



THE VALUE OF HUMAN LABOUR IN THE SOCIAL THOUGHT OF STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI

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In the contemporary times, the issue of work comes to the forefront of many significant matters. Therefore, we need to talk about work, taking into account new aspirations and new needs.

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (2020b, p. 15)¹

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Abstract. The value of human labour emphasized in the social thought of Stefan Wyszyński was approximated in the article. Using the method of text hermeneutics, an analysis of his written work was made, which allowed for the interpretation of the value of work, which also seems relevant today.

WARTOŚĆ PRACY LUDZKIEJ W MYŚLI SPOŁECZNEJ STEFANA WYSZYŃSKIEGO

Słowa kluczowe: Stefan Wyszyński, praca, myśl społeczna, sprawiedliwość społeczna

Streszczenie. W artykule została przybliżona wartość pracy ludzkiej akcentowana w myśli społecznej Stefana Wyszyńskiego. Wykorzystując metodę

¹ Further citations of Stefan Wyszyński's works will be described with the initial of the surname: W.

hermeneutyki tekstu dokonano analizy jego dorobku piśmienniczego, co umożliwiło zinterpretowanie wartości pracy, która wydaje się aktualna także współcześnie.

Introduction

Consciously, the article begins with a quote from Stefan Wyszyński to emphasize that work constitutes an elemental foundation of contemporary social life. The issue of work aligns with the research interests of two pedagogical sub-disciplines: andragogy and pedagogy of work. The aim of this scientific deliberation is to present the value of human work in the social thought of S. Wyszyński. The study will be conducted using the method of textual hermeneutics, in accordance with the assumptions of Bogusław Śliwerski (1998, p. 20–21). The presentation of selected events from Stefan Wyszyński's life has been planned in order to conduct a biographical analysis. Furthermore, the analysis of the Primate's written works will enable the interpretation of the value of work, which seems to remain relevant.

The value of work in the biography of Stefan Wyszyński

The social thought of Stefan Wyszyński demonstrates a pursuit of social justice (Ficek, 2020, pp. 168, 169). Undoubtedly, his attitude was influenced by historical events that the future primate had to contend with from a young age (Ficek, 2021, pp. 9, 26, 29). The political pressure in the Stalinist system aimed to introduce atheism, secularization, and the indoctrination of society (Kucharczyk, 2002, pp. 53, 81). However, Wyszyński's faith and inner strength shaped his unwavering principles and priestly greatness (Micewski, 1982, pp. 9, 10). An example from young Stefan's life, when he was a third-grade student in primary school, was the harsh treatment he received from his caregiver in the Andrzejewo settlement. The relentless and heartless teacher forbade the boy from returning home for lunch, even after his sister came to fetch him at the request of his father, Stanisław. In Russian, the teacher shouted that he would go without "obieda" (dinner)². This situation illustrates that the teacher did not care about the fate of the nine-year-old student. The lack of basic needs, intimidation, and lawlessness accompanied Wyszyński throughout his life (Micewski, 1982, pp. 19, 20).

² Russian word for "dinner".

As a young priest, he undertook pastoral work in the “Celuloza” workers’ community in Włocławek as a prefect. Wyszyński became interested in the Christian Workers’ Association. With the help of this institution, he aimed to counteract the socialist influences that were gradually yielding significant results (Nitecki, 2008, p. 56).

“I know a little about the art of printing. Since my youth, I have been an editor of various publications. God somehow ‘arranged’ it for me” (Biography, 2023). The priest engaged in editorial work for “Słowo Kujawskie”. In the meantime, he collaborated with the seminary newspaper “Przedświt”. Later, he published articles in “Ateneum Kapłańskie” (Laskowska, 2011, pp. 10-15). Throughout Wyszyński’s life, he was dedicated to diligent and honest work. He wrote a doctoral dissertation on the role of school, Church, and state in human education. He conducted a meticulous bibliographic review and read the Holy Scriptures in German, French, and Latin (Nitecki, 2008, pp. 70, 71, 81). “Every person’s career begins on Earth... in a diaper, even if today they wear the uniform of an ambassador or a general, and it may end on a slightly larger diaper” (W, 2008b, p. 6).

