

THE SERVANT OF GOD STEFAN CARDINAL WYSZYŃSKI
PRIMATE OF POLAND
(1901-1981)

The Servant of God Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński was born on 3 August 1901, in Zuzela on the Bug River, situated on the border between Podlasie and Mazovia. He was the second child in the large family of Julianna and Stanisław Wyszyński. In the family home, he received a deep religious and patriotic education.

At that time Poland was divided between three invaders, and Zuzela was under Russian rule. The small Stefan learned the taste of slavery and passionately loved his homeland that was experiencing such great hardship. Many years later, he recalled the nights when his father along with a few trusted neighboring landowners would take him with them into the forest. They were going to secretly repair crosses on the graves of those who had died in the January Uprising.

Stefan's childhood was deeply affected by the dramatic event of his mother's death. Julianna Wyszyńska died when Stefan was only nine years old. He longed for her all his life, and this longing directed his heart to the Mother of God, to the one "who does not die." When he left home to study, he remained in touch with his family. A special bond united him with his father, Stanisław, for whom he had great respect, and he cared for him until the end of his life.

Stefan Wyszyński attended high school in Warsaw and Łomża. He entered the seminary Pius X, in Włocławek, as a student and, then in 1920, became a seminarian in view of the priesthood in the Theological Seminary in the same town. He received the ordination to the priesthood—separately and later than those of his class because he had fallen ill—on 3 August 1924, from the hands of Bishop Wojciech Owczarek. He celebrated his first Solemn High Mass on 5 August, at Jasna Góra. During his first years as a priest, he worked in the cathedral parish in Włocławek and as the editor of "Słowa Kujawskiego."

In 1925, Father Stefan Wyszyński began studies in the Faculty of Canon Law of the Catholic University of Lublin. He took classes on socio-economic sciences in the Department of Economics. In 1927, he obtained a bachelor's degree in canon law and, in 1929, a doctorate in canon law with a thesis on the rights of the Church to Schools. This study was complemented by research done on a trip through Western Europe, including Austria, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. He was particularly familiar with the activities of the Catholic Action and Catholic workers' organizations. In the autumn of 1930,

he returned home to Poland. He became vicar in Przedecz and, later, at the cathedral of Włocławek. He also lectured on the Catholic social teaching at the seminary in Włocławek and was the director of the Diocesan Missionary Works and a member of the Episcopal Court. He directed the Marian Solidarity of Kujawsko-Dobrzyńskis, conducted social and educational work in the Christian Trade Unions as well as at the Christian Workers' University in Włocławek. From 1931 to 1946 (with an interruption during the war), he was the editor of the "Atenaum Kapłańskiego", and from 1932 to 1939 the review's editor-in-chief. In 1938, by the decision of Cardinal August Hlond, he was appointed a member of the Social Council of the Primate of Poland.

During World War II, Father Stefan Wyszyński found himself in an extremely difficult and dangerous situation. The Gestapo was after him personally because of his social activities. The Bishop of Włocławek, Msgr. Michał Kozal, and the rector of the seminary, Father Franciszek Korszyński, told Father Wyszyński to leave Włocławek. Thus, during the war, he became a wanderer, going first to Warsaw, where he stayed for a short time with his sister Anastazja, and then to see his father in Wrocheshev. He found shelter on the estate of Aleksander and Jadwiga Zamoyski in Kozłówka, then with the Franciscan Sisters Handmaids of the Cross in Zułów, in the region of Zamość, and in Laski near Warsaw, where he served in pastoral centers for the blind.

In 1942, in Laski, he got to know Maria Okońska and her group of young women, the "Eight." They asked Professor Wyszyński to be their spiritual guide. That was the beginning of a secular institute whose members consecrated their lives to the Mother of God for the Church, constantly supporting with their prayers Wyszyński as priest and professor, later as Bishop of Lublin, and then as Primate of Poland. They also helped in the implementation of his Marian pastoral initiatives.

During the Warsaw Uprising, Father Stefan Wyszyński was the chaplain of the "Kampinos"—a Group of the National Army—and the chaplain of the insurgents' hospital in Laski. He saved those wounded in the fighting in the nearby forests, accompanied operations, and supported the people suffering the consequences of the war. One day, the wind brought a scorched piece of paper from burning Warsaw to Lasek: the only words still visible were "You will love.". Father Wyszyński recognized them as the testament of the fighting capital.

Immediately after the end of the hostilities, Professor Stefan Wyszyński returned to the diocese of Włocławek and began organizing the work of the destroyed seminary in Lubraniec. He also served as the rector of three parishes: in Kujawy, Zgłowiączka, Kłobi, and Świerczyno, and assumed the duties of editor of the diocesan weekly "Ład Boże."

