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## **Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko – a Priest and a Highly Regarded Sociologist**

### **Abstract**

Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko is a priest of the Archdiocese of Kraków, where he was brought up and educated. As a priest, he worked in the pastoral ministry and then studied not only in Poland, but also in Rome. As a sociologist, he taught at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków. He is the author of more than twenty publications in the above-mentioned areas of sociology. Since 1987 he has worked in the Holy See, first in the Polish Section of the Secretariat of State, and then in the Pontifical Council for the Laity. He has been raised to the dignity of Bishop and Cardinal. On 20 December 2016, Pope Francis appointed him archpriest of the Basilica of Saint Mary Major – *Santa Maria Maggiore*, one of the four papal basilicas of Rome.

### **Keywords**

Cardinal, Holy See, World Youth Day, sociology of religion, sociology of family, sociology of parish

One of the best-known Poles in the Catholic Church is Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko. Although he is a priest of the Kraków archdiocese, he hails from the Bielsko-Żywiec diocese. After his ordination to the priesthood, he worked in the pastoral ministry and then studied in Rome.

After his graduation, he was a lecturer in sociology of religion at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków. From 1986, he worked in the Holy See alongside the Holy Father John Paul II. His pastoral and scientific achievements are considerable, and his contribution to the development of the Catholic Church calls for acknowledgment. For this reason alone, both his rich life and his activities deserve our attention and recognition.

## 1. Background and Education

Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko was born on 4 July 1945 in Andrychów in the Bielsko-Żywiec diocese. He was the third child (along with Jadwiga and Władysław) of Aurelia and Władysław Ryłko. His father ran his own electrical business, while his mother first worked at Andrychowskie Zakłady Przemysłu Bawełnianego “Andropol” (Cotton Industry Plant “Andropol” in Andrychów), and then helped her husband in running the electrical business.

It is in Andrychów that the Cardinal finds his roots. He writes: “the roots for me are undoubtedly: Andrychów, my family home, parish church, primary school, secondary school. These are my roots in their deepest sense, that is – the foundation of my life, my values, my role models, which shaped me as a man, and later as a priest. And I have to admit that I often think back to these roots. I think back to the people I met here and who certainly left a deep mark on me, be it teachers, secondary school professors or catechists.”<sup>1</sup>

In Andrychów, he attended a kindergarten run by the Little Servant Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, and then attended Maria Konopnicka Primary School No. 2 and Maria Skłodowska-Curie Secondary School. He was an exemplary student and his certificates were characterised by the best grades.

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<sup>1</sup> Nie zmarujemy daru. Z Przewodniczącym Papieskiej Rady do spraw Świeckich, ks. Arcybiskupem Stanisławem Ryłko rozmawia Ireneusz Żmija [Let us not squander the gift. The President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Archbishop Stanisław Ryłko, is interviewed by Ireneusz Żmija]; [https://issuu.com/nawiny\\_andrychowskie/docs/gazeta\\_styczen2009](https://issuu.com/nawiny_andrychowskie/docs/gazeta_styczen2009) (12.10.2020).

In St. Matthias parish in Andrychów, he was baptized, received his First Communion and the Sacrament of Confirmation (20 September 1959). Here he attended catechism classes, and was particularly influenced at that time by Father Józef Sanak (1917–2008), who was imprisoned during the Stalinist period (1950–1955). Father Sanak delivered the homily during priest Ryłko's First Mass as a bishop in his home parish of St. Matthias, which took place on 21 January 1996.

At school, Stanisław Ryłko was a very talented student who, while achieving the highest grades, remained quiet and modest. He was considered to be the best graduate of his primary school, and his name was written in the Golden Book of Graduates of the school in the year in which he graduated, that is 1958/59, class VII b.<sup>2</sup>

As regards his further education, he attended a general secondary school from 1959 to 1963. Some years later, his friend Anna Gancarczyk, who later served as the school's principal, recalled: "We studied together at Maria Skłodowska-Curie Secondary School in Andrychów. Stanisław showed great interest in science, although he was also very good at other subjects. Some people were surprised to hear that he had chosen theology. But to those who watched him closely, he always seemed to be focused on spiritual matters and on prayer. He was very hardworking, humble and extremely talented. His certificates were all As!"<sup>3</sup>

To Joanna Adamik's question: "Do you remember the moment when you first heard the voice of vocation?", the Cardinal answered: "To tell the truth, this voice grew in me, starting from the moment I became an altar boy in Andrychów: the altar service and gazing at the priest who celebrated the Eucharist. I was fortunate because we had very good mentors of the altar service in our parish, who were able to kindle in us a love for the Eucharist. There came a moment when I understood that this was it, that the Lord was calling me: 'Follow me'. That was in 1963."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Kardynał z Andrychowa [Cardinal from Andrychów]*, <https://www.niedziela.pl/artukul/83975/nd/Kardynał-z-Andrychowa> (10.10.2020).