Social human rights

The Primate explained that the foundation leading to **freedom** is the respect for human dignity and civil rights, which are guaranteed in the constitution. The paramount right of every individual is the possibility to secure and ensure a functioning life at an appropriate level. Taking care of housing, clean clothing, food, and healthcare constitute the elemental basis of one’s life (W, 2013d, pp. 85, 89). Wyszyński argued that freedom exists when every person is tolerated by others for their own beliefs. It can be stated that every faith is “true in its own way” if the individual deeply believes in it. During the Second Council, Wyszyński advocated for a psychological-philosophical analysis of the concept of religious freedom. The concern for the family in the context of Christian upbringing was also addressed during the Council (Słowikowska, 1934, pp. 150-153).

The social rights of individuals were particularly emphasized in the Social Crusade of Love. In one of my own research works, I thoroughly analysed Wyszyński’s efforts for social order and harmony. Based on an extensive bibliographic review, including the 21 volumes of his *Collected Works*, which comprise his rich and current thoughts, I concluded that three components – the individual, the family, and the nation – formulate the social rights and duties of human beings (Bujewska, 2022, pp. 45-59). Wyszyński, who advocated for human

rights, spoke about the right to work (W, 2013c, p. 11), fair compensation, rest, as well as the right to associate and strike (Nęcek, 2013, p. 53). Every individual is a subject of rights and obligations, deserving the recognition of their personal dignity (W, 2013a, p. 81). *It is necessary to make the land subservient* – this is how the priest encouraged people to proudly look at their country, at workplaces, factories, the towering ruins of castles and churches. In the grandeur of these structures, one should perceive and appreciate the symbiosis of humanity, which has brought everything into existence (W, 2007, p. 196).

Right to work

We live in a world of work, spending the majority of our lives in it. **The right to work** is not only an obligation and a task but also a social necessity for every adult. It serves to enhance one's personality, satisfy their needs, and foster personal development. The social duty to engage in work creates interpersonal relationships among workers, who mutually serve one another (W, 2021, pp. 505–508, 513). Wyszyński encouraged young people to work. His intention was not to undertake tasks beyond physical capabilities but rather to engage in various associations and contribute voluntarily. This voluntary action stemming from the need of the heart teaches a young person to respect the dignity of others (W, 2016b, p. 345). He emphasized the significance of theoretical knowledge, stating that *every job requires prior theoretical preparation*. This highlights the importance of education and familiarity with literature in one's professional field (W, 2012a, p. 283).

Right to fair wages

Catholic social thought conveys that every worker, regardless of their place of work, has the right to a **fair wage** that ensures a dignified livelihood for their family. The wife should not be forced to engage in professional activities (Nęcek, 2013, pp. 58, 59). Nothing should take place at the expense of raising children. If a woman feels the need, she has the right to take up paid work, but the man, as the head of the family, should earn enough to support his wife and children (W, 2012c, p. 107). The salary should be sufficient for the person who knows how to appropriately organize the household budget and manage it (W, 2013d, p. 90).

Right to rest/leisure

Every person has the right to engage in work, as well as **the right to rest**, which is an integral part of sanctification. The Primate recognized the dangers of occupational activities in factories. Engaging in trade on holy days was rejected by Wyszyński. He believed that there should be time for everything: for work (W, 1991, p. 83), and for the Lord on Sunday Mass, because *time is not money but love* (W, 2017, p. 5). It is not an achievement to work long hours. What is important is to fulfil entrusted duties and tasks properly and wholeheartedly (W, 2016f, p. 32). A factory cannot replace prayer and rest. Work should be a prayer! that sanctifies the individual (W, 2008a, p. 667).

Analysing the biography of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, one must mention his internment. Whilst being a prisoner, the clergyman could have succumbed to laziness. However, he acted according to a precisely planned daily schedule. Contemporary individuals can learn from the priest to find time for work and rest. By studying the content of the *Prison Notes*, one can observe that every moment of Wyszyński's life was filled. He would wake up early in the morning at 5:00 am and devote himself to prayer. He found time for celebrating Mass, reading books, writing papers, and engaging in conversations with fellow inmates (W, 2001, p. 191). In his daily schedule, he would also allocate time for moments of silence and rest. While in Komańcza, his final place of isolation, he would visit Our Lady of the Forest to entrust important matters to her. During walks, he discovered the beauty of sunlight piercing through the branches of trees (Niemeczek, 2022, pp. 12, 13). He assisted the Nazareth Sisters with their duties, bringing them St. John's wort, centaury, and other herbs. Despite seclusion and three years of imprisonment by the Security Office, he tried to make the most of every moment (Zamora, 2021, pp. 22, 23, 32).

