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New Man in the Teaching of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński

In the last two millennia, the Church created a number of interesting educational initiatives. These include laying the foundations for European education, the development of the Catholic education and pedagogical and educational activities for many Christian Orders and Congregations (Benedictines, Dominicans, Jesuits, Salesians). This is due to the fact that teaching and education are among the essential tasks of the Church. With respect to the latter, the project of the Great Novena (Wielka Nowenna) appears as a very original form of education, which was taken by the proposal of the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, to prepare Poles to celebrate the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland in 1966. The Great Novena emerged as a very original and unique educational form.

In this context, the idea of the novena requires a short explanation. It was mainly related to the liturgy and was treated as a nine-day preparation for a specific celebration. They consisted in saying privately or publicly prayers of a pleading or thanksgiving nature. It was a reference to the nine-day prayer of the apostles gathered together with Mary in the Upper Room before Pentecost. The preparation time for the novena was either nine weeks, nine months, or nine years¹. The Primate of Poland referred to this idea and planned preparations for the millennium jubilee of the Baptism of Poland for a period of nine years. The project, however, was not limited to organizing collective and individual prayers, but became a program of religious and moral renewal of the nation, which altogether had an upbringing nature². Therefore, it was a very original undertaking that had not taken place in this form before. It required

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¹ K. P. Dannecker, *Novene*, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 7, ed. W. Kasper, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2009, col. 939-940; M. Straszewicz, *Nowenna*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 14, ed. E. Gigilewicz, Lublin 2010, col. 51-52.

² Z. Zieliński, *Kościół w Polsce 1944-2002*, Radom 2003, p. 175-177.

a program mobilization at all levels of the Church in Poland (nationwide, diocesan and parish) by conducting a series of catechesis, sermons, retreats and prayers devoted to the topics indicated by the Primate.

As an introduction, attention should also be paid to the concept of 'new man'. It has its biblical origin, because it was formulated by Saint Paul the Apostle (Col 3, 10-15)³. The adjective 'new' means a man morally renewed, abandoning a life of sin, focused on living with and for Christ. According to Catholic teaching, the moment of birth of a 'new man' is his baptism, which is why the Primate, preparing the Church in Poland for the millennium of baptism called on Poles to make a moral effort to organize their lives in the spirit of the Gospel. The term a 'new man' had additional references to the political situation at that time because the communist authorities tried to create a different model of a 'modern man'. According to them, the 'modern man' was to reject the tradition of faith, abide to the scientific worldview and advocate the social progress in a socialist spirit. The practical confrontation of these two visions of 'man' was supposed to finally indicate which of these models is appropriate. For the Primate Stefan Wyszyński, the 'new man' additionally meant a person possessing social virtues and a developed sensitivity to the good of the family, the Church and the nation.

1. The program of the Great Novena in the historical context

The years of World War II left deep traces in human consciousness. The images related to the crimes and atrocities of the German occupiers made people lose their sense of dignity. Admittedly, the wave of evil and hatred that touched people's hearts was only an unpleasant memory. However, it reminded us of what an unscrupulous person could inflict on another, by treating others as ordinary objects and doing absolutely anything with them. The Primate S. Wyszyński, while still serving as the Bishop of Lublin, visited the death camp in Majdanek, which was in the nearby of Lublin. Impressions from his visit are reflected in his Pastoral Letters from 1946: "In the fields in Majdanek there are still mountains of compost – one thousand three hundred cubic meters of ashes and human bones mixed with fertilizer as a nutrient for vegetable fields. This is a sign of the economic prudence of the materialistic of the Nazi pagans. This is the boundary of two cultures: the old – supposedly retrograde, supposedly hostile to humanity the Catholic culture, which nevertheless 'protects all human remains', in reliquaries on the altar in the sacred places; and this new culture – supposedly progressive, liberated, which turns free peo-

³ A Christian is to be a new man in imitation the Christ's. It is he is the new Adam (Rom 5, 14; 1 Cor 15, 42n), thanks to him the mankind was renewed in its condition. In the indicated passage of the Letters to the Colossians, there is the image of a new man in life following the example the Christ's and cultivating his virtues. T. Michalski, „Nowy człowiek” na podstawie Listu do Kolosan (3, 10-15), „Studia Włocławskie” 1(1998), p. 94-104.

ple into fertiliser. It's a tragic sign of time!"⁴. Therefore, he was aware that a person who had survived the trauma of the war needed a spiritual renewal and restoration of the sense of dignity of humanity.