<sup>3</sup> *Kardynał z Andrychowa [Cardinal from Andrychów]*, <https://www.niedziela.pl/artukul/83975/nd/Kardynał-z-Andrychowa> (10.10.2020).

<sup>4</sup> Cardinal S. Ryłko, *Spotkałem w swym życiu wielu świętych kapłanów [I Have Met Many Holy Priests in my Life]*, (20 March 2019), <https://diecezja.pl/aktualnosci/kard-stanislaw-Rylo-spotkalem-w-swym-zyciu-wielu-swietych-kaplanow/> (12.10.2020).

## 2. Further Education

In 1963, the Candidate entered the archdiocesan seminary in Kraków, where he was received by the then young auxiliary bishop, Karol Wojtyła, who later, already as Archbishop, ordained him priest on 30 March 1969. After his ordination, Stanisław Ryłko was assigned to work as vicar in Poronin (1969–1971).

It is important to emphasize the close relationships between the Cardinal and his family. Already an archbishop, he would eagerly come from the Vatican City to Andrychów, and almost every Christmas, he would visit his brother, now deceased. The Cardinal has a great talent for foreign languages and he studied them during his the seminary years. He made good use of his time for studying. His diligence sometimes astonished his classmates. He left the seminary as one of the best graduates, then studied in Rome and Washington. We felt that one day he would join the order of the Scarlet Mantle... He always remembered Andrychów. As one of the closest collaborators of John Paul II, working in the Vatican Curia, he was one of the spiritual inspirers of the ceremony of granting and presenting Pope John Paul II with the title of Honorary Citizen of Andrychów, ten years ago.

He studied theology at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków, obtaining a master's degree in dogmatic theology in 1972 on the basis of his thesis *Rola abnegacji w życiu chrześcijańskim według Konstytucji "Lumen Gentium"* [*The role of abnegation in the Christian life according to the Constitution 'Lumen Gentium'*], under the supervision of bishop Stanisław Smoleński, PhD. In 1972–1978 he continued his studies in Rome at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Pontifical Gregorian University, where he obtained a canonical licentiate on the basis of the thesis *La dinamica psico-sociale dell'appartenenza al gruppo ecclesiale informale. Studio del caso: Centro Gioventu San Bernardino.*, Rome, 1975 [*Psychosocial dynamics of belonging to an informal church group. A case study: San Bernardino Youth Centre*]. His supervisor was Prof. Dr. J. Schasching SJ.

He earned his PhD in 1978 by defending his thesis entitled *La scelta vocazionale e il suo sviluppo. Studio psico-sociologico sugli studenti di un seminario maggiore in Polonia* (*The Choice and Growth of Vocation: Psycho-sociological study of students of major seminaries in Poland*). For his doctoral dissertation, written under the supervision of Prof. J. Schasching SJ, he received a distinction: the silver medal of the University. While still a student, in 1976, Fr S. Ryłko was asked by Cardinal K. Wojtyła to translate into Italian the text of his Lenten retreat, which the Cardinal then delivered in the Vatican for Pope Paul VI.

