

Various kinds of threats, caused both by geopolitical conditions, the destructive influence of regimes based on totalitarian ideology, as well as the progressive moral degradation of society, called for constructive actions to heal those threats that degenerate the socio-moral life of Poles. An expression of opposition to pathological manifestations of social life is found in the numerous initiatives aimed primarily

at the moral renewal of the nation, conditioning the positive character of all changes in Poland. Being aware of the complex socio-political situation, Cardinal Wyszyński stated: “The minimum that we can make as a postulate in this reality is included in the fact that the state should act ‘*ad bonum commune totius universi*’ [...] That is why we expect the state community to serve the universal good of the entire diverse population of citizens of our homeland” (Wyszyński, 1976d, p. 711).

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Patrząc diabłu w oczy: totalitaryzm i humanitarno-personalistyczna koncepcja życia społeczno-politycznego kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego

STRESZCZENIE Zasadniczym celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie specyfiki teorii totalitaryzmu w kontekście humanitarno-personalistycznej koncepcji życia społeczno-politycznego Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego. Pozwala to na wgląd w naturę obydwu systemów totalitarnych – zarówno w istotę niemieckiego nazistowskiego hitleryzmu, jak też komunizmu. Ukazanie powyższych kwestii z punktu widzenia personalistycznej prakseologii chrześcijańskiej demaskuje ich bezprecedensowo zbrodnicze skłonności. W tym kontekście przedstawienie fundamentalnych zagadnień paradygmatu obu totalitaryzmów obnaża ich wynaturzoną specyfikę, jak też dekonspiruje ich antyludzki i antychrześcijański charakter. Pozwala to zatem odmitologizować zarówno ideologię komunizmu, jak też nazistowski narodowy socjalizm i ukazać obydwie koncepcje jako zwyrodniałe systemy zbrodni prowadzącej do zanegowania godności człowieka i – w konsekwencji – do zapaści cywilizacyjnej ludzkości. Co więcej, wiąże się to również z absolutnym sprzeciwem wobec częstych obecnie prób ich usprawiedliwiania, legitymizowania, a nawet uwierzytelnienia w oczach światowej opinii publicznej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE totalitaryzm, Stefan Wyszyński, faszyzm, nazizm, komunizm, personalizm

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