In 1946, Pope Pius XII appointed Father Stefan Wyszyński Bishop of Lublin. He was consecrated Bishop by Poland's Primate, Cardinal August Hlond, on 12 May 1946 at Jasna Góra, and was installed in the cathedral of Lublin on 26 May. Bishop Stefan Wyszyński, after being called as Bishop, adopted the motto "Soli Deo" (To God Alone), and introduced into the episcopal coat of arms, among other images, that of Our Lady of Czestochowa. With great enthusiasm, he began doing pastoral work in the diocese destroyed during the war and under the occupation. He courageously supported the Catholic University of Lublin that was developing again after the war.

After the death of Cardinal August Hlond, in 1948, Bishop Stefan Wyszyński was appointed Archbishop of Gniezno and Warsaw, and consequently Primate of Poland. In the pastoral letter on the day of his installation, he wrote: "I am neither a politician nor a diplomat, nor am I an activist or reformer. I am, on the contrary, your spiritual father, your shepherd, and the bishop of your souls; I am the apostle of Jesus Christ."

The Primate assumed this pastoral ministry in the particularly difficult Stalinist era. As persecution against the Church was increasing, on the initiative of Cardinal Wyszyński, the representatives of the Polish Episcopate and State authorities signed an Agreement, dated 14 April 1950. In the absence of a concordat, it was the only legal declaration defining the situation of the Church in Poland. However, the government had no intention of keeping its commitments. It repeatedly broke the successive points of the Agreement. Primate Wyszyński, with great prudence and courage, defended the rights and the security of the country's faithful. The following year, he went to Rome for the Ad Limina visit. He explained to Pope Pius XII the line of conduct of the Church and the Episcopate in Poland. He obtained approval and full understanding.

Primate Wyszyński had special papal rights as a delegate of the Holy See for the affairs of the Eastern rites. The pastoral care included Greek Catholics who, deprived of their shepherds, were moved away from the churches and their places of residence. He also patronized illegal distribution of the Holy Scriptures and other religious publications in the regions incorporated into the USSR, and secretly ordained priests and consecrated bishops from these areas.

In the consistory celebrated on 12 January 1953, Poland's Primate was elevated to the dignity of Cardinal. However, the State authorities did not allow him to go to Rome to receive the insignia of the cardinalate. At that time, persecution against the Church was increasing in the country and Her freedom was being reduced. The communist authorities, wanting to make the clergy totally dependent, issued a decree, on 9 February 1953, filling all ecclesiastical

posts. In this way, they tried to deprive the Church of the right to jurisdiction. Priests and bishops were arrested. On 8 May 1953, Cardinal Wyszyński and the entire Episcopate sent a famous memorial to the State authorities, enumerating the injustices suffered by the Church in Poland, stating that they could not renounce: *Non possumus!*

On 25 September 1953, the Primate of Poland was arrested and deported from Warsaw. He was imprisoned successively in Rywałd Królewski, Stoczek Warmiński, Prudnik, and Komancza. On 8 December 1953, in Stoczek Warmiński, he made an act of total dedication to the Mother of God in captivity, and on 16 May 1956, in Komancza, he wrote the text of the renewed vows that King Jan Kazimierz made in 1656. They were solemnly made by millions of pilgrims with the Polish Episcopate at the head, at Jasna Góra on 26 August 1956, as the Polish National Vows on Jasna Góra. On 26 October 1956, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was released. On 28 October, he returned to Warsaw, to the great joy of the faithful, and assumed his pastoral duties.

Only in 1957 did he go to Rome to receive the insignia of the cardinalate from Pope Pius XII and take possession of the titular church of *Santa Maria in Trastevere*. On that occasion, the Holy Father blessed the Image of the Visitation to be taken around Poland. The pilgrimage of the reproduction of the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa was intended to strengthen and unite the Nation spiritually during preparations for the Millennium of Poland's Baptism. It took place within the framework of a nine-year-long pastoral action, the so-called Great Novena, aimed at the moral renewal and the fulfillment of the promises made in the National Vows on Jasna Góra. The Primate of Poland in the service of the Church insisted on bond with Mary, the Queen of Poland. In this way, he consolidated and protected the faith in the atheistic State.

Pope Paul VI wanted to come to Poland for the main celebrations of the millennium. The communist authorities, influenced by decisions emanating from Moscow, refused the Holy Father's right to come. The Millennium of the Baptism of Poland was, nevertheless, a great spiritual victory for the Church. Despite countless adversities, on 3 May 1966, a large crowd of pilgrims stood at the foot of Jasna Góra. Primate Wyszyński (as *legatus natus*), together with all the Polish Bishops, in a solemn act, consecrated Poland to the "motherly bondage" of Mary, Mother of the Church, for the freedom of Christ's Church. The Polish Episcopate gave to the Mother of God "all God's Children of the baptized Nation and everything that Poland is." The millennium celebrations marked the beginning of a moral victory over communism, and they overcame the barrier of fear in Polish society. People felt internally free, they were united and found their identity. Poland's Primate presided over all

the ceremonies on the Millennium Trail from Gniezno and Poznan through each of the episcopal capitals.