After his return to Poland, he served as the Vice-Chancellor of the Major Seminary in Kraków and taught pastoral theology and sociology at the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Kraków (1978–1987). In this relatively short period of time, he supervised as many as ten master's theses, which include: Jan Fryźlewicz, *Praktyki religijne młodzieży szkół średnich a środowisko społeczne. Badania ankietowe przeprowadzone wśród młodzieży katechizowanej w parafii Najświętszego Serca Pana Jezusa w Nowym Targu*, PWT, 1982 [*Religious Practices of Secondary School Students and the Social Environment. Surveys conducted among catechised youth in the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Nowy Targ*, PWT<sup>5</sup>, 1982, (sociology of religion)]; Jan Abrahamowicz, *Autorytet wychowawczy księdza w oczach młodzieży. Badania ankietowe przeprowadzone wśród młodzieży uczęszczającej na katechizację w parafii św. Kazimierza w Krakowie* [*The Priest's Educational Authority in the Eyes of Youth. Surveys conducted among youth attending catechisation in the parish of St. Casimir in Cracow*, PWT, 1982, (sociology of religion)]; Kazimierz Iciek, *Idealy osobowe młodzieży uczęszczającej na katechizację. Ankieta przeprowadzona w parafii św. Józefa w Krakowie* [*Personal Ideals of the Catechised Youth. A survey conducted in St. Joseph parish in Cracow*], PAT WT, 1983, (sociology of religion); Fr. Władysław Rusnak, *Postawy młodzieży wobec niedzieli i niedzielnej Mszy świętej. Studium socjologiczne na przykładzie parafii Mszana Dolna* [*Attitudes of Youth towards Sunday and Sunday Mass. A sociological case study on Mszana Dolna parish*], Krakow PAT WT, 1984, (sociology of religion); Jacek Przybyła, *Sociologiczno-duszpasterkie aspekty tworzenia się nowej parafii na przykładzie Łodygowic Górnych w archidiecezji krakowskiej* [*Sociological and Pastoral Aspects of a New Parish Formation: Case Study of Łodygowice Górne in the Archdiocese of Cracow*], PAT WT, 1985, (sociology of religion); Andrzej Sochacki, *Młodzież wobec małżeństwa. Studium socjologiczne na przykładzie parafii p.w. Matki Bożej Saletyńskiej w Rzeszowie* [*Youth and Marriage. A sociological case study on the parish of Our Lady of La Salette in Rzeszów*], Kraków PAT WT, 1985, (sociology of religion); Piotr Pawlus, *Rola wiary w życiu młodzieży. Badania ankietowe przeprowadzone wśród katechizowanej młodzieży maturalnej w parafii Narodzenia Najświętszej Maryi Panny w Żywcu* [*The Role of Faith in the Life of Youth. Surveys conducted among catechized secondary school graduates in the parish*

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<sup>5</sup> PWT (Papieski Wydział Teologiczny) and PAT WT (Papieska Akademia Teologiczna Wydział Teologiczny) both refer to The Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow [translator's note].

of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Żywiec], PAT WT, 1986, (sociology of religion); Ryszard Zastawny, *Młodość o problemie alkoholizmu. (Badania ankietowe wśród młodzieży katechizowanej w parafiach: Żarki oraz Kraków-Borek Fałęcki)* [Youth on the Problem of Alcoholism. Survey research among the catechized youth of the parishes: Żarki and Kraków-Borek Fałęcki], PAT WT, 1986, (sociology of religion); Andrzej Kopicz, *Katechizacja i jej znaczenie w oczach młodzieży. Ankieta przeprowadzona w parafii św. Jana Chrzciciela w Komorowicach* [Catechization and its Meaning in the Eyes of Youth. A survey conducted in St. John the Baptist parish in Komorowice], PAT WT, 1987, (sociology of religion); Mirosław Sander OP, *Kwestia męczeństwa Ojca Cyryla Szlachtowskiego OP (1899–1944), misjonarza chińskiego* [The Question of Martyrdom of a Chinese Missionary Father Cyryl Szlachtowski OP (1899–1944)], Krakow: WT, 2007, (Kol. Filozof. Teolog. OP), (canon law).

In 1979, he became a secretary of the Commission for the Lay Apostolate of the Polish Episcopal Conference, established on the initiative of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła.

### 3. Service in the Church

After obtaining a scholarship at the Catholic University in Washington, D.C., in 1987, he worked alongside the Holy Father John Paul II at the Pontifical Council for the Laity as Chairman of its youth section. It is worth noting that in this Council, he succeeded Father Józef Michalik, who in 1986, was appointed bishop of the Diocese of Zielona Góra-Gorzów. Fr. Stanisław Ryłko held this position for five years, during which he participated in the organisation of World Youth Days in Santiago de Compostela (1989), Częstochowa (1991) and Denver (1993).

