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John Paul II to youth

The project of Christian life

John Paul II is called the pope of young people.¹ This title is not surprising, since the energy, joy, vitality, healthy and sporty lifestyle of the young vicar, professor, suffragan bishop of Kraków, then archbishop and cardinal had many quite natural consequences. One of them was a particularly close relationship with young people, high school and university students of Kraków, university students of the Catholic University of Lublin, the engaged and young married couples.² During more than a quarter of a century of his “breakthrough pontificate,”³ a special role was played by contacts with young people, representing different cultures, races and

1 Currently, the primary source for analysing this issue is the publication: Jan Paweł II, Benedykt XVI, Franciszek, *Do młodości (1979–2015)*, Poznań 2015, containing a full range of papal addresses and letters directed to youth.

2 The most telling testimony of friendship with a young married couple were close ties between Karol Wojtyła with the family of Wanda and Andrzej Póttawscy – see: W. Póttawska, *Beskidzkie rekolekcje. Dzieje przyjaźni księdza Karola Wojtyły z rodziną Póttawskich*, Częstochowa 2009.

3 G. Dobroczyński SJ, *Pontyfikat przełomów*, “Więź” 2001 nr 10 (516), pp. 78–85.

religions, initiated in 1985 during World Youth Day in Rome and regularly continued in subsequent years.⁴

Therefore especially today – eleven years after the death of Pope Wojtyła – it seems necessary to take a fresh look at his message to youth. May modern young people, who are more than those of a decade ago obsessed with consumerism, drawing on popular culture brimming with sexuality, surrounded by technology, threatened daily by an apocalyptic vision of a “clash of civilizations,” and at the same time devoted completely to relativism and dictatorship of modernism, adopt an alternative outlined by “the pope from a distant country?”⁵

This work is aimed at the presentation of the relations between Pope John Paul and youth, outlining the main content of his teachings for youth and showing his legacy in the form of a project of Christian life stemming from the civilization of love. Pope Wojtyła repeatedly said and wrote that only Christianity can offer the only true and integral vision of man to contemporary people⁶, a vision of man who is spiritually and physically fulfilled. At the end of his pontificate, watching the profound mental and moral changes in Europe, in his *Message to the participants of the Congress of Catholic Laity of Eastern Europe* on October 4, 2003, entitled: “Being the witness of Christ today” he wrote:

Old Europe, from the West to the East, is trying to define its new identity. It cannot forget about its roots in this quest. Europe must

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- 4 The idea of organizing regular meetings of youth, first in Rome and later in other regions of the world, originated in the environment of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and one of its founders was the employee of this dicastery, Rev. Józef Michalik, the future bishop of Gorzów (1986–1993), archbishop of Przemyśl (since 1993) and the President of the Polish Episcopal Conference (2004–2014) – see: T. Krzyżak, *Nie mam nic do stracenia. Abp Józef Michalik. Biografia*, Kraków 2015, pp. 111–118.
- 5 A wide cultural context of threats in the post-modern era and secularization has been outlined in the work of M. A. Peeters, *Globalizacja zachodniej rewolucji kulturowej. Kluczowe pojęcia, mechanizmy działania*, tłum. G. Grygiel, Warszawa 2010; G. Kuba, *Globalna rewolucja seksualna. Likwidacja wolności w imię wolności*, tłum. D. Jankowska, J. Serafin, Kraków 2013; J. Bujak, “Mężczyznę i niewiastę stworzył ich?” *Współczesny feminizm w poszukiwaniu tożsamości kobiety*, Szczecin 2014 (Studia i Rozprawy. Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 37).
- 6 See E. Gołąbek OFM, *Duchowy portret młodzieży w ujęciu Jana Pawła II*, in: *Młodzież nadzieją Kościoła i świata*, Poznań 2008, pp. 311–324 (Kolekcja “Communio”, 18).

remember that the vital lymph from which it drew the noblest spiritual inspiration for two thousand years was Christianity.⁷

1. The experience of being young

The question: “How to live?” has been and will always be asked by youth to political and religious leaders. The question that young Germans asked Adolf Hitler, Hispanics – Che Guevara, Americans – Martin Luther King, Palestinians – Yasser Arafat, Tibetans – the 14th Dalai Lama was given many, often very different, responses.

Let us, therefore, return to the origins, the roots or the foundations. The experience of being young remained an extremely important element of the authentic life and ministry of Karol Wojtyła – Pope John Paul II. The genesis of this state of mind and body which accompanied the pope until the end of his life may be traced to the enjoyment of everyday life, the beauty of the surrounding world and love towards others. Karol Wojtyła as a boy took an active part in school life (at first, in the Maciej Wadowita Primary School and then the Marcin Wadowita State Male High School in Wadowice) and the life of his parish. The future pope was a member of interest groups, sports teams, and in the years 1936–1938 he was the president of the Sodality of Our Lady of middle school students.⁸ As a member of the drama club he was known as a young, talented actor⁹ – the passion that was continued in the Rhapsodic Theatre and during the Polish studies at the Jagiellonian University and interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War and the first years of the German occupation.¹⁰ This fascination with theatre and art was not abandoned despite joining the underground Seminary of the Archdiocese of Kraków in the autumn of 1942.¹¹

⁷ John Paul II, “*Being the witness of Christ today*”. Message to the participants of the Congress of Catholic Laity of Eastern Europe, Vatican, 4.10.2003.

⁸ Jan Paweł II, *Autobiografia*, red. J. Kiljańczyk-Zięba, Kraków 2003, pp. 13–17; *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły*, red. A. Boniecki MIC, Kraków 2000, p. 37.

⁹ G. Weigel, *Świadek nadziei. Biografia papieża Jana Pawła II*, Kraków 2012, pp. 50–56.

¹⁰ A. Riccardi, *Jan Paweł II. Biografia*, tłum. K. Stopa, Częstochowa 2014, pp. 53–55.

¹¹ *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły...*, pp. 73–74.

The post-war years, of which doubtlessly the turning point were the holy orders given to him by Cardinal Adam Stefan Sapieha on November 1, 1946, studies at the Pontifical Angelicum University in Rome in 1946–1948¹², the ministry of a vicar in the parish in Niegowic in 1948–1949, the ministry of a vicar in St. Florian Church in Kraków in 1949–1951¹³ and academic work on his post-doctoral thesis, abounded in numerous cordial contacts with university students and young married couples.¹⁴ Wojtyła recalled these times in the following words:

There, in the district of Kleparz, together with priests and people of the younger and older generation, those devoted to the Church and those who were looking for Christ in the Church, I discovered a number of issues and human needs in our difficult times. There the idea of organizing university chaplaincy centre and adapting it to the needs of time arose, based on the experience of others. Its form was developed and perfected also at this time. Thanks to the above, youth and all its affairs entered in a special way into my life, my mission and pastoral work.¹⁵

Being a young priest, Karol Wojtyła became at that time a guide and a confidant of young people entering their adult life. Spending time with young people full of hope, joy, success, achievements and ideas, and at the same time experiencing problems, difficulties and often crises and dramatic events allowed him a better understanding of the human soul and reaching the hearts of youth. Likewise, the time of holidays, which he spent almost always among young people gave the future pope a unique opportunity to evangelise during mountain hiking and canoeing trips in the Mazurian Lake District.¹⁶

Without the experience of contact with young people entering adulthood and close friendships with young married couples, fundamental

¹² A. Riccardi, *Jan Paweł II. Biografia...*, pp. 67–72.

¹³ A. Riccardi, *Jan Paweł II. Biografia...*, pp. 75–79.

¹⁴ A. Riccardi, *Jan Paweł II. Biografia...*, p. 91.

¹⁵ Jan Paweł II, *Autobiografia...*, p. 72.

¹⁶ Jan Paweł II, *Autobiografia...*, pp. 74–79; G. Weigel, *Świadek nadziei...*, pp. 136–139.

works in the field of anthropology and theology undertaking the issues of responsibility, closeness between man and woman, human sexuality, love in betrothal and marriage and parenthood would not have been written. Let us recall that in 1960 one of the most important books of Karol Wojtyła was published – *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* (*Love and Responsibility*) and nine years later *Osoba i czyn* (*Person and Act*).¹⁷ He remained faithful to the reflections which the above books contained, and as the pope he developed them even further in the cycle of Wednesday catecheses published in 1986 in the book *Mężczyznę i niewiastę stworzył ich* (*He Created them Male and Female*).

John Paul II spoke about his experience and the value of “being young” and “being with young people” on June 10, 1987 in Kraków:

If I had not learned to be with you in the past, but this experience cannot be forgotten – if I had not learned what it means to be young, how beautiful and difficult it is, I probably would not be able to do it, and I would not be constantly nagged with the words “Come on, stay with us.” I’ve learned that in Poland, I’ve learned that from you.¹⁸

2. *Verba docent, exempla trahunt*

In addition to the experience of his own life, John Paul II pointed to specific figures – examples of holiness of young people. One of the first role models that he offered youth early on is Karolina Kózka (1898–1914), beatified in Tarnow during his third pilgrimage to Poland on 10 June 1987. This young girl was a victim of a brutal attack of a Russian soldier in the first months of the Great War. She died defending herself against rape, but her innocence and purity remained intact.¹⁹ Therefore, as John Paul II pointed out in his homily of beatification, she:

¹⁷ Jan Paweł II, *Autobiografia...*, pp. 92–95; G. Weigel, *Świadek nadziei...*, pp. 183–188.

¹⁸ Jan Paweł II, *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2002. Przemówienia, homilie*, Kraków 2005, p. 444.

¹⁹ T. Jankowska, *Bardzo niemodna święta. Błogosławiona Karolina Kózkówna*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 15–20.

Speaks of the great dignity of women: the dignity of the human person. The dignity of the body, which, although in this world is subject to death, is destructible, like her young body was killed, but the human body bears a record of immortality that man will achieve in eternal and living God through Christ.²⁰

However, not only her martyrdom brought Karolina Kózka to the altar. For her young age she was very much involved in religion (in the Apostleship of Prayer, Brotherhood of Temperance and the Living Rosary) and socially – she helped in running the village meeting hall and library. The residents of her native village have preserved the memory of her apostolate, expressed in helping the sick, the old and the poor. Today she is the patroness of the Movement of Pure Hearts and the Catholic Youth Association.

Similar charismas characterized two other Italian martyr virgins: **Antonia Mesina (1919–1935)** and **Pierina Morosina (1931–1957)**. Both died defending their chastity and they were both beatified on October 4, 1987.

The biographies of the three young men whom Pope Wojtyła names as ideals for young men are extraordinary and ordinary at the same time. These are: **Marcel Callo (1921–1945)** **Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901–1925)** and **Albert Marvelli (1918–1946)**. The first was an activist of the Jesuit movement of the Working Christian Youth, a devout Catholic, a dedicated and loving fiancé, a victim of the Nazis, tortured and killed in the Mauthausen concentration camp. The Pope said:

Marcel did not immediately attain the perfection of the Gospel. Talented and full of good will, he had to fight a long battle with the spirit of the world, with himself, with the weight of things and people. But he was fully open to grace and let the Lord gradually lead him until the martyrdom. His love for Christ reached maturity through trials. [...] Having attained eternal joy in God, Marcel Callo proves that the Christian faith does not distance the earth from heavens.

²⁰ Jan Paweł II, *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny...*, p. 421.

Heaven is prepared already here on earth, in justice and love. When we love, we are “blessed.”²¹

The second beatified person was the son of an Italian diplomat, politician and entrepreneur Alfred Frassati (1868–1961). Pier Giorgio was a Dominican tertiary, a member of several Catholic associations and a lover of mountain expeditions. His studies at the Royal University in Turin enabled him to evangelize the working class and youth. He focused on consoling the sick and the poor, devoting a lot of time, commitment and financial resources to this pursuit. He died at the age of 24 of polio, which he contracted from a poor patient.²²

Younger sister of Pier Giorgio, Luciana Frassati-Gawrońska (1902–2007), recalled years later:

One may not have appreciated the love of Giorgio towards others, his piety and intelligence, one may not have known his oratorical abilities, but his purity shone directly into the eyes of even the most inattentive observer. It was his most visible feature. It marked his whole character. He had a permanent and immutable restraint, restraint not excluding absolute freedom, even stressing it to a certain extent.²³