In the 1960s, the Primate of Poland actively participated in the work of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), first in the preparations and, then, in the deliberations during its subsequent sessions. He was a member of the Central Pontifical Preparatory Commission of the Second Vatican Council, and later Pope Paul VI appointed him to the Presidium of the Council. He called the faithful in Poland to take part in pastoral campaigns supporting the Council: "Vigils for the Council with Mary in Jasna Gora," "the Council's Action of goodness," "Victory over oneself for the sake of the Council," and the consecration of parishes to the Mother of God for the freedom of the Church.

Primate Stefan Wyszyński enjoyed great recognition among the world's Bishops gathered in the Council hall. He personally handed to Pope Paul VI the letter of the Polish Bishops' Conference asking that Mary be declared Mother of the Church and for the collegial consecration of the world to her Immaculate Heart. On 21 November 1964, the Holy Father proclaimed Mary Mother of the Church and entrusted the destiny of humanity to her. At the end Vatican II, the Polish bishops sent letters to the episcopates throughout the world telling the, about the Millennium of Poland's Baptism. A special letter was sent to the German Bishops with the eloquent words "we forgive and ask for forgiveness." This message was strongly criticized in the communist press, but it was an important step in the pursuit of reconciliation between the neighboring nations.

In 1971, the Primate participated in the Synod of Bishops in Rome. On 17 October, he took part in the beatification of Father Maximilian Kolbe. On 28 June 1972, Pope Paul VI's decision to stabilize the Ecclesiastical Administration in the Western and Northern Territories crowned the many years of efforts undertaken by Primate Wyszyński and the Polish Bishops. In 1976, Cardinal Wyszyński inaugurated a six-year program of preparation for the 600th Anniversary of the Presence of the Miraculous Image of the Mother of God at Jasna Góra.

The greatest joy of the Primate of the Millennium and of the Church in Poland was the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła on 16 October 1978 to the Holy See. During the audience for Poles, on 23 October 1978, Holy Father John Paul II, addressed a remarkable statement to Cardinal Wyszyński: "Venerable and beloved Cardinal Primate, allow me to tell you just what I think. This Polish pope, who today, full of fear of God, but also of trust, is beginning a new pontificate, would not be on Peter's chair were it not for your faith which did not retreat before prison and suffering. Were it not for your heroic hope, your unlimited trust in the Mother of the Church! Were it not for Jasna Gora, and the whole period of the history of the

Church in our country, together with your ministry as Bishop and Primate!” Already in June 1979, Cardinal Wyszyński received the visible Head of the Church, the Polish Pope, in his Homeland.

As the union “Solidarity” was being formed, Poland’s Primate was constantly a keystone of balance and social peace. Concerned about the good of the people and peace in his homeland, he continuously insisted on acting responsibly.

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński received, from various universities and organizations, many awards and prizes for his pastoral and scientific activities. The Catholic University of Lublin and universities abroad awarded the Primate the title of *Doctor honoris causa*.

Cardinal Primate Wyszyński died on 28 May 1981, on the solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. A man who loved God has passed away; he called for justice and the freedom of the Church and the Fatherland; he loved every human being, even the persecutors; he taught great respect for the human person and defended life; he emphasized the value of the maternal vocation of women. The funeral of the Primate of the Millennium, truly royal, expressed respect and reverence for the Father of the Nation. Both faithful and non-believers bade him farewell. Thousands of people, delegations of most European episcopates and the United States, and the highest authorities of the Polish People’s Republic came to the funeral ceremony in Warsaw on 31 May 1981.

The memory of the deceased Primate is still alive. In 1999, the Warsaw Academy of Catholic Theology was renamed Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University. Over the last thirty years, many doctoral and master’s theses have been written on the teaching of the Primate of the Millennium. Countless schools, streets, squares, monuments, parish houses, museum halls, and hospitals bear the name of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. The testimony of his life is illustrated by theater plays, musical pieces, television documentaries, and books. Forums evoke the Primate’s thinking on religious and social issues.

In 1994, the Primate of the Millennium was posthumously awarded the Order of the White Eagle. The Sejm of the Republic of Poland proclaimed 2001 the Year of Cardinal Wyszyński.

In 1989, the beatification process of the servant of God Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński began and the diocesan stage ended in 2001, with the transmission of the files to the Vatican. On 18 December 2017, Pope Francis signed the decree on the heroic virtues of Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński.