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The Arrest and Imprisonment of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński: Turning Points in the Life of the Primate of Poland

Aresztowanie i uwięzienie Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego – Prymasa Polski jako punkty zwrotne w jego biografii

Abstract: The article, titled 'The Arrest and Imprisonment of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński: Turning Points in the Life of the Primate of Poland' examines the unlawful and unjust arrest and imprisonment of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, treating these events as turning points in his life. The article consists of three parts. The first discusses Primate Wyszyński's experience of isolation and solitude. The second discusses how the Primate endured his arrest and seclusion. The final part describes the outcomes of his persecution and confinement. These were numerous and included, among other things, a renewed faith, inner strength, a sense of spiritual rebirth, a deeper identification with the crucified and risen Christ, an increasing desire to imitate the Saviour, total devotion to Him, and a search for meaning—ultimately leading to the discovery that everything has purpose and that he was an instrument in the hands of the Lord and His Mother, Our Lady of Jasna Góra.

Keywords: Arrest, imprisonment, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, fruits of imprisonment.

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When following the life of Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, one has to agree with Rafał Łatka's assertion that:

Cardinal Wyszyński is, for many reasons, an extraordinary figure, well deserving of continuous scholarly interest across various disciplines. ... His life and work inspire us with their intellectual depth, as well as their ethical, moral, and social messages. His contemporaries admired him for his tenacity, broad intellectual horizons, intimate understanding of social issues, and personal charisma.¹

Throughout his life, Cardinal Wyszyński showed strength and resilience in enduring the numerous persecutions that he faced from his opponents. One of the defining moments in his biography—during his tenure as Archbishop, Metropolitan of Gniezno and Warsaw—was his unlawful arrest and three-year imprisonment by the communist regime in Poland. This article examines both his experience of incarceration and the day-to-day reality of prison life, and the unique personal resources he drew upon when suffering this ordeal. His imprisonment left a lasting mark both on the Church and Polish society. Hopefully, by revisiting this turning point in his life, we can better understand who he was, what he stood for, and why—like few others—he deserves to be remembered by posterity.

The Strength That Sustained Cardinal Wyszyński in Captivity

Blessed on 12 September 2021, Father Stefan Wyszyński had already established himself as an accomplished religious writer and social activist long before becoming Primate of Poland. With his strong foundation in philosophy and theology, he stood as a clear witness to Christ, devoted to God, the Church, his nation, and every individual. Guided throughout his life by the scouting motto *Fatherland – Learning – Virtue*, he proved his patriotism on numerous occasions, most notably as a chaplain in the Warsaw Uprising, where he provided

1 These are the words Rafał Łatka uses to describe Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in his book *Prymas Stefan Wyszyński w realiach PRL*, Warszawa 2022, pp. 9–10.

spiritual and medical support under the alias *Radwan III* in a field hospital outside the city.² From the earliest days of his priesthood, whether in Włocławek, Wrociszew, Licheń, Przedecz, Kozłówka, Żułów, or Laski, he undertook demanding pastoral responsibilities, always leaving behind a shining example of indomitable spirit and sense of duty.

Stefan Wyszyński's episcopal mission began on 26 May 1946, when he stepped into the pulpit of the Lublin Cathedral to deliver his first public address as Bishop of Lublin, greeting his congregation with the words: 'My beloved children.' Though only 45 years old, he was already a well-recognised figure in Lublin. His connection to the city stretched back to his student years (1925–1929), when he had studied at the Faculty of Law at the Catholic University of Lublin, and earned a doctorate for his dissertation *The Rights of the Family, Church, and State in Education*. As a student, he was an active member of *Odrodzenie*, a Catholic youth association and *Bratnia Pomoc*, an academic aid society. The Lublin region later became a place of refuge for him during the German occupation of Poland in the Second World War. His tenure as Bishop of Lublin was brief—just two years and eight months—yet this period remains an important though often overlooked aspect of his legacy, not only in Poland but even in the city itself. For the residents of Lublin, this forgotten chapter of history should be a source of civic pride and responsibility.³

Considering the breadth of Stefan Wyszyński's experience as a cardinal, a seminary lecturer and an attentive confessor—his dedication to collaboration with clergy, social and administrative reforms, concern for students, intellectuals, workers, married couples, and families, as well as his care for those in need—it is evident for me that at the moment of his imprisonment, he was already a staunch defender of the Church, Polish traditions, and national identity. From the very beginning of his pastoral, theological, social, and journalistic work, he

2 J. Baszkiewicz, *Powstańczy kapelan Armii Krajowej*, in: *Czas nigdy go nie oddali. Wspomnienia o Stefanie kardynale Wyszyńskim*, eds. A. Rastawicka, B. Piasecki, Kraków 2001, p. 75.