Karol Wojtyła already as Archbishop of Kraków spoke of him in 1977 in the following words: “Look at a man of eight Beatitudes, carrying every day the joy of the Gospel, the Good News, the joy of salvation offered to us by Christ.”²⁴

Albert Marvelli, in turn, was an activist of the Catholic Action and many other movements and Catholic associations.²⁵ He was a member,

²¹ Jan Paweł II, Homilia podczas mszy św. beatyfikacyjnej trojga świeckich męczenników: Marcela Callo, Pieriny Morosini i Antonii Mesiny, 4.10.1987, “L’Osservatore Romano” (wydanie polskie) 8 (1987) nr 9–10, p. 5.

²² R. Claude, *Pier Giorgio Frassati*, przedmowa K. Rahner, tłum. J. Petry-Mroczkowska, Kraków 2012; see also: L. Frassati, *Mój brat Pier Giorgio. Wiara*, Poznań 2016.

²³ <http://adonai.pl/ludzie/?id=102> (31.01.2016).

²⁴ Card. K. Wojtyła, *Excerpts from the sermon delivered in the Dominican Basilica in Kraków for the opening of an exhibition dedicated to Pier Giorgio Frassati – 27.03.1977.*

²⁵ He left a “diary of his soul” which he wrote in 1933–1946. This small document, covering less than sixty pages is a testament to his great spiritual wealth – A. Marvelli, *Diario e lettere*, Cinisello Balsamo–Milano 1998.

among others, of Italian Federation of Catholic Students (FUCI). In 1941 he graduated from the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of the University of Bologna.²⁶ He found time not only for the apostolate of prayer and social activities, but also for sports, playing tennis, volleyball, football, and his favourite – cycling. During the Second World War he saved the lives of many people who were to be deported to concentration camps. Shortly afterwards, he joined the ranks of Christian Democrats and the diocesan bishop of Rimini, Luigi Santa, entrusted him with the mission of chairing the Association of Catholic Intellectuals.²⁷ He died due to severe injuries caused by a car accident. He was hit by a military car when cycling to an election meeting of the Christian Democratic Party.²⁸

Pope Wojtyła then sets as an example people involved in life who have a passion and also their own vision of humanity and life. One role model of a young person, an animator of religious and social life, dedicated and ready to sacrifice for others, was particularly close to the pope. According to John Paul II, only those ready to give up their own selves can follow the path of holiness. At the same time, he extends an invitation to join this path to each young person, indicating that neither the family background nor education, abilities or wealth make anyone worse or better in the eyes of the Heavenly Father.

3. Values

An analysis of the content of papal speeches, starting from the key conversation with young people at the Parc des Princes in Paris on 1 June 1980²⁹, meetings with young people during the eight pilgrimages to his homeland (1979–2002) and World Youth Days (1985–2002), allows for the determination of a set of values that constitute a project being the foundation of Christian life.³⁰

26 M. P. Tomaszewski, *Albert Marvelli. Pełnia życia*, Poznań 2012, pp. 81–82.

27 M. P. Tomaszewski, *Albert Marvelli...*, p. 134.

28 M. P. Tomaszewski, *Albert Marvelli...*, p. 148.

29 A. Frossard, "Nie lękajcie się!". *Rozmowy z Janem Pawłem II*, Vatican 1982, pp. 49–54.

30 A. Riccardi, *Jan Paweł II. Biografia...*, p. 238–239.

In the project of Christian life, the pope gave a special role to **freedom**. Undoubtedly, the exceptional importance of freedom in the teaching of the pope grew out of his post-war experience of living in a totalitarian system. Two years after the death of Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, referring to the issue in an interview with Gian Franco Svidercoschi, pointed out that in the 1960s and 70s: “The activities of Cardinal Wojtyła were purely religious and evangelical. He tried to awaken the conscience of the young, the inner freedom that comes from contact with God and dialogue with Him in prayer.”³¹

At the same time the pope saw a strong relationship between freedom and **truth, life in truth** and **service of truth**. In an apostolic letter addressed to the youth of the world to celebrate the International Year of Youth, on March 31, 1985, he wrote:

To be “truly free” by no means equals doing whatever one feels like. Freedom includes the criterion of truth, the discipline of truth. Without it, there is no real freedom. Then it is a lie of freedom. To be truly free means “to use one’s freedom for what is truly good.” Again: to be truly free means to be a person of righteous conscience, to be responsible, to live for others. All this constitutes the inner core of what we call education; and especially self-education. Yes: self-education! The internal structure, where “the truth makes us free,” cannot be built only from the inside – it must be built in toil, with perseverance and patience (which is not always easy for the young). And this process is called self-education. Jesus also speaks of this, emphasizing that only in “patience” we can “possess our souls” (Lk 21:19). “Possessing one’s soul” is the fruit of self-education.³²

The teaching about freedom to the young was continued during his third visit to Poland. In the evening of June 10, 1987, in the dialogue with

³¹ *Świadectwo*. Kard. Stanisław Dziwisz w rozmowie z Gian Franco Svidercoschim, Warszawa 2007, p. 51.

³² Jan Paweł II, *Młodość nadzieją Kościoła. Orędzia na Światowe Dni Młodości*, Warszawa 2005, pp. 39–40.

young people participating in the vigil on the square in front of the House of Archbishops of Kraków at Franciszkańska 3, John Paul II said:

[...] Freedom can never be possessed. It is very dangerous to have it. Freedom must be constantly acquired. Freedom is characteristic of man – God created man free. He created man free, and gave him free will regardless of the consequences. Man used the freedom that God gave him badly, but God made him absolutely free and will not take this freedom away. He paid for his gift – he paid for his gift himself. What we are experiencing now during the Eucharistic Congress, the Eucharist keeps reminding us how God paid for his gift – the gift of freedom given to man. But the gift will not be taken away. So, freedom is a dimension of human existence, a dimension of being human and being in a community. I believe that all the current generation of Poles, all those who belong to it, all with no exception, must ask themselves this question. One cannot run away from it, one cannot believe that it has already been answered. One has to see this issue honestly. God made man free not for the purpose of wantonness, this is also true.³³

John Paul II saw the connection between **freedom and the issue of human dignity**. During his sixth visit to Poland on June 3, 1997 in Poznań he appealed to young people:

The human person, created in the image and in likeness to God, cannot become a slave of things, economic systems, technical civilization, consumerism or easy success. A man cannot become a slave to their various inclinations and passions which are sometimes deliberately fuelled. We must defend ourselves against this danger. One has to know how to use one's freedom and choose what is truly good. Do not get enslaved! Do not be enslaved, tempted by pseudo-values, half-truths, the charm of mirages which later will turn to disappointment, pain, and maybe even a broken life.³⁴

³³ Jan Paweł II, *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny...*, p. 448.

³⁴ Jan Paweł II, *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny...*, p. 921.

The problem of the relation between love and freedom accompanied the papal remarks delivered to young people in Turin. The city of St. John Bosco, the “father and teacher of youth” was visited by the pope on 2–4 September 1988. On the first day of the visit the pope drew attention to the importance of the presence of Christ in the lives of young:

In our times we are witnessing the terrible abuse of the words “love” and “freedom.” One needs to find the true meaning of these two words: love and freedom. I am telling you, you should go back to the Gospel. You should go back to the school of Christ. Then you will transmit these goods of the spiritual beginning: the sense of justice in all human relations, promoting and securing peace. And again I say to you that these words have been repeatedly misused. You should always go back to the school of Christ, to discover the true, full, deep meaning of these words. A basic need of these values is just having honest and sincere faith, which embraces God and man and man in God. Wherever God is, where Jesus Christ, His Son is, there is truly durable foundation: it is deep, it is truly deep. There is no other more appropriate, more profound dimension to the word “man,” to the word “love,” to the word “freedom,” to the words “peace” and “justice;” there is no other dimension than Christ. Continuous returning to this school is the search for these valuable assets, which you, young people, ought to pass to future generations, to the world of tomorrow. With Him will this task will be easier and most certainly successful.³⁵

Analysing Papal teaching addressed to young people, it is not difficult to see that **love** is the word which is the key to understanding the authentic humanity rooted in the person of Jesus Christ and a central element of the project of Christian life. In a message addressed to youth for the 2nd World Youth Day, November 30, 1986, the pope wrote:

Mindful of the fact that man cannot live and cannot be understood without love, I urge you all to grow in your humanity, to give absolute

35 J. Moskwa, *Kalendarium pontyfikatu Jana Pawła II*, Kraków 2014, p. 250.

priority to spiritual values, to be transformed into “new people,” ever more fully recognizing and accepting in your life the presence of God, who is love; the Father who eternally loves each one of us, who created us for love, who loved us so much that he gave his only Son for the forgiveness of our sins, so that we can be reconciled with Him, to live united with Him in endless love.³⁶

Trying to outline a set of values that Pope Wojtyła specially wanted to offer young people, it must be emphasized that in the teaching of the Holy Father **the natural consequence of love is purity and faithfulness.**³⁷ These problems were raised in his homily in Sandomierz on June 12, 1999:

[...] this message on purity of the heart has become very relevant in recent times. The culture of death wants to destroy purity of the heart. One of the methods to do this is by deliberately undermining the value of the virtue of chastity. This phenomenon is particularly dangerous when the attack is aimed at sensitive consciences of children and adolescents. A civilization, which thus damages or even destroys the correct relationship between people is the civilisation of death, for man cannot live without true love. [...]

You have to carry “good news” of purity of the heart to the world, and by your own example give the message of the civilization of love. I know how sensitive you are to truth and beauty. Today, the culture of death offers you among other things, the so-called “free love.” This distorts love and leads to the profanation of one of its most precious and sacred values, for promiscuity is neither love nor freedom.” Do not take example from this world, but be transformed by the renewing your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, what pleases Him and what is perfect” (Rom 12:2), St. Paul exhorts. Do not be afraid to live contrary to popular opinions and those which

³⁶ Jan Paweł II, *Młdzież nadzieją Kościoła. Orędzia na Światowe Dni Młdzieży*, p. 56.

³⁷ These are the solid foundations on which love between fiancés rests, love, which is expected to reach its fulfilment in marriage. See: R. Skrzypczak, *Wiara i seks. Jan Paweł II o małżeństwie i rodzinie*, Kraków 2015.

are against God's law. The courage of faith is costly, but you must not lose love! Do not let yourselves be enslaved!³⁸

Karol Wojtyła, contrary to modern social trends, calls on young people to remain faithful to purity. At the same time he reveals a new dimension associated with spiritual purity – the purity of heart. The pope clearly points to two paths that the young can possibly choose. Their choices, however, will cause obvious consequences in the form of promoting “the civilization of love” or “the civilization of death,” living in freedom or in slavery, in truth or in lie.

4. Message for youth

While reconstructing the project of Christian life, it is worth recalling that John Paul II stressed the importance of spiritual values not only in Christian life, but he also pointed to specific risks, dangers and pitfalls that may await the young, which the Holy Father warned against. And so during the second visit to his homeland, in his remarks presented at the Jasna Góra Appeal of 18 June 1983, he said:

What does it mean: “I am keeping vigil?” It means I am trying to be a man of conscience. My conscience is not deadened and not distorted. I can clearly distinguish between good and evil and do not blur the borderline between the two. I will work on being a better person and I will try to overcome evil in myself. This is a very basic thing that must not be underemphasized or pushed into the background. No. No! It is everywhere and it is always at the forefront. It is the more important, the more circumstances seem to support the toleration of evil and absolve it. Especially if others do evil.

My dear friends! It is your task to halt demoralization and put an end to social evils, which I will not mention here, but which you yourselves know very well. You must demand from yourselves, even if others not

38 Jan Paweł II, *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny...*, pp. 1112–1113.

demand anything from you. Historical experience tells us about how much periodic demoralization has cost the nation. Today, as we are fighting for the future shape of our society, remember that this shape depends on the shape of man. So be vigilant!³⁹

In contrast, on June 12, 1987, speaking to young people gathered in Gdansk-Westerplatte the pope described the temptations and challenges that young people encounter:

