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Stefan Wyszyński's Christian personalism

 <https://doi.org/10.15633/pch.15203>

Abstract

The aim of this article is to present Stefan Wyszyński's personalism based on the mystery of God, especially on the creation and salvation of human beings. The most important issue in Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's personalism is the integral vision of the human person. At the same time, attention is drawn to the extent to which personalism can constitute a basis for shaping pedagogy, especially in relation to the contemporary reality.

Keywords

Stefan Wyszyński, personalism, integral vision

Questions about human beings, their lives, identity, and transience are the subject of inquiry in various academic disciplines. Anthropologists, philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and educationalists continuously seek answers to these questions, while emerging social movements are often described as “personalist.”

Contemporary personalism encompasses various currents, including Thomistic, axiological, existential, and socio-economic perspectives. A thorough analysis of its content reveals the following dimensions: the metaphysical, which emphasizes that the essence of being is personal in nature; the epistemological, which asserts that knowledge is expressed through personality; the ethical, which highlights the importance of aesthetic experience; and theological, which refers to the concept of a personal God.¹

Based on the subjectivity of the person and objective axiology, Christian personalism advances the concept of teleological moral education. In essence, personalist pedagogy is an integral part of anthropology. While exploring the nature of human beings, it simultaneously defines who they should strive to become. Thus, all educational efforts, including those addressing the more foundational layers of personality, are ultimately directed toward the individual's spiritual growth. Personalism seeks ways to influence the spiritual dimension of humanity and the personal “self,” with the central tenet being that individuals must be treated as subjects in education. It is essential to develop and harmonize one's body and soul, for only the harmonious integration of their faculties constitutes true perfection and forms the foundation of a noble character.²

1. Who is a human being?

Emerging new concepts and movements assert that a human being is their own God. These perspectives prioritize individual rights over God, our neighbors,

¹ Cf. S. Kowalczyk, *Człowiek w myśli współczesnej: Filozofia współczesna o człowieku*, Michalineum, Warszawa 1990, p. 377.

² Cf. J. Kostkiewicz, *Kierunki i koncepcje pedagogiki katolickiej w Polsce 1918–1939*, Impuls, Kraków 2013, p. 52; B. Gawlina, *Wprowadzenie do wybranych nurtów w pedagogice współczesnej*, in: *Wychowanie: interpretacja jego wartości i granic*, ed. B. Gawlina, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 1998, p. 11 (Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Pedagogiczne, 26).

society, and the state. Everything is subjected to the judgment of the individual, who is morally free and liberated from social obligations. They recognize only private morality, claiming that religion is a personal matter. According to this view, the purpose of human life is temporal happiness, which may be pursued by any means. The unrestricted freedom to accumulate wealth is seen as the highest economic principle.³

There are also those who assert that man is nothing, devoid of any intrinsic personal value. Their worth is derived from the state and social co-existence. As a result, man is denied the fundamental rights of a person: the right to be free, to think, and to act. They must submit entirely to the ruling authority. As Stefan Wyszyński stated,

The person is subjected to complete contempt, the unyielding rigidity of the governing system, the inhumanity of boundless bureaucratic arbitrariness, despotism, and terror. In practice, this leads to citizens being enslaved for the benefit of the collective.⁴

In light of emerging concepts, man is also denied the freedom to believe in God and worship Him. The spiritual dimension of man is disregarded, while a world devoid of God and religious morality is ushered in. Technology and technical progress become the new gods, while proletarian equality is viewed as the highest form of happiness. Human's destiny and the purpose of their life are similarly rejected. If a world without God is proclaimed, man is no longer permitted to pursue happiness in communion with God. The only goals that can be pursued are those dictated by the state. With spiritual values deemed irrelevant, man's life should be devoted to the welfare of the state, society, temporal happiness, and personal gain, ultimately leading to the deification of materialism.⁵

2. Stefan Wyszyński's personalism

The crucial characteristic of Wyszyński's personalism is the integral perception of the human being. In light of this concept, education encompasses the totality

³ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Miłość i sprawiedliwość społeczna*, Pallottinum, Poznań 1993, p. 46.

⁴ S. Wyszyński, *Miłość i sprawiedliwość społeczna*, p. 46.

⁵ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Miłość i sprawiedliwość społeczna*, p. 47.

of methods and processes that help a human being realize their full humanity.⁶ The Primate had no doubts about this. In his view, after God, man is the greatest value on Earth.⁷ Man is a rational, self-aware person, oriented toward spiritual values, and free in their actions. As such, a person should be examined from a variety of perspectives: metaphysical, moral, social, and religious perspectives. Stefan Wyszyński was an authentic defender of an integral view of human being.

On the metaphysical level, a person is an individual substance of a rational nature—an entity that is living, independent, self-aware, and self-responsible. A person is the subject of existence, as well as of creative and free actions. Endowed with spiritual faculties, namely, reason and will,⁸ a person is oriented toward the highest manifestations of being: truth, goodness, beauty, and ultimately, God, who is the source of both being and values. In this context, the supernatural gifts of grace,⁹ faith, hope, and love are particularly significant, as they elevate the individual to a higher level of spiritual existence. Through these gifts, humans can participate in God's life and open themselves to the mysteries of faith. In this dimension, a person can attain the highest dignity while transcending the natural order. Man is a person with a unique mode of existence, one that is entirely distinct from that of all other creatures. Transcending historical and social determinants, man is a being endowed with purposefulness and subjectivity.¹⁰

Another level that needs to be emphasized is the moral one,¹¹ where a person appears as the subject of rights and duties, a discoverer, and creator of values.

⁶ J. Tarnowski, *Człowiek – dialog – wychowanie. Zarys chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki personalistyczno-egzystencjalnej*, "Znak" (1991) no. 436, p. 69; A. Murzyn, *Filozofia edukacji u schyłku XX wieku – wybrane kwestie*, Kraków 2001, p. 37.

⁷ S. Wyszyński, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946–1981*, Ośrodek Dokumentacji Studiów Społecznych, Warszawa 1990, p. 681.

⁸ "Man is a person, a rational and free being, the steward of creation. [...]. Outside of man, there is no personality, no rationality, no freedom" (S. Wyszyński, *Społeczność przyrodzona i nadprzyrodzona*, vol. 2 (Warsaw, 18 February 1957), p. 61. This passage is a reference to J. Maritain, who argued that the person is a universe of a spiritual nature, endowed with the freedom of choice, and thus constitutes a whole independent of the world. Cf. J. Maritain, *Humanisme intégral*, Fernand Aubier, Paris 1947).

⁹ God "wished that we become His children, not only in the order of nature, as the Creator of our bodies and souls, but even more so—in the order of grace" (S. Wyszyński, *W obronie praw osoby ludzkiej i kultury humanistycznej*, vol. 16 (9 April 1964), p. 2.

¹⁰ K. Bochenek, *Personalizm jako wyznacznik chrześcijańskiej wizji społeczeństwa optymalnego, "Nierówności Społeczne a Wzrost Gospodarczy"* (2009) no. 14, pp. 30–31.

¹¹ Cf. U. Gruca-Miąsik, *Rozumowanie moralne – osoba, rozwój, wychowanie*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszów 2018.

Endowed with conscience,¹² they are responsible for their actions. The freedom of the will, together with conscience, enables education, the determination of guilt, and the creation of moral, legal, and social orders that are rooted in objective norms and recognized in a free manner. Thus, a person becomes, to some extent, a self-regulator of their own destiny.¹³

On the social level, a person is open to the world of others. As Wyszyński put it, “[a person] can live and develop their faculties only because of their relations with other people.”¹⁴ A person lives in dialogue with others, thereby creating a milieu of free and rational beings, each of whom is both a subject and an object of law—each possessing intrinsic value, ontologically prior yet requiring others for their growth and happiness. A person exists for themselves and others. Therefore, one can speak of complementarity between a husband and wife, parents, and children. In this way, social cooperation becomes possible.

To grow, a religious dimension with a clearly defined purpose is of paramount importance. In the context of religious education, this means following Christ—becoming more like Him, uniting with Him, incorporating prayer, liturgy, and the sacraments into one's life, shaping one's moral attitude, and harmonizing one's spiritual life with the physical. In personalism, education involves shaping a human being with consideration of their ultimate goal while, of course, also promoting the well-being of the communities in which they live and from which they benefit. This is always achieved through the harmonious development of one's innate physical, intellectual, and moral traits, in conjunction with the religious dimension.

¹² M. Parzyszek, *Prawo wpisane w serce w nauczaniu kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego*, in: *Być człowiekiem sumienia. Interdyscyplinarny namysł nad fenomenem sumienia*, ed. by R. Ceglarek, M. Sztaba, Regina Poloniae, Częstochowa 2015.

¹³ “There are values within man that are given by God—we cannot comprehend them in a different way—which constantly stir our reason, directing it toward truth so persistently that even when a person seems to have grasped the truth, they continue to seek it, continually verifying every step of their reasoning [...]. In this regard, even if they have reasoned most conscientiously and honestly, they do not stop but continue searching for truth. A person has a profound right to know the truth and desires to know it fully. At the same time, they long to see themselves in the light of the whole truth” (S. Wyszyński, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946–1981*, p. 987).

¹⁴ S. Wyszyński, *U podstaw soborowej nauki o człowieku*, in: *W nurcie zagadnień posoborowych*, ed. B. Bejze, vol. 2, Wydawnictwo Sióstr Loretanek, Warszawa 1968, p. 135.

Mature religiosity is possible when a person accepts the gift of faith, practices sacramental life, engages in prayer, and lives according to the commandment of love and apostolic mission.¹⁵

All individuals are connected not only by shared community, biological origin, and rational nature but also by their psychology, love, and the search for truth. Since it is human nature to continuously transcend ourselves, the process of growth is meaningful only when we serve transcendent values that are rooted in God. By entering into an inner dialogue with God, a person achieves their highest realization, meaning, value, and purpose. A person is both the subject and object of love—they exist for themselves and for those they love and those who love them in return. Thus, personal reality achieves greater unity, simplicity, and harmony. The love between persons on the spiritual plane gives the personalist concept its truly social character.

Christian personalism, as presented by Stefan Wyszyński, goes beyond mere mental manifestations. In portraying a person, it delves into deeper layers of personality, primarily moral, religious, and metaphysical. It also takes into account one's supernatural gifts. Therefore, this personalism emphasizes the spiritual connections that link a person not only to the world of others but also to the supernatural order.

On the metaphysical level, therefore, persons are individual, rational, and independent substances. On the moral plane, they must be understood as oriented toward the realm of values, while on the religious plane, persons express themselves through their attitude toward God. On the psychological level, they express themselves through their intellect, character, and temperament.

Human nature is composed of both body and soul, but it is in the person that they are united. It is within the person that the faculties of body and soul, physical and spiritual energies, powers of intellect, will, and heart, and personal and social aspirations intertwine. The human spirit often “rebels” against the body, while the latter resists the spirit. Yet the body “knows” that without the spirit, it is merely a handful of dust.¹⁶ The person, a being that is ontologically and physically unified, constantly strives to achieve a higher inner, spiritual integrity. One's complete integrity occurs when conscience, endeavours, convictions, love, and cooperation with others are harmonized.

¹⁵ Cf. M. Parzyszek, *Rodzina w nauczaniu kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego. Aspekt pedagogiczny*, Episteme, Lublin 2012.

¹⁶ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Bochen chleba*, Marianum, Poznań–Warszawa 1997, p. 139.

Subjective unity is only one aspect of the person. To fully understand who a person is, one must consider their rationality and freedom, reflective consciousness, autonomy, creativity, capacity for purposeful action, responsibility, authenticity, orientation toward values and other individuals, and commitment.

The person is the noblest form of a substantial being. As such, they are endowed with a unique value: dignity. Consequently, a person should be shown respect and regard. The dignity of a person comprises the following elements:

1. **Ontological dignity**, i.e., transcendental goodness.
2. **Physical dignity**, which depends on the integrity of the body.
3. **Functional dignity**, based on specific intellectual capabilities, creative skills, and the ability to work (professional competence).
4. **Moral dignity** in the natural order, based on honesty, wisdom, and goodwill. It manifests itself in one's righteous actions.
5. **Supernatural dignity** in the order of grace, where one is an actual or potential child of God.

Czesław Bartnik observes that “the Primate rooted his concept of personalism in the infinite dignity of the human person. As he often put it, ‘the dignity of a child of God.’”¹⁷

3. Pedagogical consequences of Stefan Wyszyński's personalism

Wyszyński's personalist vision of humanity clearly emphasizes the dual function of pedagogy: diagnostic and apologetic.

The **diagnostic function** involves uncovering the ideological influences of communism permeating society. Rooted in the principles of dialectical materialism, communism promoted a false notion of human liberation. Individuals were viewed primarily through the lens of their productive utility, while religion was deemed a “necessary evil,” and religiosity was something to be eradicated from public life.¹⁸ Political, social, economic, and cultural changes negatively impacted both individual and social life. Long-cherished values were being

¹⁷ C. Bartnik, *Personalistyczny wymiar duchowości według Prymasa Wyszyńskiego*, in: *Gorycz proroctwa*, ed. C. Bartnik, STANDRUK, Lublin 2003, p. 117.

¹⁸ A. Micewski, *Kardynał Wyszyński. Prymas i mąż stanu*, Société d’Éditions Internationales, Paris 1982, p. 29.

displaced and replaced by views and ideologies that undermined the essence of marriage and family.

Among the threats Wyszyński confronted were atheism, secularization, alcoholism, divorce, egoism, contraceptive mentality, lack of a spirit of sacrifice, individualism, sloth, negligence, comfort-seeking, wastefulness, and superficiality. These and many other challenges prompted the Primate's radical defense of human dignity.

Stefan Wyszyński exposed the evil that arose from the premises of communism. However, he did not criticize the system; rather, he indirectly made people aware of the moral, material, and intellectual privations inherent in the system, which inevitably led to its decline. He demonstrated that the materialist Marxist ideology was the root cause of this evil, having a destructive influence on the development of personality, both individually and socially. In fact, it hindered social transformation and the realization of genuine welfare.¹⁹ Wyszyński argued that the solution lay in adopting the principles of Catholic social teaching.

Wyszyński discussed four dimensions of man's social nature: family, nation, international community, and work.

On the level of the family, Wyszyński's thinking is situated within Catholic personalism. Here, parental love, both paternal and maternal, should find its natural fulfillment in the integral upbringing of children, with whom parents co-create the family.²⁰

The family is the primary community in which a person lives. At the same time, it is the most enduring social unit, possessing biological potency and moral, educational, social, and civic significance.²¹ The family should be a place where the noblest values are recognized and developed, not only in the physical dimension (cf. CCC 2221)²² but also in the spiritual one (cf. GS 52).²³

¹⁹ A. Micewski, *Kardynał Wyszyński*, p. 112.

²⁰ Cf. A. Rynio, *Rodzina środowiskiem integralnego wychowania w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, in: *Świat rodziny. Perspektywa interdyscyplinarna wobec trwania i zmiany*, ed. by J. Garbula, A. Zakrzewska, W. Sawczuk, Toruń 2013, pp. 28–56; A. Rynio, *Integralne wychowanie w myśl Jana Pawła II*, Lublin 2004, p. 360.

²¹ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946–1981*, p. 687.

²² "The fecundity of conjugal love cannot be reduced solely to the procreation of children but must extend to their moral education and their spiritual formation. The *role of parents in education* is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable." (John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 36).

²³ "The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds and the joint deliberation

According to Wyszyński, in addition to the family, the nation contributes to one's social growth, as it shapes one's identity and fosters the development of one's personality. A nation is an accidental and relational entity that does not exist independently but through individuals, who are the true substantial beings.²⁴

Wyszyński's analysis of the nation is multifaceted and focuses on two crucial elements. The first pertains to material values, such as origins, tradition, history, economic life, and material and technological civilization. The second element is subjective in nature and includes the community's self-awareness, language, spiritual culture, and, above all, religion.²⁵

A person also develops their social nature within the international community, which the Primate refers to human as *familia humana*. This community serves the nations, which, in turn, should serve families, and families should be directed toward the well-being of their offspring. *Familia humana* is the subject of the Church as perceived on historical, developmental, and geographical planes.²⁶

In light of Stefan Wyszyński's personalism, a human being is the subject of labour, its agent, and its purpose. Although labor may deplete physical strength, it liberates the spirit from material constraints. Moreover, it serves not only temporal good but also eternal good, fostering virtues, skills, and values of the soul that are essential for inner life.²⁷ Ultimately, labor shapes Christian virtues, known as the virtues of work, including patience, long-term thinking, perseverance, humbleness, and diligence.²⁸

of spouses, as well as the painstaking cooperation of parents in the education of their children. [...] Children should be so educated that as adults they can follow their vocation, including a religious one, with a mature sense of responsibility and can choose their state of life; if they marry, they can thereby establish their family in favorable moral, social and economic conditions" (D. Opozda, *Rodzina najcenniejszym dobrem ludzkości – aspekt psychopedagogiczny*, in: *W służbie rodziny*, ed. R. Bieleń, Wydawnictwo Salezjańskie, Warszawa 2000, p. 132).

²⁴ J. Lewandowski, *Naród w nauczaniu kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego*, Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Studiów Społecznych, Warszawa 1989, p. 18.

²⁵ C. Bartnik, *Chrześcijańska nauka o narodzie według Prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego*, RW KUL, Lublin 1982, p. 9.

²⁶ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Ojcze nasz*, PAX, Poznań 1977, p. 29.

²⁷ S. Wyszyński, *Duch pracy ludzkiej*, Soli Deo, Warszawa 1991, p. 111.

²⁸ M. Parzyszek, *Personalistyczny wymiar duchowości chrześcijańskiej w nauczaniu Stefana kardynała Wyszyńskiego*, Lublin 2003, p. 229 (typescript of a PhD dissertation).

The apologetic function of Wyszyński's pedagogical personalism is expressed in the teaching that it is necessary to undertake the demanding task of education—one that considers reason, will, and heart while affirming the intrinsic personal value of every individual. To educate a person means to help them direct their natural faculties toward God, recognize the values that God has instilled in their soul, love the world and others, unite their soul with sanctifying grace, and nurture spiritual and supernatural gifts.²⁹

This type of education is comprehensive and profound, as it encompasses all aspects of human traits and endeavors. When educated in this way, a person acquires a broad worldview that embraces both earthly and heavenly matters, temporality, and eternity. This worldview compels a person to transcend themselves and seek the cause of their existence, meaning, and purpose of their life, not only within themselves but also beyond. It also teaches them to think broadly and protects against sectarian narrow-mindedness.³⁰

Thus, the best form of education is Christian education, as it is the most socially oriented. It prepares us for life within the family—an irreplaceable community³¹—and within society. It teaches us to respect human beings, their rights, and their dignity. Moreover, this form of education contributes to personal growth, as it continuously requires our spiritual effort.³² It successfully avoids the risks of one-sided education, such as naturalism, intellectualism, chauvinism, misguided patriotism, materialism, the idolization of the body, cosmopolitanism, or religious sentimentalism. This education is “self-reflective;” it harmonizes obligations, organizes priorities, neglects nothing, and neither diminishes nor exaggerates.³³

According to Primate Wyszyński, Christian education requires that we “put out into deep water” (cf. Lk 5:4) to perfect ourselves. Spiritual work, grounded in the capacities of the human spirit and religious ideals, is the most demanding effort one can undertake to shape oneself.³⁴

²⁹ S. Wyszyński, *W światłach tysiąclecia*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 1961, pp. 124–125.

³⁰ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 2, Soli Deo, Warszawa 1995, p. 74.

³¹ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Z królewskiego Krakowa*, Soli Deo, Warszawa 1992, p. 42.

³² Cf. S. Wyszyński, *Nauczanie społeczne 1946–1981*, pp. 73–75; S. Wyszyński, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 2, p. 74.

³³ Cf. M. Romaniuk, *Życie, twórczość i posługa Prymasa Tysiąclecia*, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warszawa 2001, p. 105.

³⁴ Cf. S. Wyszyński, *W światłach tysiąclecia*, p. 124.

The fruits of Christian education are valuable individuals, honest citizens, and good Christians who are aware of the gift of faith and shape their lives according to the example of Jesus Christ.³⁵

It is through personalist pedagogy that we can most fully implement the educational process. This pedagogy perceives the “disciple” not merely as a body, a set of emotions, or subjective convictions but as a unified being of both body and spirit—one who thinks, loves, and works both for others and for themselves.

The aim of personalist education is to cultivate “champions of virtue” who, having achieved one goal, continue to seek new ones. The fundamental element of their formation is the encounter with another person.

Conclusions

The basic duty of contemporary societies should be to ensure the harmonious and integrated development of children and young people. Only when the growth of moral personality occurs—a process of becoming a thinking, free, and self-responsible individual, independent yet capable of living with others while adhering to established social norms—can we hope for an optimistic future for humanity.³⁶ It is only love that can ultimately bring about mutual openness, considerateness, dedication, acceptance, and respect in our relationships.³⁷

Stefan Wyszyński's personalism, together with the personalist pedagogy outlined above, is a form of education that respects the nature and value of the human person—one who humanizes the world and, through self-improvement, expresses themselves. It is the individual who imparts a personal, dynamic, and social character to the community in which they function. At the same time, the individual is both the subject of education and has the right to an education that aligns with their nature and ultimate purpose.

³⁵ Cf. A. Rynio, *Wychowanie młodzieży w nauczaniu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego*, Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 2001, p. 157.

³⁶ U. Gruca-Miąsik, *Teoria rozumowania moralnego – zarys syntezy*, “Polska Myśl Pedagogiczna” 5 (2019), p. 138.

³⁷ Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UPJPII, Kraków 2020, pp. 226–267.

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