Right to association and strike

In his social activism, one can discern his efforts towards the right to association, particularly during the March events in Bydgoszcz, which served as the epicentre of an intensified political conflict. The Primate helped resolve the dispute in 1981, which became one of the largest political public demonstrations in the history of insurgent Poland (Rastawicka, Piasecki, 2011, p. 192). The social turmoil began when farmers started advocating for their rights. Although he did

not consider himself a politician, those in power attempted to exploit his priestly recognition among the people.

Indications in the context of the undertaken work

He suggested that when undertaking work duties, one should strive to maintain silence and inner peace. He likened concentration to entering the very midnight called *medium silentium*. The ability to maintain silence was metaphorically presented by stating that every person, regardless of their occupational position, sometimes needs moments of quietude. A doctor, an academic teacher preparing materials for a lecture, a mechanic in an automotive workshop, a lawyer, or other professionals work at night so that no external stimuli disturb or distract them (W, 1999b, pp. 105, 106).

Another indication is to “work like a good soldier of Christ.” The work of a soldier requires the practice of many virtues: meticulousness, discipline, integrity, conscientiousness, and self-control. Self-mastery (W, 2020a, pp. 3, 4), the ability to follow orders and submit to the command of the military unit, constantly reminds one of the hierarchical levels within the corps. Men must adhere to the dress code and compulsorily attend military roll call. This serves as an ideal example, as it demonstrates a certain orderliness that should teach every worker about duty and discipline (W, 1999c, p. 187).

The paramount task of every parent is to teach children respect for work and the acquisition of sustenance. One must not transmit to them one of the deadly sins, which includes laziness (W, 2016e, p. 92). Equally important is the habit of not consuming alcoholic beverages in the workplace. The Primate observed the problem of alcoholism among Poles and repeatedly urged the preservation of a sober state of mind (W, 2002, pp. 120, 121). Efforts must be made to steer the younger generation away from selfishness and to instil in them the ability to work for the good of the Nation and the Homeland. Guided by wise decisions and choices, one should be protected from hatred, violence, and exploitation (W, 2016a, p. 154).

Stefan Wyszyński in relation to working women

At first glance, it may seem that Wyszyński's position as a clergyman keeps women at home and only encourages them to fulfil their obligations towards the family. However, he proposed that women's workplaces should be adjusted

to their psycho-physical capabilities. Working in a mine or heavy industry would be beyond their strength. It is also inappropriate for them to undertake duties that men take on, as it would hinder the bearing and raising of children.

There are many positions in the labour market where women can excel and save themselves from the neo-pagan concept by nurturing their homes, working in education, being involved in social care, and taking up roles in the healthcare sector. Nurses working on the front lines in hospitals for the terminally ill, with their feminine delicacy, can bring comfort in pain and suffering (W, 2016c, p. 212). When considering job opportunities for women, it is also worth considering positions at universities, in the judicial and custodial field, voluntary and charitable organizations, as well as establishments in the light food industry. Wszyński left room for interpretation by stating that he does not set limits for women regarding job positions. Resourcefulness and creativity open up new areas of employment, ultimately providing self-realization, professional fulfilment, satisfaction, as well as an inner sense of social usefulness (W, 1999d, p. 394).

Difficulties of the undertaken work

Every human work, especially physical work, requires effort. Below is presented a fragment of a speech delivered to pilgrims at Jasna Góra. The significance of these words demonstrates the magnitude of the physical effort undertaken by individuals, which is rewarded.

“It is impossible to fulfil one’s duties on this Earth without a cross, without suffering. Does any child come into this world without the mother’s labour pains? This is her cross. Yet, when it passes, she rejoices, no longer remembering the oppression, but rather the joy of giving birth to a child. When you plunge your hands into the heavy work, digging into the heart of Mother Earth and tearing her womb apart to sow the seed, it seems as if both your arms and the entire earth suffer in some kind of agony, awaiting the liberation of God’s children. But when the same earth is later wounded by delicate, growing signs of life reaching towards the sun and covered in a blanket of grain, the earth no longer remembers the pain of ploughing, but rejoices that a new ear will nourish people. When you strike the red-hot womb of iron with mud, it appears to weep tears hidden by fiery heat, but once its anguish cools, it no longer remembers [...]. When you pierce the womb of Mother Earth with the dreadful auger of a miner, in order to extract that black treasure, it may seem to you only as anguish and cross. But when thousands of freezing children warm themselves, when meals

are cooked, when the sick gather around the fire, when the whole family experiences the blessing of warmth amidst the cracking cold, who remembers their toil when witnessing so much joy from the fruits of labour?” (W, 1999a, p. 394).

I intentionally and consciously quoted such an extensive fragment. I wanted to draw the reader’s attention to the **final product** of the work carried out. Despite the arduous physical labour, there is **a joy** that overshadows any inconveniences. In conducting a hermeneutical analysis of the text, it is necessary to examine the historical context. In the last sentence, Wyszyński wrote about the difficulty of ensuring warmth. This was mentioned to explain that in the interwar years, winters were very harsh and accompanied by severe snowstorms. Therefore, it was much more challenging to take care of the warmth of a family hearth than it is today in the era of civilization progress, where homes are heated by heat pumps.

The product of human labour becomes **a loaf of bread**, for which every person should honestly and diligently work. Only in one case is there a different possibility of obtaining bread. In a situation where a person is ill and unable to work, they can seek another path, avail themselves of state aid to receive sustenance. Every person deserves proper care and bread after years of service. The priest emphasized that even if a person has done no good, they are entitled to food because God, who is the Father of all people, does not leave His children in need (W, 2013b, p. 162, 163). The content of the *Our Father* prayer, as interpreted by Wyszyński, constitutes a compendium of social justice. He introduced additional invocations addressing the proper functioning of the state. He prayed for the hungry, the homeless, for just laws, for the eradication of the spirit of war and discord, for a just economic system on earth, for courage in resisting temptations, and for those who died defending the holy faith. There are many invocations.

For the purposes of this study, it was decided to indicate selected formulations (W, 2020c, pp. 5-10). Undoubtedly, the upbringing in the Primate’s family home influenced his approach and respect for bread. The priest himself recalls it in the following way:

“I remember that once a bread crust fell to the ground. My father told me to pick it up and kiss it. He also didn’t forget to explain why it should be done [...]. Our ancestors have long valued and respected bread. How much work must be put into harvesting grain, grinding it [...]. It was the basic food, God’s gift for life. Grain comes from God!” (Zamora, 2007, p. 10).

In his rich social thought concerning the scope of work, the clergyman found the time and place to appreciate the hard work of farmers in the fields. If farmers

sow the seeds and gather the harvest, Polish families will be fed, and there will be no shortage of food. They are the ones who make the land productive. Progress in the agricultural market contributes to even better work organization, which in turn contributes to the welfare of society as a whole (W, 2008c, p. 322).

Wyszyński appreciated the difficulty of scientific work. He believed that a person of science, in pursuit of the nobility of knowledge, resigns from pleasures and many comforts (Jastrzębski, 2014, p. 15). He noticed that it often happens that a person obtains numerous diplomas without possessing the skills to properly utilize the acquired knowledge (W, 2016d, p. 20). Human knowledge surpasses the level of civilization progress that has been achieved. Everything that humans produce in factories and establishments should serve to improve social functioning (W, 2016g, p. 328).

Ethics in the workplace

Regardless of the profession one engages in, a worker should be guided by vocation and ethical principles, as well as moral obligations. Especially a doctor is obliged to demonstrate patience and service (W, 2012b, p. 250). *Work is a natural pursuit of human beings towards one another. It is the collaboration of people as a result of this pursuit* (W, 1999e, p. 494). *The lowest work elevates through love to the heights of holiness, while the loftiest work without love debases and condemns* (W, 2011, p. 6). These two sentences presented represent a kind of quintessence as they showcase the greatness of humanity.

Conclusions

In summary, the prepared study on the value of work in Stefan Wyszyński's social thought reveals that his pastoral activities showed the Polish people a glimpse of heaven. The Primate recognized that work is a necessity for every human being. He was aware that work was denigrated under communism, which is why he addressed issues related to fair wages in his homilies. Despite his numerous responsibilities, he managed to find time for others. According to him, work is the duty of every individual, and engaging in it shapes respect for bread (Góra, Grzegorzczak, 2010, pp. 86, 88).

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