The second historical factor that motivated the Primate to prepare the program of the Great Novena was the process of atheisation of social life in Poland conducted by the communists. The Stalinist's policy of terror was a massive machine of communist propaganda which had a demoralizing effect, breaking down people's conscience, humiliating human dignity, and limiting their freedom. The moral condition of Poles in the 1950s and 1960s called for a renewal. At that time, Poles felt disappointed with the prevailing political and economic situation. People ceased to believe in the promises of communist paradise and prosperity, and they found a space of freedom in the Church. Hence, the program of the Great Novena provided for the rebuilding of the social order and the national spirit on the foundations of Christian morality⁵.

The new generation were free from the burden of war, brought up in a new spirit, benefiting from the achievements of civilization; they were under the special care of the Primate. He saw in them the hope of the nation. Therefore, he was directing his pastoral attention to this group. The Cardinal wanted to form in them the high moral ideals and encourage to profess the faith in the manner of free people. In this case, the Great Novena was shaping the moral backbone of the young people so that they would follow the voice of conscience in their personal and social life. In reference to E. Malaczewski's⁶ creativities, the Primate S. Wyszyński said about it that "the new human tribe is coming" ("idzie nowych ludzi plemię"). He wanted the new generation to become free and morally healthy. He hoped that the new generation would ensure such a development of social relations that it will make it possible to overcome the ideological communist enslavement⁷.

The last historical event, which should also be mentioned, is the stabilization of the situation of the Church, which was related to the return of the Primate from internment in 1956. Under those conditions, the peregrination of the image of Our Lady in Czestochowa began. It was connected with the inauguration of the Great Novena in 1957. The idea of the cult to the Virgin Mary's was very important for the Primate. Therefore, it led to the nation's Vows Act in

⁴ S. Wyszyński, *Na nowy rok kościelny. O chrześcijańskim wyzwoleniu człowieka*, in: *Listy pasterskie Prymasa Polski 1946-1974*, Paris 1975, p. 34.

⁵ P. Skibiński, *Obchody milenijne na kartach „Pro memoria” prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego*, in: *1966. Milenium Chrztu Polski Prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego. Perspektywa teologiczno-społeczna*, ed. E. Czaczkowska, Warszawa 2016, p. 120-121; Z. Zieliński, *Kościół w Polsce...*, op. cit., p. 174-184.

⁶ Eugeniusz Malaczewski (1897-1922), novelist and lyricist, soldier of the Polish Army, one of the favourite writers of the Primate S. Wyszyński.

⁷ A. Rynio, *Wychowanie młodzieży w posłudze duszpasterskiej Stefana Kardynała Wyszyńskiego*, in: *Społeczna potrzeba pamięci. Osoba i dzieło Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego Prymasa Tysiąclecia*, ed. A. Rynio, M. Parzyszek, Lublin 2017, p. 240-243.

Jasna Góra in 1956, (Jasnogórskie Śluby Narodu), it was also referring to the 300th Vows anniversary of the King of Poland, John II Casimir Vasa. One year later the image of the Queen of Poland from Jasna Góra began its journey to individual dioceses and parishes in the country. In this way, the relationship between Poles and Jasna Góra was strengthened. It gave the feeling that Mary was coming and taking care of her nation, and at the same time she called them to be faithful to her Son and to his Gospel. As part of the peregrination, large crowds of the faithful's gathered at the ceremonial, to whom the Primate Stefan Wyszyński often spoke in person. These great congregations also gave a feeling of a great strength that there is a huge crowd of believers in Poland, so they should not be afraid to profess their faith⁸.

2. Assumptions and forms of implementation of the Great Novena

The smallest part of the Great Novena of the Primate was prepared during his imprisonment in Komancza in 1956. It was born in the chains of communism, but with the prospect of the impending release. It symbolically led Poles from the state of enslavement of minds and hearts through sin and atheization to freedom of the spirit. It was supposed to be a national examination of conscience and retreat. Each year approaching to the millennium jubilee of Poland, the baptism had its own theme, which aimed at restoring the individual's and community's spiritual and moral values that had been deteriorated by communist authorities⁹.

The first two years were aimed at strengthening the foundations of faith and at reminding that faith is expressed through fidelity to the sign of the Cross, by listening to God's words, abiding by the precepts of the Church, obeying the pastors and participating in the sacraments:

1. Fidelity to the God, the Cross, the Gospel, the Church and its pastors;
2. Life in sanctifying grace.

It was a direct response to the atheization, which was carried out by the communists.