The threat is in the climate of relativism. Loosening principles and truths which build the dignity and human development is a threat. Promoting opinions and views that serve this loosening is also a threat. [...] Strength is needed not succumb to the temptation of resignation, indifference, doubt or the so-called internal emigration; the temptation to escape from the world, from society, from life, also an escape in the literal sense by leaving the country; the temptation of hopelessness that leads to self-destruction of one's own personality, one's own humanity through alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual abuse, search for experiences, participation in sects or other associations that are so alien to the culture, tradition and spirit of our nation.⁴⁰

It is worth noting that John Paul II never externalized the role that he fulfilled in practice. According to his contemporaries, he was the world's leading authority of the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century. He tried to convey the truths of life to young people in the form of kind-hearted teaching given by a good teacher. He did not use the language of order and prohibition.⁴¹ On August 15, 1991 he spoke to one and half-million crowd of young people from around the world gathered at Jasna Góra:

All those who are disappointed with the earthly tasks of civilization should be invited to cooperate in building the "civilization of love." [...]

³⁹ Jan Paweł II, *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny...*, pp. 263–264.

⁴⁰ Jan Paweł II, *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny...*, pp. 478, 480.

⁴¹ G. Dobroczyński SJ, *Jak mówić o Bogu do ludzi młodych?*, "Przegląd Powszechny" 3 (2013).

Much of what will be tomorrow depends on the commitment of today's generation of Christians. It depends above all on your commitment, boys and girls, who will soon come to bear the responsibility for decisions on which not only your fate, but the fate of many other people will depend.

Your mission is to make sure that the world of tomorrow has values such as full religious freedom, respect for personal dimension of development, protection of the right to life from the moment of conception until natural death, concern for the development and strengthening of the family, appreciation of cultural autonomy for the mutual enrichment of all people, protection of the natural balance of the environment which is increasingly threatened.⁴²

Pope John Paul II gave an extremely important, poignant and unique message to young people in the last hours of his earthly life. Being aware that on St. Peter's Square there were thousands of young people on vigil, praying in his intention, he bade them farewell, saying, "I looked for you, now you have come to me and for that I thank you." Karol Wojtyła remained until the end the best father, patiently waiting, longing and always ready to take their children back and to forgive them.⁴³

5. Legacy and future

Undoubtedly, an attempt to outline the pope's original project of Christian life implies questions about its fulfilment and relevance today. Moreover, it becomes necessary to search for an answer to the question concerning the place of the heritage of John Paul II in the lives of young people today, especially of young Polish men and women.⁴⁴

⁴² Jan Paweł II, *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny...*, pp. 809–810.

⁴³ G. Weigel, *Kres i początek. Papież Jan Paweł II – zwycięstwo wolności, ostatnie lata, dziedzictwo*, Kraków 2012, p. 413.

⁴⁴ Such attempts were undertaken, among others, by sociologists – see: *Wartości Polaków a dziedzictwo Jana Pawła II*, red. T. Żukowski, współpraca P. Gierech, Warszawa 2009.

Very often, within the popular perception of papal teaching, one may come across a statement that John Paul II called for the observance of moral principles. In fact, the pope above all preached the Good News – the Gospel and he was the witness of the living God – Jesus Christ. He spoke of maturity and responsibility, love, hope and freedom, living in truth and fidelity to God’s commandments. During his visit to the United States of America on October 3, 1979, speaking to hundreds of thousands of teenagers gathered at Madison Square Garden in New York, he said: “When wondering about the mystery of yourselves, fix your gaze on Christ who will give the meaning to your life. When wondering what it means to be mature, look at Christ, who shows the fullness of humanity.”⁴⁵

John Paul II was a personalist philosopher, who, in his characteristic way tackled the problems of youth. He did not force them to become saints, but encouraged them to do so. This incentive was addressed not only to Catholics but to all Christians, followers of religions outside Christianity and non-believers. Therefore, the legacy of John Paul II has a humanistic and universal character. His legacy as a defender of dignity and the right to life is still undervalued, but more and more evidently necessary in today’s demographic situation in Europe. It was during his homily on August 15, 1993 in Cherry Creek Park in Denver (Colorado) that the Pope urged young people to oppose the “culture of death” as opposed to the “civilization of love.”⁴⁶