In 1992, John Paul II appointed Fr. Stanisław as an employee of the Polish Section of the Secretariat of State, and then, on 2nd December 1995, Bishop (Titular Bishop of Novica) and Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, where he had already worked. The following year, on 6 January 1996, he was ordained Bishop by Pope John Paul II. He took the words *Lux mea Christus* – “Christ is my light” – as his episcopal motto. These words hold the key to understanding his priestly vocation. It was said then that Wadowice had a Bishop of Rome, and Andrychów had a Bishop in Rome. Six years later, on 4 October 2003, he was appointed Archbishop and President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. He held this position until 31 August 2016.

On 17 October 2007, he was on the list of nominees for the dignity of Cardinal, to which he was elevated during the consistory convened by Pope Benedict XVI for 24 November 2007. He received the news while he was in Sydney (Australia), where he was visiting in connection with the organisation of the next World Youth Day. He took part in the Conclave of 2013, which elected Pope Francis.

He was the organiser of the World Youth Day in Cologne in August 2005 and was also involved in the preparations for the following events held in Sydney (2008), Rio de Janeiro (22–29 July 2013) and Kraków (July 2016).

In accordance with Pope Francis' *motu proprio Sancta Mater*, issued on 15 August 2016, which reformed the Roman Curia, on 1 September 2016, the Pontifical Council for the Laity became part of the emerging Dicastery (Congregation) for Laity, Family and Life. At that moment, Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko ceased to serve as President of the Council. Immediately, on 20 December 2016, Pope Francis appointed him arch-presbyter of the Basilica of Saint Mary Major – *Santa Maria Maggiore*, one of the four papal Basilicas in Rome. It houses the famous image of *Our Lady Salus Populi Romani* – Protectress and Health of the Roman People. He made his ingress into the Papal Basilica on 2 February 2017. Subsequently, on 19 May 2018, the Candidate was promoted by Pope Francis to the rank of Cardinal Priest with the retention of his previous diakonia on a *pro hac vice* basis. Finally, on 11 August 2018, he was appointed a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican State.

In 2015, the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda decorated him with the Grand Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta. Previously, by order of President Lech Kaczyński on 9 November 2009, he was decorated with the Commander's Cross with Star of the same order, with the justification: "for outstanding merits in public activity for the development of cooperation between the Republic of Poland and the Holy See."

#### 4. Scientific Achievements

He is the author of twenty-two publications, including monographs, parts of monographs, as well as scientific articles and introductions to various publications. Most of them were published outside Poland.

1. John Paul II, *Anioł Pański z papieżem Janem Pawłem II, 27 października 1991 – 16 października 1994* [*Angelus with Pope John Paul II, 27 October 1991 – 16 October 1994*], [eds: Stanisław Dziwisz, Henryk Nowacki,

- Stanisław Ryłko], vol. V, Edizioni Aquila Bianca: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1995;
2. *Czestochowa '91: VI World Youth Day: VI Giornata Mondiale della Gioventù: VI Vlème Journée Mondiale de la Jeunesse: VI Jornada Mundial de la Juventud: VI World Youth Day: VI Weltjugendtag*, compiled by Youth Section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity; [ed. Stanisław Ryłko], Roma, Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici, Città del Vaticano 1991;
  3. *El espíritu de los hijos de Dios: espíritu de libertad: III Forum Internacional de Jóvenes*, Pontificio Consejo para los Laicos; [presentacion Eduardo Pironio; introd. Stanisław Ryłko], Ciudad del Vaticano: Pontificio Consejo para los Laicos, Città del Vaticano 1992;
  4. *L'Esprit des fils de Dieu: esprit de liberté: IIIème Forum International des Jeunes Czestochowa, 7–10 août 1991*, Conseil Pontifical pour les Laïcs; [prés. Eduardo Pironio; introd. Stanisław Ryłko], Forum Internazionale dei Giovani 1991, Czestochowa. Cité du Vaticana: Service de Documentation, Città del Vaticano 1992;
  5. *Der Geist der Kinder Gottes, geist der freiheit: III. Internationales Jugendforum Tschenstochau, 7.–10. August 1991*, Päpstlicher Rat für die Laien; [Vorstellung Eduardo Pironio; Einl. Stanisław Ryłko], Vatikanstadt: Päpstlicher Rat für die Laien, Città del Vaticano 1992;
  6. *Generazione Giovanni Paolo II: la storia della Giornata Mondiale della Gioventù/Mimmo Muolo*; pref. di Stanisław Ryłko, Ancona–Milano 2005;
  7. *Ewangelia pracy: encyklika Jana Pawła II "Laborem exercens" wraz z komentarzem [The Gospel of Work: John Paul II's encyclical "Laborem exercens" with commentary]* (ed.: Jerzy Chmiel i Stanisław Ryłko), Wyd. Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne [Polish Theological Society Publishing House], Kraków 1983;
  8. *The spirit of the sons and daughters of God: spirit of freedom: III International Youth Forum Czestochowa, 7–10 August 1991*, [pref. Eduardo Pironio; introd. Stanisław Ryłko], Ciudad del Vaticano: Pontificio Consejo para los Laicos, Vatican 1992;
  9. *Lo Spirito dei figli di Dio: Spirito di libertà: III Forum Internazionale dei Giovani, Czestochowa, 7–10 agosto 1991*, Pontificio Consiglio per i laici; [pres. Eduardo Pironio; introd. Stanisław Ryłko], Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici, Vatican 1992;
  10. *Segno di contraddizione: meditazioni / Karol Wojtyła*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1977;