The next three years were devoted to the family. The protection of life, the indissolubility of marriage and the valorisation of the religious principles:

3. Protecting the life of grace in the soul and the life of the physical body;
4. Guarding the indissolubility of marriage;
5. Promoting awareness of the need for families to consecrate themselves to God to grow spiritually, develop strong family ties and embrace the religious values taught by the Church.

⁸ Z. Zieliński, *Kościół w Polsce...*, op. cit., p. 181-185.

⁹ R. Czekalski, *Milenium – katechezą narodu*, in: *1966. Milenium Chrztu Polski Prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego...*, op. cit., p. 177-181; J. Lewandowski, *Naród w dziejach zbawienia*, Warszawa 2001, p. 122-123; Z. Zieliński, *Wielka Nowenna*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 20, ed. E. Gigilewicz, Lublin 2014, col. 496-497.

In this case, it was also a response to the policy introduced by the state – the right to abortion, the secularization of marriage and limiting parents' influence on the upbringing of their children.

The previous cycle was related with the theme of the following year.

6. The Youth faith to Christ.

Its content and meaning are quite clear. It should be noted that only one stage of the Great Novena was devoted to young people. Of course, not only for young people were this catechesis addressed, but also became the object of concern for the whole Church¹⁰.

The subject of moral work undertaken as part of the Great Novena in the following years became the social ethics:

7. Social love and justice;

8. Fighting against the national defects and acquiring Christian virtues.

It was also a field of ideological rivalry with the communists who wanted to push the Church out of social life at all costs. The Primate S. Wyszyński dealt with the issue of social relations in the Catholic Church since in the late twenties of the 20th century. Over the years he gave lectures on this subject to various groups of students. He was convinced that only on the basis of sound moral foundations it would be possible to resolve conflicts and social tensions (resulting from the employment relationship)¹¹.

The last year of the Great Novena was devoted to Mary:

9. Under the protection of God's Mother, The Queen of Poland.

In her person were both deep theological threads related to the history of salvation, a personal relationship with God's Mother (a protector and role model) and the social perspective – Mary's role in the history of the nation.

The beginning of the Great Novena took place in May 1957. Then the Primate with great commitment shouted in Jasna Góra: "So I lit the flame for you!" (A więc rozpałilem Wam ogień!)¹². He was aware of the importance of this undertaking and he wanted it to be received also by the nation (including people that were distant from the Church)¹³. At that time, it was a dynamic eruption of religiosity in Poland. The religion lessons returned to schools, the crosses were hanging in the classrooms and the workplaces, many civil servants and functionaries celebrated their marriages in the Church and baptized their children (earlier they usually declared themselves to be atheists for fear of losing their jobs). The Churches became full, and here the faithful found the

¹⁰ It was on the initiative of the Primate in 1957 that the structures of the national youth pastoral ministry were created, which were directly subordinate to the Primate of Poland. A. Skreczko, *Wkład kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w organizację duszpasterstwa dzieci i młodzieży w Polsce*, „Studia Prymasowskie” 2(2008), p. 241-272.

¹¹ J. Majka, *Nauczanie społeczne Prymasa Polski*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 73(1981), vol. 97, p. 238-244; Z. Skrobicki, *Mysł i działalność społeczna ks. Stefana Wyszyńskiego*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 93(2001), vol. 136, p. 442-453.

¹² E. Czaczkowska, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Biografia*, Warszawa 2013, p. 288.

¹³ Z. Zieliński, *Kościół w Polsce...*, op. cit., p. 183.

inspiration to think about the current spiritual situation, to understand the contemporary social changes and to start working on their spiritual values. The Great Novena turned out to be the great action at the Church that integrated the entire nation, it was an event of Catholic formation on a scale that had never been seen before. It ended with a great celebration of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland in 1966¹⁴.

Under the patronage of the Polish Episcopate, the pastoral materials were created for preaching in the parishes – the topics of the sermons, the retreats and the pastoral care of the state. They were printed in the homily magazines. The Bishops in individual dioceses sent letters to the faithful and the various materials, which strengthened the activities in this field. The members of the Primate's Institute largely contributed to the preparation of the materials that were used to strengthening the participation of the faithful and growing the religious community. It was connected with the great enthusiasm of the great masses of people participating in this project. The implementation of the Great Novena program at the level of individual dioceses and parishes were varied, but the content had to penetrate into the human consciousness¹⁵.

The effectiveness of the idea was largely determined by the personal involvement of the Primate S. Wyszyński who was visiting individual Polish dioceses, as well as coordinating the peregrination of the image of Our Lady from Czestochowa who was accompanying the Great Novena. The Primate also attended the celebration and delivered numerous sermons and conferences. The ceremonial was saturated with simple, and often emotional, piety; this style was the most appealing to the faithful in Poland. It was well recognized by the Primate, and despite of the resistance of the Catholic intelligentsia, that this was the tone that dominated the peregrination of the icon in Jasna Gora. Some years later, some people admitted that it was the Primate S. Wyszyński who was right and not them. The best effects of the Great Novena that were connected with it the peregrination impacted on the return of people to the Church and their participation in the sacraments after many years of persecution and spiritual slavery¹⁶.

3. The universal nature of the new man's formation in the program of the Great Novena

There are several factors that contributed to the final effect of the Great Novena program. The first and the most important was the personality of the main educator, the Primate S. Wyszyński. The charisma of the leader of the Church in Poland played a key role in all of the shortcomings and deficiencies

¹⁴ A. Dudek, R. Gryz, *Komuniści i Kościół w Polsce (1945-1989)*, Kraków 2006, p. 119-122.

¹⁵ E. Czackowska, *Kardynał Wyszyński...*, op. cit., p. 294-296; Z. Zieliński, *Wielka Nowenna*, op. cit., col. 497.

¹⁶ E. Czackowska, *Kardynał Wyszyński...*, op. cit., p. 296-299; R. Czekalski, *Milenium – katecheza narodu*, op. cit., p. 177-178.

associated with the implementation of such a complex and extended project. His personal commitment and dedication to the Great Novena was reflected on the thousands of kilometers that he travelled all over Poland to meet people, to preach inspiring sermons, and to share his faithful love to God and Our Lady in a simple and humbly manner, which allowed people that had ordinary lives to identify themselves with the message the Primate was conveying to them. The Primate's humility and 'leading-by-example' style attracted large crowds of people. He was a man from the commune, a son of a humble organist from a small parish in Podlasie. He was surrounded by the aura of a person that was imprisoned by the communist regime for practicing and sharing his faith, yet being an ascetic man who was dedicated to the service of the Church and the Nation with unwavering willpower, able to make difficult decisions, while maintaining tact and respect for every human being (even the opponent). While W. Gomułka's rating declined and his embarrassing speeches increased, the personality of the Primate grew into the most important social authority in the country.

The second factor influencing the effectiveness of the renewal program was the engagement of the recipients who turned to be receptive listeners. The Great Novena took place in a good time, which coincided with the growing social disenchantment with the communist rule. It was an antidote to the nation and a breath of spiritual freedom. The historians estimate that thanks to it, the social consolidation took place under the slogans of faith and great symbols of Polish history. It is also believed that the Great Novena slowed down the process of secularization, which was accelerating in European countries, and revived mass religiosity. The phenomenon of the Polish Church is surprising, especially in comparison with the countries of the Eastern Block where the authorities led to the complete subordination of church structures and marginalization of their influence on society life. The generation of Poles who grew out of the experience of the Great Novena largely appreciated the strength that comes from faith¹⁷. The way in which the Solidarity movement was born in 1980, which referred to Christian values and religious freedom, can be considered the aftermath of the national retreat.

The selection of themes for the preparation of the Great Novena turned out to be very helpful and well chosen. The researchers and witnesses of that time have pointed out that the transmitted materials were abstract, in many places monotonous and too demanding, but it gradually penetrated into the self-dignity. They touched upon matters of fundamental faith, such as attachment to the Church and tradition, access to the sacraments, concern for family life, upbringing of children, and responsibility for social life. At the same time, they

¹⁷ R. Czekalski, *Milenium – katechezą narodu*, op. cit., p. 181-182; Z. Zieliński, *Kościół w Polsce...*, op. cit., p. 185-190; idem, *Wielka Nowenna*, op. cit., col. 497.

strengthened self-dignity, and the right for freedom¹⁸. It cemented the moral objection against the falsifying reality of the party propaganda. It also referred to those pages of Polish history that were not mentioned in the official message. It was rooted into tradition and awakened the spirit of the nation. However, all politics were avoided in this undertaking. Thanks to this, the program content combined the traditional moral teaching of the Church with the model of the ‘new man’ (free from the spiritual enslavement caused by sin) with the current social conditions, with the universality of the specific needs of time and place.

Finally, it is also note worthy to remark the gestures and symbols presented in the pedagogy of the Great Novena. One of the most important and particularly difficult gesture was his 1965 address to the German Episcopate, which included the message of reconciliation “–We forgive and ask for forgiveness”. Twenty years after the end of the war, these deep wounds were still very fresh and the long history of mutual conflicts made us think of the Germans as eternal harmers. Therefore, such a sentence was extremely risky, but that was centre of teaching on Christ who demanded forgiveness (cf. Mt 18: 21-22) and made this difficult but thorough Evangelical gesture in order to purify the heart of the celebration of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland. It was severely criticized by the authorities, but it was important for building up the future Polish-German relations, including the recognition of the Polish western border¹⁹. Another gesture was to include Polish communities in the celebration of the jubilee, to strengthen the feeling of unity among Poles living all over the world. An important gesture was also the invitation of Pope Paul VI and representatives of other episcopates of the world to the millennium celebration. Their participation built a sense of unity and brotherhood of faith in the family of nations, pointing to the universal message of the Gospel.

4. Conclusion

The program of the Great Novena and its implementation were associated with the celebration of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland. And still remains a great importance of the contemporary history of the Catholic Church in Poland and Europe. The years 1957-1966 can be compared to the profound years of spiritual ploughing and throwing the seeds of the Gospel into the soil of human hearts. The idea and implementation of this giant project were largely the work of one man – Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland. The

¹⁸ R. Bednarczyk, *Prawa, obowiązki i zadania wychowawcze rodziców w myśli Prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego. Studium Katechetyczne*, Warszawa 2017, p. 254-273; E. Czaczkowska, *Kardynał Wyszyński...*, op. cit., p. 294-296; Z. Zieliński, *Kościół w Polsce...*, op. cit., p. 185-186.

¹⁹ Z. Gleaser, *Milenijne dzieło pojednania prymasa kard. Stefana Wyszyńskiego*, in: *1966. Milenium Chrztu Polski Prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego...*, op. cit., p. 65-79; Z. Zieliński, *Kościół w Polsce...*, op. cit., p. 185-201.

pastoral models formed during the Great Novena left a deep mark on the way the Church functions in Poland. It can even be assumed that some elements of this pedagogy were successfully used during the pontificate of the Pope John Paul II. The evaluation and analysis of this stage of history will certainly be the subject of research for specialists in various fields of history, pedagogy, social relations, theology and others for a long time to come. In the changing cultural and civilization situation, the patterns of action that have proven to be effective in shaping collective social awareness will always be sought. The considerations on the idea of the Great Novena of the Primate S. Wyszyński taken in this article should at least partially indicate the proposed ways of implementing bold educational projects. One of the principles that can be fruitful in this field is the principle of combining what is traditional (the ideal of the 'new man') with the context of modernity, as well as what is universal (Christian values, ideal of freedom) with particular values and needs.

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Summary

The times of the Second World War led to a deep degradation of human dignity. In addition, the communist decades in Poland also gave the humans lost their dignity, which was associated with numerous abuses of power and violations of human rights. The Primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, who headed the Church in Poland, proposed in the context of the program called 'The Great Novena' the religious and moral renewal of Poles. In that way in the years 1957-1965 it was the main aim to prepare people for the celebration of the millennium of the Baptism of Poland. The essence of this program The Great Novena was to rebuild the sense of dignity of the believers who is not afraid to profess and practice his faith, keeping the moral virtues. In this way, the Primate wanted to bring up a "new man" who had a sense of his own dignity, who respected the traditional national values, caring the family life and he is sensitive to other people and common good. In many points the program the Primate was against of the communist policy of that time which breaks the pillars of social life (such as freedom of speech, the right of association, the freedom of conscience, the values of truth and law) and building the new corresponding to the concept of an atheistic socialist state. Thanks to the wide response of the Polish society and the personal involvement of Primate Stefan Wyszyński, the Great Novena program allowed to be strengthen the Catholic Church in Poland, but also brought up the Solidarity generation.

Keywords: the Great Novena, the millennium of the Baptism of Poland, the Primate Stefan Wyszyński, Solidarity, the Catholic pedagogy, the new man.

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