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## The Social Message of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland

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ANDRZEJ FRANCISZEK DZIUBA, ŁOWICZ

### **THE SOCIAL MESSAGE OF CARDINAL STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI, PRIMATE OF POLAND**

The Christian vision of social life, as well in its political ramifications, holds nothing in common with moral relativism nor class warfare, rather, it is a witness of faith and a form of vocation in relation to the salvific mission of the entire People of God, ever on pilgrimage in concrete circumstances of time and place. Teaching founded on Catholic social doctrine, particularly as based upon its socio-political life, permits one to more expressly point up the norms and principles upon which social life ought be grounded. This is not to be construed as a sort of third way proposed in contrast to a variety of systems, but rather an ethical-moral outlook on the dynamic of diversiform social processes.

In the postwar historical experience of Poland and the Church in Poland, the life and activity of the Servant of God, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (1901-1981), is particularly noteworthy. As the Metropolitan of Gniezno and Warsaw, and especially as the Primate of Poland, he evolved into a symbol of solicitude for the Country and all its citizens, including all co-nationals resident abroad. This was, however, a pastoral as well as national responsibility, and was neither political nor ideological.

His broad undertakings in the course of more than thirty years of his primatial service laid an exceptional emphasis on the place of the Church, not only in its religious life, but also in the social and cultural life of the Country. An indefatigable preacher and orator and no less a prisoner and persecuted witness for the faith, he frequently drew attention in his teaching to the great social themes.

This he did, not as an ideologue, but as one who loved his fatherland and as an effective shepherd of souls. In this respect he followed in the long line of Primates of Poland (for example, Cardinal Mieczysław Halka Ledóchowski, Archbishop Marcin Dunin, the

Servant of God, Cardinal August Hlond, SDB) and the archbishops of Warsaw (such as the Blessed Zygmunt Szczęśny Feliński), all uniquely dedicated to the welfare of Poland.

Reflection on the social teachings of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński allows one to encounter the breadth of his solidly anthropological and theological assumptions. These were always marked by an unusual reference to the truths of faith and Christian morality. There, finally, were planted the foundations of a total Christian vision of social life, hence the totality of the Church`s social doctrine, whence ensued the building of numerous particular aspects and forms of social activism, most notably that of the Christian laity, not excluding the political dimension of life.

I. In order to discern and properly understand the vision of Cardinal Wyszyński`s social message, indispensable reference must be made on the anthropological and theological components of social life, namely, the primacy of the human person, the family, the nation as family of families, service to the State, and the human family.

The Christian discernment of social life unequivocally indicates that, finally, all pertains to man, both in his personal and social-communitarian specificity. The social nature of man, as an intelligent being, imposes upon him the responsible formulation of the multifarious forms of his existence. All will always commence from himself and is finally directed toward him. The ways thereto may be very variegated, but never may they be permitted to infringe upon the anthropological reality of existence itself or the fulfillment of the human personality.

The primacy of the human person in the foundation of social life. Therefore it is precisely man who holds an irreplaceable position in it, who in his personal dignity surpasses all communal entities, and what is more, is its ultimate foundation, in both its social and cultural as well as its economic and political aspects. Man, then, is – as the Second Vatican Council avers – „the principle, object and goal of all special arrangements” (GS 25). Furthermore, man remains the key to the proper understanding of social life in the wealth of its manifold forms and the manifestations of which involve and engage concrete persons.

A personalist vision emphasizes that the human person, the „homo Dei”, who simultaneously is a microcosm and microsociety, is

always being fulfilled in an unrepeatable „kairos”. This *hic et nunc* is unique and exigent for his fulfillment as a person. Hence it is in the God-Creator, who enspirited the soul (Gn 2,7), that we find the source of its hopes, expectations and strivings.

At the same time, it is necessary to recall that, in the Christian conceptualization, the human body merits its appropriate attention, authentic respect, wise and tender care, for it is endowed with a native dignity, capable of receiving a mysterious sacrality and predestination to ultimate victory over death itself, hence „may we praise God in our body” (1 Cor 6,20). Proceeding from the integral truth about man, all become capable of ultimate fulfillment.

For Primate Wyszyński, the family is the next subject of social life. It is the fundamental and simultaneously social focus of life and self-realization of man as a person -- the source from which we take life, the first school in which we are taught to think, the first House of God in which we learn to pray.

The family is very deeply rooted in the very nature of the human person, and, as it were, still further, in the phenomenon of sexual difference, which is most fully expressed in marriage, being thus the first and fundamental mode of the human person's social life. The family becomes, therefore, the first and indispensable school of social life, the example and stimulus toward broader social contacts in a spirit of dialogue and love.