11. *La aventura de la vida cristiana: Juan Pablo II a los jóvenes*, (Júlio Egrejas; Prologo del Stanisław Ryłko), Vida y Espiritualidad, Lima 2014;
12. *Pokolenie Światowych Dni Młodzieży [The World Youth Day Generation]*, (Mimmo Muolo; with a foreword by Stanisław Ryłko and an introduction by Marcello Bedeschi), (translated by Marcin Masny), Wydawnictwo św. Stanisława BM [St Stanislaus BM Publishing House], Krakow 2015;
13. *I laici nella Chiesa oggi: sfide e prospettive*, Grafitalica, Napoli 2000;
14. *Świeccy w dzisiejszym Kościele. Wyzwania i perspektywy, [The Laity in Today's Church. Challenges and Perspectives]* Kraków 2000;
15. *Il mondo dello sport oggi: campo d'impegno cristiano: seminario di studio, Vaticano, 11–12 novembre 2005*, Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis; [prefazione Stanisław Ryłko], Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2006;
16. Tortorella Laura, *La Mulieris Dignitatem nel post-moderno alla luce di Maria / a cura di Laura Tortorella*, (prologo pref. Stanisław Ryłko), IF Press srl, Morolo 2012;
17. *Pier Giorgio Frassati e Giovanni Paolo II: la santità possibile per tutti / a cura di Cecilia Gilodi*, (prologo pref. del S. Ryłko), Cantagalli, Siena 2008;
18. *Folk religiosity in the light of the 1974 Synod of Bishops and the apostolic exhortation "Evangelii nuntiandi" of Paul VI*, "Analecta Cracoviensia", 18 (1986), pp. 415–439;
19. John Paul II, *Wierzę w Kościół: jeden, święty, powszechny i apostołski [I Believe in the Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic]*, [eds. Stanisław Dziwisz, Henryk Nowacki, Stanisław Ryłko], Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Edizioni Aquila Bianca, Città del Vaticano 1996;
20. *The World of sport today a field of christian mission: International Seminar: Vaticano, 11–12 November 2005*, Pontificium consilium pro laicis; [prefazione Stanisław Ryłko], Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2006;
21. *Żniwo jest wielkie [The Harvest is Great]*, [text prepared by: Stanisław Szymecki, Stanisław Ryłko], Association Notre Famille, Paris 1979;
22. *The World Youth Day generation*, Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow Krakow 2016.

In his publications, Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko dealt in particular with the sociology of religion, and more specifically with pastoral theology in both its

criteriological (doctrinal) and kairological (sociological) aspects. This was the subject of his lectures and some of his publications. The author's endeavours to present, in a synthetic way, the complex issue of the presence and involvement of lay Catholics in the sphere of social life, were largely successful. The foundation for his views may be found in the documents of the Social Teaching of the Church. An important role in this area was played by the book *Świeccy w dzisiejszym Kościele. Wyzwania i perspektywy* [*The Laity in Today's Church. Challenges and Perspectives*], Kraków 2000, which was then translated into other languages, for example, into Italian (*I laici nella Chiesa oggi: sfide e prospettive*, Grafitalica, Napoli 2000). It may become an inspiration to undertake further, detailed studies of those issues that were only mentioned in the book.