3 I discuss this period of activity in greater detail in my article: *Biskup Stefan Wyszyński jako ordynariusz diecezji lubelskiej i Wielki Kanclerz Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego*, in: *Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński. Droga życia i posługi pasterskiej*, ed. R. Czekalski, Warszawa 2021, pp. 157–186.

set new horizons for their development and was a constant source of direction for the nation. He had a deep vision of the Church, the nation, and the state, all of which, in his view, should serve the highest ideals. He cautioned against building a 'new Poland on a blank slate' without acknowledging its past:

We shelter Poland's thousand-year-old oaks. But for them to thrive, each new branch bearing fruit today must grow from the trunk. The same is true of a nation. The Polish nation of the future, if it is to bear blessed fruit, must retain a living connection to the past through the present.⁴

With his experience working among labourers in Włocławek and Lublin, Father Wyszyński taught the importance of social responsibility. He urged people to critically evaluate mainstream economic and ideological trends and to measure them against Christian moral values.⁵ Throughout his ministry, he defended human dignity and rights while mentoring others in questioning the dominant ideologies of capitalism, socialism, and communism alike.

Both before his imprisonment and after his release, Cardinal Wyszyński preached social solidarity: he called on his followers to reform themselves and to love their neighbours. He taught that those who fail to love are destined to lose, and often reminded people that 'Only eagles soar above the peaks.' He urged young people to cultivate moral integrity, self-discipline and inner strength, and live their faith with courage. A fearless truth-teller, he warned against secular atheism, individualism, collectivism, and abuses of state power. His vision for national renewal centred on the moral education of youth and the awakening of human conscience. He emphasised the role of religious and moral order in family, social, and professional life. For him, true freedom lay in respect for this order, even in times of enslavement, as well as the courage to accept personal and social responsibility. His own words illustrate this:

Dearest children of God, do not think that freedom simply fell into Poland's hands like a gift from the heavens, without struggle or sacrifice

4 Stefan Kardynał Wyszyński. *Droga życia*, Warszawa 2001, p. 12.

5 J. Majewska, *Działalność ks. Stefana Wyszyńskiego jako chrześcijańskiego społecznika*, in: *Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński. Droga życia i posługi pasterskiej*, p. 138.

from the entire nation. Even in captivity, our people never stopped believing in divine justice. With patience, constancy, and perseverance, they cried out: 'Oh Lord, before Your altar, we bring our plea—return to us a homeland that is free.' This was no ordinary song—it was a cry of despair, hope, and faith that pierced the heavens and rallied all of Poland. It echoed across the homeland and beyond, from prisons to mines, uniting those in exile and those at home. It was the voice of a nation refusing to die, for it could not, and would not, surrender.⁶

Fully aware of the tasks and difficulties ahead, Cardinal Wyszyński became Primate of Poland in early 1949,⁷ stepping into an increasingly hostile climate as the communist government intensified its campaign to fully secularise society and eliminate the Church's influence from public life. On 12 September 1945, the Provisional Government of National Unity had already severed ties with the Vatican by nullifying the 1925 concordat. Shortly after, on September 25, a decree from the Council of Ministers introduced civil marriage and divorce, while references to God were systematically removed from official oaths. By 1949, further decrees curtailed religious freedoms and restricted faith-based education: a decree on freedom of conscience and religion, a legal framework for further repression, was issued on 5 August 1949. Church-run schools—particularly those managed by monasteries—were shut down and stripped of their state rights. Catholic publications, both religious and church-organizational, were subjected to stringent censorship.

Clergy and Catholic organisations faced surveillance and intimidation, while Catholic Action, a lay movement dedicated to strengthening the Church's influence in society, was barred from resuming its activities. The communist authorities also sought to divide the clergy into so-called 'positive' and 'reactionary' factions—those who complied with the regime and those who resisted. Arrests of priests mounted, particularly of those involved in youth associations or those who delivered outspoken sermons critical of the state. The authorities ordered that a major trial be held in each province to publicly discredit

6 Stefan Kardynał Wyszyński. *Droga życia*, p. 14.

7 S. Wilk, *Niezwyyczajony obrońca Kościoła w Polsce*, in: *Spółeczna potrzeba pamięci. Osoba i dzieło Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego Prymasa Tysiąclecia*, eds. A. Rynio, M. Parzyszek, Lublin 2017, pp. 17–34.

the clergy in the eyes of the faithful. The secret police placed bishops, priests, and even senior seminarians under constant surveillance, and compiled dossiers on them to be used for blackmail and coercion.⁸