The issue of legacy of John Paul II remains relevant and important, although it cannot be denied that the interest in it is not as massive as it was more than eleven years ago. Moreover, in recent years there is a noticeable **absence of the person and teaching of John Paul II in public discourse**. “JPII generation” formed during the pontificate of the Polish pope (precisely the “federation of JPII generations”)⁴⁷, which was strongly present in the process of integration and identification of young people, lost its initial dynamism, enthusiasm and freshness. Paradoxically,

45 *Jan Paweł II w Irlandii i Stanach Zjednoczonych. Przemówienia i homilie*, tłum. K. Doroszewski, J. Jarco, A. Polkowski, Warszawa 1981, pp. 183–184.

46 G. Weigel, *Świadek nadziei. Biografia papieża Jana Pawła II*, pp. 866–867.

47 T. Żukowski, *Przeżywanie śmierci Jana Pawła II i jej rocznic*, in: *Wartości Polaków a dziedzictwo Jana Pawła II...*, pp. 171–172.

in the pope's homeland, the phenomenon of dehumanization or even monumentalisation of Karol Wojtyła is on the increase. The best evidence that this process takes on specific dimensions is the fact that the most common form of commemoration of the person of the Holy Father John Paul II is erecting his monuments. Meanwhile, young people need living role models and such an example is the person of Karol Wojtyła – a genuine and mystical and not a fictitious and mythical person.

Real actions honouring this great Pole are important: all kinds of works of mercy, charitable commitment to the poor or supporting ambitious, talented but poor young people. Here a special role is played by various initiatives undertaken during the Papal Day celebrations, including the collection organized for the scholarship fund of the “Work of the New Millennium” Foundation. The idea of promoting the heritage of Pope Wojtyła certainly fits well into the annual Meetings of Youth on the fields of Lednica, organised by Fr. Jan Góra OP (1948–2015) or new evangelisation co-ordinated by the auxiliary bishop of Kraków Grzegorz Ryś clearly reflecting the pastoral experience of John Paul II.

Such actions, conducted “in the spirit” and “with the spirit” of John Paul II, will appeal more to human imagination than most wonderful monuments. They may not, however, only have an incidental, occasional and anniversary character. Pastoral and catechetical formation programmes should also lead to a deep, theological reflection on the papal teaching. The great majority of Poles does not know the title of even one of the fourteen encyclicals of Pope John Paul II. This state is also confirmed by theoretical research. An analysis prepared by Krzysztof Koseła, a sociologist of religion, even allows us to formulate a thesis of “double moral standards” of Polish Catholics. Contemporary Poles perceive the impact of the teaching of the Holy Father on their own life and the political and social changes around the world. Moreover, in spite of the results of the study, they declare a very good knowledge of his teaching. At the same time they do not mind the incompatibility of their own beliefs and attitudes with the pope's teaching. The admiration for John Paul II cools down particularly when confronted with papal teaching on the dignity and the absolute protection of human life from the moment of conception until natural death. Issues of natural methods

of family planning and morality in the sexual realm are no longer debated, but in fact rejected by the vast majority of the Polish society, including youth. One may quote few statistics to illustrate this issue: in research conducted in Poland after the death of Pope Wojtyła regarding the acceptance or rejecting particular elements of the pope's teaching, only 34% of respondents asked about their opinion on death penalty fully shared the pope's opinion in this respect. Only 26% of respondents fully supported the rejection of abortion and only 15% the prohibition of contraception.⁴⁸

Do the patterns of behaviour advocated by John Paul II still matter to youth, and what function should they have, if they are not accepted? Does Wojtyła's project of Christian life have any chances to be widely accepted outside a narrow group of deep religious experience? Perhaps it is the pastoral idea of World Youth Day, open to mass reception and popularity of faith, that is the only offer through which the Catholic Church may reach the hearts of youth of today?⁴⁹

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⁴⁸ K. Koseła, *Opinie o pontyfikacie Jana Pawła II*, in: *Wartości Polaków a dziedzictwo Jana Pawła II...*

⁴⁹ See: M. Muolo, *Pokolenie Światowych Dni Młodzieży*, przedmowa kard. S. Ryłko, wstęp M. Bedeschi, tłum. M. Masny, Kraków 2015.

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