The question of the apostolic activity of lay people comprises both their individual and collective acts. Lay Catholics form various apostolic communities and establish associations. The pontificate of John Paul II, when Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko was the prefect and the president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, saw a particular flourishing of these. He also noted that all associations aim to enrich the mission which the Church fulfils in the world. Therefore, he supported their development, so that they would bear more and more mature fruit. The Candidate has often commented on this topic, not only in various documents, but also in his homilies and lectures which were delivered during numerous international events and congresses, to which he was eagerly and often invited.

Cardinal Ryłko has spoken very knowledgeably on the subject of popular religiosity, especially at the beginning of his academic career, for example, in his article "*Folk Religiosity in the Light of the Synod of Bishops in 1974 and of the Apostolic Exhortation 'Evangelii Nuntiandi' of Paul VI*", "*Analecta Cracoviensia*" 18 (1986), pp. 415–439. He saw folk religiosity and folk culture as closely connected. Since the Gospel needed a long time to take root in different cultures, folk religiosity did not always coincide with institutional, that is, ecclesiastical one, and sometimes differed from it considerably. It was formed in a lively and spontaneous way and manifested itself in certain traditions, services, language, pilgrimages, sacred places and art. It repeatedly expressed itself in the richness of religious culture and practices and in the multidimensional connection between religion and the everyday life of the people. This theme was extremely important because of inculturation, which the Church began to teach about more and more vociferously.

The above-mentioned subject leads to another, that is, to the question of holiness, which also holds its important place in the research work of Cardinal

Stanisław Ryłko. The author notes that, although it has a universal character, for everyone has been invited by God to become a saint, every person has his/her own way to attain sainthood. Everyone is called by God to holiness, but the ways of life in which sanctification is to take place, are different for each person. In a way, they are conditioned by a person's character, intellectual abilities, upbringing (especially religious one), and the social and cultural circumstances in which that person lives. These conditions may facilitate or hinder the process of maturing into holiness. However, the most important factor determining holiness is openness to God's grace and the ability to cooperate with it, manifested, for example, in the life and work of Blessed Peter Frassati (*Pier Giorgio Frassati e Giovanni Paolo II: la santità possibile per tutti / a cura di Cecilia Gilodi*, (prologo pref. del S. Ryłko), Cantagalli, Siena 2008).

## 5. Contribution to the Development of Church Teaching

An important area of the Cardinal's research is the social teaching of Pope John Paul II, of whom he was a close and dedicated collaborator. We know, from the statements of Polish priests working in the Vatican, that many enunciations of John Paul II were translated into Italian by Fr. Ryłko. He knew well that these problems troubled the Holy Father and he tried to confront them. The Candidate devoted a lot of attention to the problem of human work, which is a great task and a vocation for for the life man. A very important study in this regard is the article: *Ewangelia pracy: encyklika Jana Pawła II "Laborem exercens" wraz z komentarzem [The Gospel of Work: John Paul II's Encyclical "Laborem Exercens" with Commentary]*, (ed.: Jerzy Chmiela i Stanisław Ryłko), published by Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, Kraków 1983.

Most of the Cardinal's attention, however, has been devoted to the matters of World Youth Day, which is absolutely understandable given his great involvement in this truly global undertaking. This fact is not surprising since the event has become a permanent part of the Church's activity and this is also due to the Cardinal's work. World Youth Day is preceded by long preparations (at least one-year-long) and comprises the deliberations of the 'Forum' on a chosen theme, as well as three days of catechesis. The programme of the meeting with the Pope includes a prayer vigil and Holy Mass. The common meetings are a special opportunity for evangelisation, community experience, spiritual and apostolic renewal. One can say that they are not only a celebration, but also

a serious spiritual work. It should be also mentioned that, in addition to the preparation phase for the meetings, the important role is played by the period of implementation of the World Youth Day postulates.

According to the Cardinal, World Youth Days are providential moments of reflection, which allow young people to ponder upon their deepest desires, to strengthen their awareness of belonging to the Church and to profess, with ever greater joy and courage, their shared faith in the crucified and risen Christ. At these moments, many young people, following the voice of the Holy Spirit, a voice both strong and gentle, take mature and courageous decisions, which will perhaps influence the future course of history. Their true fruits cannot be calculated in statistics, but only in the works of love and justice, and in their daily fidelity, which is so precious, although so often invisible.