In a bid to suppress social resistance, the communist authorities fought a battle on two fronts. On the one hand, they maintained an illusion of dialogue by establishing the so-called Mixed Commission. On the other, they resorted to blackmail behind the scenes, coercing bishops into signing declarations 'designed to discredit the Church'.⁹ By 1949, the repression had intensified: religious hospitals run by nuns were seized, new laws forced bishops to disband all Church associations, religious gatherings were banned, collections for charity were prohibited, and even prison and hospital chaplains were dismissed from their duties. The regime escalated its attack in 1950 with the dismantling of Caritas, the Church's charitable organisation and the confiscation of Church property, including monastic estates. The orchestrated arrests of prominent bishops, such as Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek and Archbishop Antoni Baraniak, were part of broader efforts to intimidate the clergy. Meanwhile, the communist authorities launched the so-called 'Patriotic Priests' movement to sow division within the clergy.

When the Ordinary of Lublin and soon after the Primate began publicly exposing these actions—in pastoral letters and communiqués—the government responded with even greater force and intensified the reprisals over time. The 1952 Constitution, enacted on the sixth anniversary of the Polish Committee of National Liberation's manifesto (on 22 July) cemented the communists' absolute grip on power. None of the appeals from the Polish Episcopate that President Bolesław Bierut submitted to the highest officials of the communist government were heeded. The regime immediately set its sights on Catholic schools and institutions. At the Catholic University of Lublin [*Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski*, KUL], entire faculties were disbanded and academic rights stripped: first, the admission of first-year students to the Law Department was prohibited, then the following departments were closed: the Economics Department, the Law Department, the Department of Rural Social and Eco-

8 J. Żaryn, *Kościół w PRL*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 19–23.

9 Ibidem, p. 23.

nomic Studies and the Department of Pedagogy. The Faculty of Humanities was denied the right to award doctoral and postdoctoral degrees. Many professors were dismissed. In later years, the departments of English, German and Romance Studies were closed.¹⁰ The university's assets (around 7,000 hectares) were seized from Countess Aniela Potulicka's foundation. Even donations from the faithful to support the university were subjected to taxation. By the end of 1952, nearly 50 lower seminaries, mainly run by religious orders, had been shut down.

During these difficult times, Cardinal Wyszyński, either through his secretary, Bishop Zygmunt Choromański, or in direct talks with state officials, called upon authorities to respect Poland's history, traditions, and common sense. He urged them to honour the agreements they had made and warned against blindly following Soviet policies that were so diametrically at odds with Poland's interests. In January 1953, Archbishop Wyszyński was elevated to the rank of cardinal. Yet, he was unable to travel to the consistory in Rome on 12 January to receive his cardinal's hat, as the authorities denied him a passport. Shortly thereafter, in their dogged efforts to establish a state-controlled Church in Poland, the communist government issued a decree on 9 February, granting itself the power to appoint clergy at all levels, from parish vicars to diocesan bishops. The decree was enforced immediately. Wyszyński, along with the Polish bishops, firmly protested this move. Their response was unequivocal: *non possumus*—we cannot comply. In response, the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers, already determined to neutralise Wyszyński, decided to act. The Cardinal, a realist and prophet, a national educator, a guardian of justice, and a defender of human dignity was arrested and imprisoned for three years. His arrest, orchestrated at the request of Bolesław Bierut and agreed upon nearly a year earlier with Joseph Stalin, took place on the night of Friday, 25 September 1953, with the full backing of the Secretariat of the Communist Party's Politburo. By this decision, Wyszyński was to be exiled from the capital and banned from carrying out any further ecclesiastical duties. He was forcibly removed from his residence at 17 Miodowa Street in Warsaw and placed in detention.

10 Ibidem, pp. 28–29.

The Primate's Experience of Arrest and Imprisonment

The prison chronicle records that on the evening of his arrest, Cardinal Wyszyński delivered a sermon at St Anne's Church in Warsaw. Only hours later, on the orders of the highest state authorities, he was arrested and transported under cover of night to the Capuchin monastery in Rywałd Królewski near Grudziądz. The resident monks were expelled, and the windows of his cell were covered with white paper to obscure any view of what was happening inside. Twenty plainclothes secret police officers kept a constant watch over him. Though Wyszyński had anticipated his arrest for two years, once detained, he found himself completely cut off from the outside world. On the evening of 12 October 1953, he was transferred to a former Bernardine monastery in Stoczek near Lidzbark Warmiński. From the outset, his every move was monitored by informants: Father Stanisław Skorodecki and Sister Maria Leonia Graczyk of the Franciscan Sisters of the Family of Mary. The conditions were harsh. Wyszyński was confined to a dilapidated monastic building, its grounds surrounded by high walls and barbed wire. The winter months were particularly gruelling, as the premises were heated by malfunctioning coal stoves. Armed guards patrolled the perimeter, and the access roads were sealed off with barriers and checkpoints. A year later, on 6 October 1954, the Primate was moved once again—this time by plane—to his third place of imprisonment, a near-deserted Franciscan monastery in Prudnik Śląski, near Nysa, nestled within a vast military zone.

Throughout his imprisonment, Cardinal Wyszyński remained in total isolation—cut off from the outside world. He was even denied the right to visit his gravely ill father. His arrest, carried out in blatant violation of the law, was accompanied by a state-led propaganda campaign in which he was stripped of all his titles and dismissed as the 'former primate' and 'former bishop.' When, on 7 July 1955, Wyszyński was offered freedom in exchange for renouncing his Church positions, he refused. For another year, until 6 August, he was denied access to any newspapers. Then, on 29 October, the government issued an order transferring him to a fourth place of confinement, a convent of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth in Komańcza. Although conditions there were somewhat more lenient, the area had been designated a restricted border zone, accessible only with government-issued passes. Here, for the first time in years,

he was allowed access to select periodicals, such as *Świat* and *Przekrój*. Visits were permitted, though only with prior government approval.

Meanwhile, tensions in Poland were reaching a boiling point. Three days after Władysław Gomułka took power, on 23 October 1956, the Politburo of the Polish United Workers' Party—facing a nation on the brink of strikes and bloodshed—resolved to release Wyszyński and allowed him to return to Warsaw, where he resumed his pastoral duties after three years of painful isolation. It was a political calculation rather than an ideological change, made under intense public pressure. On 26 October, Gomułka dispatched Deputy Minister of Justice Zenon Kliszko and MP Władysław Bieńkowski to Komańcza for a two-hour negotiation. The main points of discussion included repealing the decree of February 9, 1953 on church appointments, which required government consent for the appointment of bishops, resuming the work of the Joint Commission, reinstating bishops Stanisław Adamski, Czesław Kaczmarek and the suffragan bishops of Gniezno, greater autonomy for church-run seminaries, restoring the Church's right to provide Catholic education to children and young people, and reviving Catholic press publications.¹¹

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's return to Warsaw in 1956 was a defining moment in Poland's post-war history. His decision to accept the government's offer of release showed strategic prudence which ultimately spared Poland from bloodshed¹²—he neither imposed unattainable conditions nor incited public unrest upon his return. The Primate's return and reinstatement to his ecclesiastical offices was a personal victory and a moment of immense significance for the entire Catholic community. Returning from captivity as a moral leader, his steadfast resistance and personal sacrifice solidified his status as a national symbol. As Anna Krystyna Zyskowska later observed, Wyszyński came to embody 'the love of freedom and reverence for human dignity.'¹³ More

11 S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. 3: 1953–1956, eds. I. Czarcińska, A. Gałka, Warszawa 2018, pp. 195–197.

12 B. Nowaczak, *Okoliczności uwolnienia kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego z internowania w Komańczy (X 1956), Materiały z konferencji naukowej: W 50. Rocznice powrotu kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego do posługi prymasowskiej*, Warszawa, 11 X 2006, „*Studia Prymasowskie*”, 1 (2007) pp. 79–89.

13 A. K. Zyskowska, *Jasnogórski Pielgrzym Ojciec Narodu Ksiądz Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński*, Warszawa 2013, p. 47.

than that, he was now a figure of national unity for all Poles. It was not until October 2000 that, after an official investigation, his arrest and imprisonment were officially recognised as a communist crime.¹⁴

During his three-year isolation, Wyszyński produced an invaluable document—his *Prison Notes*¹⁵—which, beyond detailing the realities of daily life, contained spiritual reflections, letters, petitions to the authorities, and extensive meditations on his incarceration and the situation of the Church in Poland. While in Prudnik Śląski, he composed three volumes of *Letters to My Priests*,¹⁶ and in Komańcza, on 16 May 1956, at the request of the General of the Pauline Order, Fr. Alojzy Wrzałik, and the Prior of Jasna Góra, Fr. Jerzy Tomziński—supported by Maria Okońska—he drafted the Jasna Góra *Vows of the Nation*. These vows were modelled on the (unfulfilled) pledges made by King John II Casimir in Lviv Cathedral on 1 April 1656. Wyszyński hoped that these vows would become sealed in Polish people's hearts, minds, and souls and serve as a moral compass in their personal, family, and social lives.