It is precisely for this reason that marriage is regarded as that foundation enabling the existence of a full family and is, at the same time, the fundamental condition for its proper social functioning and its interpersonal relationships. In such a family alone is fulfilled the positive vocation of two persons to authentic love with an openness to new life through responsible parenthood.

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński distinguished the nation as a family of families, granting to it, moreover, the character of personhood. The nation appertains to the natural and most fundamental units of social life. It is a community of people, who are characterized by a common provenance, language and culture and possessed of a common political consciousness.

Among the referred to elements a lesser significance is accorded to provenance and language, while, on the other hand, a greater significance is given to culture and political consciousness, with par-

ticular regard of the perspective of historical continuity. Fundamentally, it finds its genesis enrooted in the history, tradition and ethos, formed by a common native culture, which renders possible the discovery of the identity and security of a given human commonality, alongside its tending forward into the future, even at times inadequately defined.

An important anthropological and theological element is that of the service to be rendered by the State. The nation is an exceptional and likewise natural organism of social life, ordinarily complementary to the basic political organization of communal life, that is, the State, which, as a matter of fact, arises as a society as a consequence of the natural necessities of people living together, and the need to organize these within society. It becomes, as it were, an organized and external manifestation of the social phenomenon of man as well as the organs of service in a given society and which take on the expression of a State.

In the view of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński world society is a still broader society, namely, the community of the human family. Ever pointing up the higher structures of social life, broader than the nation, the family and the State ultimately are involved in a set of problems on the international and interhuman level, and perhaps the more peculiar and less formal structure which we understand as the „family of families”, or as Francisco de Vitoria asserted, „the human republic” which embraces all peoples by reason of their social nature and actual entity and ultimate destiny to social life, which also encompasses the State and family.

Such are the fundamental structures of social life, which the contemporary world has to offer, being at least a form of discussion which is ultimately open to the future. The vision of a society of humanity or a common human society is based on certain fundamental philosophical principles: the a common human nature, a common final goal, and in particular, a societal human nature.

**II.** The recognition of the fullness of its humanity and its social duties, both individual and societal, is supported in the New Covenant by the placement through the Incarnation of the God-Man in the spheres of personal, family, national and social life. Only when the vision of social life, even in its international context, is so understood, can it lead to a uniting of all social structures, where ju-

stice, refined by forgiveness and mercy creates the „human family” of all the society of the world.

The social doctrine of the Church treats of brotherhood as of a social principle, essential to life and action in community. This principle is the foundation upon which the unity of the Church and of the world are to be built and carries within it an acceptable idea for the building of human society and world peace.

On such a basis, demonstrating the five anthropological and theological foundation of social life, as envisioned by Cardinal Wyszyński, can one enter upon specific spheres of Christian social activism. It is obvious, then, that the fundamental realities of social life cannot remain a purely theoretical and unsystematized conclusion of simple research.

There must be, therefore, an express reference to and application within the realities of the richness of everyday life. Such, then, take on concrete challenges and manifestations. Social activism carries within itself extraordinary riches, both in terms of obligations as in terms of anticipated fruits.

Within the rich treasure of social activism, at its very foundations, is to be found moral renewal and a religious-social obligation. The threat to social life, both geopolitical and ideological, and such as result from individual human weakness, demand not only personal action, but also on the part of all social structures. It is a matter of a concrete ethical and moral transformation, and not simply an interior spectacular sort of triumphing over particular vices, which change could offer a basis for a nation`s rebirth. This truth finds its final echo within each individual person.

Patriotism, in the mind of Primate Wyszyński, is an evident sign of social activism. What is more, the commitment of Christians to the socio-political life of their individual Country, and for a variety of reasons, are integrally bound up with sincere patriotism. These expressions make demands one upon the other, engaging the total person in the richness of these references and positions. A creative attitude toward one`s Country is to be discerned in human nature itself, written, as it were, in the heart of man, thus comprising within itself a commitment of the total personality to the pursuit of social truth.

Still more, Cardinal Wyszyński believes that the fatherland is a mystery, which can be described as a law of nature, the most fun-

damental and sacred of all laws. Patriotism deals with the „soul” of the nation and in reality is characterized by solicitude for her, while always remaining a foundation of national identity and sovereignty, particularly with respect to other societies.

According to Cardinal Wyszyński, *solicitudo* for the common good must also be seen as one of the important criteria of social activism. For after all, authentic social commitment of Christians has its place in the creating and unfolding of the common good, which signifies the good of the citizenry, the good of every person in the fatherland, in the nation, in the State. This creation of maximal opportunities for individual persons within society is meant to lead to positive development of all.

On the other hand, individuals, families and organisms which are all a part and parcel of the civic community, have an awareness of their own inadequacy to truly arrange and govern human life, and must become more conscious of the necessity of a broader community in which all daily collaborate for the greater evolution of the common good.

In the social activism of Christianity particular place must be accorded to merciful love and social justice. Only in Christianity can these be creatively encountered and be mutually life-giving. The fundamental and worthiest expression of human life is love, which proceeds from God.

From this relationship with the Creator, man takes from the essence of God his greatest of qualities: his desire for truth and divine wisdom, his desire for the love that proceeds from the Divine Essence, his desire for justice and peace. These strengths incessantly cry out for recognition in human life, representing and manifesting the most nurturing characteristics of his dignity.

It is a matter, then, of the triumph of a civilization of love, that is, a culture of love and life, which signifies „a more human world”, a world built on values, and, above all, on justice, truth, freedom and solidarity. This civilization of love is founded on its own proper hierarchy of values, on the primacy of ethics over technology, man over things, spiritual values over materialism, mercy over justice, „to be” over „to have”. This, ultimately, is a civilization of the person and of persons.

Cardinal Wyszyński very emphatically stressed the service of truth as it is directed to the service of freedom. Practically considered, the

most authentic commitment of Christians to socio-political life, especially in matters concerning social justice and love, always requires fulfillment in truth and freedom. Such is Christianity, which has in Christ and through Him to lead us to a truth which liberates and actually makes all people free (Cf. J 8,32; Lk 1,68). Freedom in its international dimensions must lead every person to mutual solidarity and justice with respect for the common good of various communities. Socio-political life awaits that man not only know how to love, but also that he live in the truth. That truth be preached, that truth be spoken with courage, that one be directed by truth, that one live by truth, is at the heart of the matter, for it is by way of truth that man attains his humanity and solidifies his dignity.

Peace, as viewed by Cardinal Wyszyński, appears precisely as the fruit of personal social order. Peace is bound up with human nature, to the environment of human life and the development of the human being. Simultaneously, the socio-political image of the contemporary world, the multiplicity of conflicts, some on a dramatic scale, elicit – with authentic hope – opinions that peace is the most vital need of the contemporary world.

This concept encompasses an extraordinarily rich and variant content, which can be concentrated about such values as life, health, harmony, prosperity, spiritual happiness, material success, both individual and social. This is even more expressively evident when one sees all that opposes these goods, namely, war and all that which militates against the good of the individual and interhuman relations, and this on a variety of backdrops.

The personalistic character of socio-economic activity was often referred to by Cardinal Wyszyński. After all, socio-economic life ought be centered on commitment to creatures, and should be its proper participation in this positive good, but only man as an unreplicable person is its subject, its intelligent creator and goal.

All economic activity must serve the self-realization of every human being, hence it must tend not only toward the maximal economic profit, but also toward the satisfying of many other needs, whether cultural and civilizational or social, all along the broad spectrum of human society, inclusive of individual persons.

Finally, Cardinal Wyszyński stresses also the axiological conditioning of Christian cultural activism. Every human person by reason of physical nature is bound to the whole of creation, and, at

the same time, transcends it by reason of his personal specific and his unique relationship with his Creator. Man should bear fruits in time, that is, in the course of his earthly life, and not only by his own effort, but by that of others, and that of society of which he is a component.

One of the expressions of this transcendence is also an openness to the many structures of social life, which man co-creates, particularly in the sphere of culture. Here we touch upon questions of values which to an essential degree create and form the communitarian dimension of human life and thereby contribute to the fulfillment of man as a person.

These values confer upon man a sense of his own being, his identity, and the direction of the activities of societies and States. Values, particularly Christian values, should penetrate the total reality of social life, and, finally, all human culture, leading to a discovery of the full truth about man himself, as well as his multiple relationships.

The Christian vocation, furthermore, places before us certain expectations, challenges and demands, for all its values of the supernatural order will be included in the social reality and other spheres of fulfillment for every human being. These values can contribute to the harmonizing of the social order, but always with the fullest respect for every human person. On the other hand, responsible participation in political life offers an opportunity for realizing the common good and the transformation of social structures. This will lead, then, to hope, love, truth, freedom, justice and peace.

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