It is also not surprising that the Cardinal, influenced by these World Youth Days, raises a subject which has been present in the public space for some time, that is the “Generation of John Paul II” (*Generation of World Youth Days*, (Mimmo Muolo; with a foreword by Stanisław Ryłko and an introduction by Marcello Bedeschi), (translated by Marcin Masny), published by Wydawnictwo św. Stanisława BM, Kraków 2015). The author applies this term to people who were fortunate enough to personally meet John Paul II, a man of great heart, intellect and spirit, on the paths of their lives. It is the duty and, at the same time, the privilege of these people to preserve, deepen and develop the teaching of John Paul II, and to pass on this gift on to future generations. John Paul II turned out to be an extraordinary gift for the Church and the world. Initially, he served the Church in Kraków and the Church in our homeland, and from 16 October 1978, he became a servant of the whole Church and the world.

According to the Cardinal, the greatness of John Paul II lies in the fact that he was a man of deep faith and prayer, who put God at the centre of his existence. Fascinated by the figure of Jesus Christ and His Gospel, he made himself available to the Church and his life took the shape of service to man and the world. His profound experience of God and the things of God were combined in his person with a titanic activity. He guided the Church, he enriched her life and her reflection with his extensive teaching, and he dealt with the great problems of the contemporary world. The Cardinal even speaks about the specific mysticism of John Paul II.

The Cardinal wrote: “The Holy Father John Paul II is some great prophet of our times. He is ahead of us and sometimes he says more than we are able to comprehend. And it is good that it is so, because he gives us time to return

to his words, to try to understand them better and better. Above all, we should put his teaching into practice. The Holy Father is a great gift for us, but at the same time it is a challenge and a great task not to waste this gift.”

The Cardinal contributed to reviving the pastoral awareness of what a parish is, and the important role it plays in the life of the Church. It is worth recalling his words from an interview: “Undoubtedly, the parish and popular religiosity in Poland are an enormous spiritual capital of both the Polish Church and the Polish nation. This attachment, love of the Church, which is characteristic of Poles, is undoubtedly a great value on which one can build. It can be a starting point. I am currently working as President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity so I meet bishops from various countries every day, and in my conversations with them the observation that parochial Catholicism is the foundation keeps coming back. But today it needs deepening. The means of this deepening, as far as the formation of lay people is concerned, are small communities, church movements. This is a great gift of the Holy Spirit for the Church in our times, as the Holy Father says. This is the great wealth of the Church in these difficult times.”

Cardinal Ryłko was a supporter of European integration, about which he stated: “We enter Europe with an experience which is our great wealth. I am talking about the experience of a totalitarian system, which is a unique one. The citizens of Western Europe do not have it. We know what it means to be enslaved, what it means to lack freedom, religious freedom, for example, and we know what the price of freedom is. People in the West know as much about these things. Hence our great task: to use the freedom which has, in a certain sense, been given to us, to make good use of it so as to build good in all dimensions: moral, social and religious.”

## 6. Conclusion

It is commonly known that, since 1987, Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko has been the head of the youth section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and he has made a huge contribution to the organization of the first World Youth Days, which took place in Santiago de Compostela, Częstochowa and Denver. The fact that World Youth Day had such a fantastic international character and course, is undoubtedly the personal merit of Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko.

The Holy Father John Paul II and the priest, and later Bishop and Archbishop Stanisław Ryłko, shared common research and cultural interests. This caused

the Cardinal to serve the Holy Father, and subsequently, the whole Church so competently and devotedly for many years. The Cardinal was also by the side of the Holy Father at the moment of his departure to the House of the Father on 2 April 2005. Together with others, for example, Cardinal Marian Jaworski, he participated in the final Holy Mass celebrated at the bedside of the dying Pope, and provided him with a viaticum on his way to eternity. Together with Cardinal Jaworski and Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, at the moment of the Pope's death, he sang *Te Deum laudamus*. It was Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko who at that dramatic moment, stopped the clock in the room of the deceased Saint John Paul II at 21.37.

In addition, the kindness with which he always refers to his Homeland deserves recognition. He is a true patriot who loves his homeland, his hometown of Andrychów (as already mentioned, he is an honorary citizen of Andrychów), but also his greater homeland – Poland, of which he is an ambassador in Italy, and in a way also in the whole world. His love for his homeland has amounted to a great testimony.

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