The vows reached Jasna Góra on 22 May, delivered by Joanna Michalska. From the monastery, invitations were dispatched to every parish in Poland, summoning the faithful to the Votive Mass of Our Lady of Częstochowa. On 26 August 1956, the vows were solemnly proclaimed before the revered image of Our Lady of Częstochowa (raised to the top of the hill) by Bishop Michał Klepacz, President of the Polish Episcopal Conference, before an estimated one million attendees and over a thousand clergy. A chair had been reserved for Wyszyński, yet it remained empty, symbolically adorned only with a bouquet of white and red roses. Meanwhile, in Komańcza, after celebrating Mass before the image of Our Lady of Jasna Góra, Wyszyński, aware of the historical magnitude of the moment, recited the act of consecration. From this momentous event arose his vision for the Great Millennium Novena, a spiritual preparation for the Millennium of Poland's Baptism. Between 15 and 29 August

14 D. Gabrel, Śledztwo dotyczące uwięzienia prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego, „Biuletyn SAWP KUL”, 13 (2018) issue 15 (2), pp. 77–84.

15 S. Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne*, Warszawa–Żąbki 2001.

16 Idem, *List do moich kapłanów*, vol. 1: *Wspólnie z Trójcą świętą*; vol. 2: *Wspólnie z moim Kościołem*; vol. 3: *Wspólnie z moim biskupem*, Paryż 1969.

1956, while still in Komańcza, he developed the plan that would define Poland's religious and national renewal for the coming decade.

Father Stefan Wyszyński accepted his arrest and imprisonment with characteristic composure, succumbing neither to panic nor despair. He endured this ordeal with the same calm resolution he had shown in the face of previous attacks on the Church, such as the closure of minor seminaries, the forced conscription of seminarians, the confiscation of property belonging to religious sisters, and the dissolution of Catholic associations. Although undoubtedly surprised and deeply pained by his arrest, he did not lose his spirit and refused to yield to disillusionment, bitterness or doubt. He firmly believed that God, a loving Father and ever-present companion, would not abandon him even in the bleakest of places. This belief is captured in his prison diary, where he wrote: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Komańcza—I wish to say this aloud, Father, for You know where Komańcza is and that I am in Komańcza."¹⁷

Even in captivity, Wyszyński exhibited heroic fortitude, perceiving his suffering through faith and entrusting himself to the care of the Virgin Mary. In Rywałd, where he was confined to his room for several weeks, he sketched the Stations of the Cross onto the wall. Reflecting on these experiences years later, he remarked:

Looking at the cross brings relief, for the cross is proof that God loves us. We have no power to separate God from His love for us. Neither we nor the entire world possess such strength! For God cannot be separated from Himself, and He is Love.¹⁸

The Fruits of Persecution and Imprisonment

What does the persecuted, imprisoned, and isolated Primate reveal to us? What lessons does he impart? Above all, he demonstrates remarkable mental clarity, composure and dignity in the face of oppression. He does not accept the legitimacy of his arrest, nor does he compromise his beliefs for personal

17 Idem, *Zapiski więzienne*, Paryż 1982, p. 214.

18 Idem, *Miłość na co dzień*, Warszawa–Ząbki 2001, p. 191.

privileges. Instead, he approaches his time in confinement with great creativity. Shortly after his arrest, he establishes a structured daily routine, which he maintains until the very end of his isolation.¹⁹ According to *Wyszyński. The Birth of a New Man* by Father Zdzisław Kijas, the fruits of this painful solitude are many. It becomes a time of spiritual rejuvenation—of faith deepened and strengthened, of rebirth into a stronger union with the crucified and resurrected Christ. It is a path toward complete imitation of and surrender to the Saviour, a search for meaning, and the realization that everything has a purpose. Wyszyński comes to see himself as an instrument in God's hands, embraces obedience to the Father's will and discovers His closeness even in the darkness of isolation.

This night of the soul tests friendships: it exposes both loyalty and illusion. In this spiritual darkness, the light of the saints and their teachings shine brightly, yet none more so than Mary, to whom the Primate entrusts himself boundlessly. His understanding of the Church is purified—it revealed itself to him not only as an institution but as a divine mystery, a Bride of Christ. In this purified vision, he rediscovers Christ and reaffirms his calling. A second consecration to the Church takes place, one that is reciprocated with love. The Primate also comes to a deeper understanding of prayer, the necessity

- 19 The schedule from Komańcza, dated 29 October 1955, is analogous to that of Rywałd: rising at 5.00, followed by Prima and private prayers at 5.30, meditation at 5.45, and the Angelus Domini at 6.15, along with preparation for Holy Mass. The first Holy Mass took place at 6.30, followed by a second at 7.15, along with thanksgiving. Breakfast was at 8.15, after which breviary hours and part of the rosary were observed at 8.45. Work on a book followed at 9.15, and at 11.15, there was a visit to the leadership. Lunch was at 13.00, accompanied by Adoratio Sanctissimi, then a walk and free time at 13.30. At 15.00, Vespers and part of the rosary were recited, followed by more work on the book at 15.30. Matutinum cum Laudibus took place at 18.15, then supper at 19.00, along with German reading. At 20.00, the rosary and evening prayers were said, followed by church hymns. At 20.45, time was dedicated to work and reading, with retiring for the night at 22.00. The schedule in Stoczek Warmiński and Prudnik was almost the same, with only minor exceptions: there was no time allocated for visiting the leadership, German reading, or working on a book, but instead, there was personal work. From Komańcza onwards, the Primate often recited the rosary either in the garden or while walking. S. Wyszyński, *Pro memoria*, vol. 3, pp. 38, 147–148.

of suffering, and the grace of patience in communion with God. He surrenders himself entirely to the divine will, whatever it may bring. He longs for the Cross and expresses gratitude even for the trials of his spiritual night, for in them, he discovers God anew—His presence in prayer, His guiding hand, and His renewed love.

During his period of enforced isolation, the Primate rediscovers the complex nature of freedom—its essence, its connection to truth, goodness, responsibility, and dependence on God. His awareness of his spiritual fatherhood deepens, and he comes to see voluntary ‘bondage’ as the path to true liberation. Throwing himself into intense intellectual work, he revisits the meaning of labour, contemplates its complexities and strives for a vision in which, through work, God’s presence permeates every aspect of life—‘deep and high, far and wide.’²⁰ Yet these are not the only fruits of his solitude. On a spiritual level, his faith is tested, which gives rise to a deeper understanding of reality. In this process of inner rebirth, he gains serenity and a newfound equanimity, with which he approaches all that befalls him. As he takes stock of his past work, he reaffirms his calling to holiness and grows ever more conscious of his mission.

At the same time, his stature as an undeniable leader of the nation grows. He becomes an educator, a guardian of justice, a defender of human rights, and a figure of unparalleled moral authority. His isolation gives him the space to rethink many fundamental issues: the dignity of the human person, Poland’s struggle for freedom, patriotism, the training of priests, the moral and religious renewal of the nation, the sanctity of marriage and family, the protection of unborn life, and the education towards the full realization of personhood. In *Komańcza*, he pens a commentary on the Jasna Góra Vows, hoping that the Polish people will embed their meaning so deeply in their minds, wills, and hearts that the vows become a guiding programme for personal, family, and social life. For nine years, they remained at the heart of the Great Novena, preparing the faithful for the Millennium of Poland’s Baptism in 1966. Even in the face of personal injustice, Wyszyński remains committed to the Christian principle of overcoming evil with good. By forgiving those who wronged him, he sets an example of how to live with respect and in harmony with others.

20 Z. Kijas, *Wyszyński. Narodziny nowego człowieka*, Warszawa 2021.

The trials of isolation and persecution that accompanied Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński throughout his priestly career made him a formidable leader of the Church, a great patriot, and a statesman who went down in history as one of the most outstanding figures of the 20th century. His absence from history would leave many unanswered questions: What would have become of the Diocese of Lublin, the Catholic University of Lublin, or the Church in Poland's western and northern territories? Would the Church in the East have survived in the same form? Without his time in isolation, there would have been no renewal of the Jasna Góra Vows, no nine-year Great Novena for moral and religious renewal, no national pilgrimage of the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa, no Millennium celebrations of Poland's Baptism, and no Social Crusade of Love.

Without his devotion to the universal Church, the Gospel, tradition and the Polish nation—understood as a family of families—there would have been no thousands of inspiring sermons, no pastoral letters from the Primate or the Polish Episcopate, including the famous 1965 Letter of Polish Bishops to German Bishops, which called for reconciliation and dialogue. The Vatican Council vigils, post-conciliar renewal, religious education in schools, and the continued presence of the sacraments in public life might never have come to pass. Without his resistance, the communist regime, waging a battle against both faith and national identity, would still have dictated Church appointments. Had the Primate not defended the Church, tradition, and the nation—nor proclaimed the Gospel to the entire Polish people, sacrificing his freedom in the process—there would be no theology of temporal affairs. His Christian interpretation of marriage and family, his vision of human labour, moral renewal, and concern for the common good in its widest sense, as well as his advocacy for Poland's national sovereignty, would not have taken shape.

Above all, we would lack the powerful example of faithfulness—to God, to humanity, to centuries-old tradition and to Christian culture that has guaranteed the identity and continuity of the nation. Without his influence, there would be no relentless pursuit of truth, no defence of personal freedom and human dignity, no dream of an independent Poland, nor a commitment to human rights and integrity in both thought and action. Most strikingly, without Wyszyński's courage, Poland may never have seen a Polish Pope, nor the Solidarity movement that ignited change in 1980, nor the exceptional model of the sanctity of life that he left us. His defiance secured his place as the 'uncrowned king

of Poland' and the 'Father of the Nation.' Those who knew him remember what a great support he was for believers living in Poland and abroad.

Primate of the Millennium did not perceive the Church only as an institution but as the 'Mystical Body of Christ' and His 'Bride.' On numerous occasions, he sought to explain what it truly meant to love the Church and what kind of love Christ expected of His followers. For him, loving the Church was not simply a matter of faithful service. He taught that 'Service is a duty we can fulfil most diligently, especially when we possess a sense of social order and responsibility,' as he wrote in *A Letter to My Priests* in Prudnik:

Love is something greater still—it is union, concern, compassion, fear, sacrifice, self-denial, and devotion, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, to make her holy. (Eph 5:25).

To love the Bride of Christ, in Wyszyński's understanding, was to 'do everything so that she may grow, even if it meant diminishing oneself.' It meant 'shielding her from every blow, even if one must take the strike, and protecting her from all harm, even at personal cost. If the Church gains great honour, while I suffer disgrace—so be it,' he wrote. 'I cannot save myself at the Church's expense,' he confessed.²¹

This same devotion extended to his nation, its traditions, and his homeland.²² Blessed Primate Wyszyński loved Poland more than his own heart, and all that he did for the Church, he did for his country as well. He taught that one must not sever ties with the past, for:

A nation without history is a nation doomed to tragedy! Poland's fortune has been that it has forged its history not only in times of prosperity but also in moments of great hardship. There are realms of Polish culture that found their voice precisely in the most difficult times. One need only recall the Great Trinity, then Norwid, and later, the great historical writers, especially Sienkiewicz, who kept Poland spiritually and mentally prepared for its resurrection.... That is why it is reckless, and at times even arrogant, to mock our national past from a contemporary standpoint.²³

21 Ibidem, p. 114.

22 E. Sakowicz, *Prymas Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński – Świadek Ewangelii i obrońca tradycji*, in: *Spółeczna potrzeba pamięci. Osoba i dzieło Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego Prymasa Tysiąclecia*, pp. 35–53.

23 *Stefan Kardynał Wyszyński, Droga życia*, p. 46.

Returning to the central theme of this discussion, it is worth noting that Cardinal Wyszyński experienced his imprisonment as a part of his mission. As a servant of the Church, he perceived his suffering as not the workings of human will but the unfolding of divine plans and providence. For this reason, he did not complain and strove to hold no resentment towards anyone. He believed that one must patiently and calmly pray for God to grant the grace to fulfil the task set for the present moment. During his imprisonment, he developed a comprehensive plan for the moral and spiritual renewal of the Polish Nation, placing the Church—understood as the Bride of Christ—at its heart. His three years in isolation became a period of even deeper contemplation on his love for the Church. For him, this love meant:

A firm belief in its supernatural beauty, which manifests in the harmony of ecclesiastical order, its laws—both in matters of ordination and jurisdiction—the Eucharistic sacrifice, the sacraments, and the history of holiness, martyrdom, and the witness of faith in both word and deed.

Furthermore, it encompassed:

A deep love for the inner life of the Church, present in all the celebrations of the Liturgical Year, in religious rituals and customs, in every hymn and prayer, in every blessing and sacred chant, in the soothing sound of the organ and the humble ascent of incense smoke.²⁴

To love the Church also meant:

Cherishing its historical legacy, embracing Christian culture, believing in its ultimate victory, and remembering that, at the end of time, Christ will judge the living and the dead, and that it is the Church—above all else—that will endure until the end of the world.²⁵

24 Stefan Kard. Wyszyński, *List do moich kapłanów*, vol. 3: *Wspólnie z moim biskupem*, Paryż 1969, pp. 168–170.

25 Ibidem.

Cardinal Wyszyński fearlessly defended the rights of the Church and stood in unwavering support of its educational and charitable missions. He believed that 'it is God who governs the Church, and that it is enough to surrender oneself to it wholeheartedly; He will accomplish in us what is needed for these times.' He taught that the Church is not merely a victorious stronghold of truth and moral certainty, but that it must also suffer and make great sacrifices, just as Christ did. At times, it must remain silent, endure scorn and condemnation, be scourged and sentenced to death. Yet ultimately, it will rise again, responding with love—provided that we allow ourselves to be embraced by faithful, sincere, and selfless love and that we live with courage, sacrifice, and vigilance.

The circumstances of the Primate's arrest and unjust imprisonment reveal yet another rare and remarkable virtue—his ability to love even those who persecuted him and to place the common good above personal welfare. Unwilling to seek favour or compromise his integrity, he remained true to himself. He upheld his right to his convictions and refused to condone any morally wrong stance. With moral clarity, he distinguished good from evil, and sin from the sinner. His sense of responsibility extended not only to those entrusted to his pastoral care but, in a broader sense, to all citizens of the nation where, by divine will, he had been made Primate. He actively fulfilled his duties and sought to collaborate—whenever possible—even with those outside the Church, including those who opposed it. In his 1969 testament, he wrote:

I consider it a grace that I was able to bear witness to the Truth as a political prisoner for three years and that I was spared from harbouring hatred towards my fellow countrymen in positions of power. Though fully aware of the wrongs inflicted upon me, I wholeheartedly forgive them for all the slanders they have heaped upon me.

Cardinal Wyszyński taught that love and forgiveness are noble and spiritually liberating. They have the power to elevate us, make us truly great, as well as draw us closer to others in a spirit of brotherhood. He believed that such was the nature of true love. In his view, forgiveness is the act of reclaiming one's freedom—it is the key that unlocks not only one's personal confinement but also the shackles of resentment and anger that imprison others. As he put it, 'most

conflicts that torment people would likely dissipate soon after the initial stage of disagreement.’²⁶

There is no doubt that his three years of isolation, filled with suffering and hardship, had a momentous impact on him as a man, a priest, and a leader of the Church. Yet, he did not perceive his imprisonment as a punishment, but rather as an honour, and described those years as ‘days of privilege,’ during which ‘the Primate of Poland was granted the joy of suffering disgrace for the Name of God.’²⁷ Throughout this ordeal, he drew strength and solace from the Virgin Mary of Częstochowa, whom he venerated as *Virgo Auxiliatrix–True Virgin, Helper*²⁸—his source of fortitude, light, comfort, hope, and ceaseless assistance. From the very beginning of his priesthood, he had entrusted himself and all that constituted Poland to her care. His time in prison only deepened and reinforced this bond, as well as his patriotism and love for his homeland.

As a responsible citizen, he remained steadfastly loyal to his country. Though he did not share the ideology of the ruling authorities, he did not call for their violent overthrow. Instead, he sought their reform in the spirit of the Gospel. He had an unshakable belief in the hidden goodness of every person, and he regarded dialogue and respect for differing worldviews as the means to uncovering and nurturing this goodness. Even when the reality around him seemed to contradict this faith, he chose to believe in this hidden virtue. In this regard, as in many others, Cardinal Wyszyński remains an unparalleled example and an unmatched role model to follow.

Streszczenie: Artykuł dotyczy realiów bezprawnego i niesprawiedliwego aresztowania oraz uwięzienie Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, traktując je jako momenty zwrotne w jego biografii. Opracowanie składa się z trzech części. W pierwszej z nich zostaje omówione doświadczenie, jakim Prymas Wyszyński dysponował w chwili skazania go na odosobnienie i samotność. Część druga poświęcona jest omówieniu sposobu, w jaki Ksiądz Prymas przeżywał aresztowanie i odosobnienie. Natomiast w ostat-

26 A. Rastawicka, *Maryjne drogi wolności Prymasa Tysiąclecia*, Częstochowa 2018, p. 60.

27 S. Wyszyński, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 3: 1956–1957, Warszawa 1999, p. 7.

28 Ibidem.

niej części opisane są owoce prześladowania i odosobnienia. Są one liczne i manifestują się m.in. jako odrodzenie i umocnienie wiary, nabywanie mocy, jakby nowe narodzenie, pójście za Chrystusem ukrzyżowanym i zmartwychwstałym, a zarazem pragnienie upodobnienia się do Zbawiciela, oddanie Mu się bezgraniczne, próba znalezienia sensu, odkrycie, że wszystko ma swoje znaczenie i odkrycie bycia narzędziem w ręku Pana i Jego Matki – Pani Jasnogórskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: aresztowanie, uwięzienie, kardynał Stefan Wyszyński, owoce uwięzienia.

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