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## **Rev. Prof. Józef Stala (1966–2025): In the service of science and the pursuit of purpose – perspectives, challenges, and academic achievements**

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### **Abstract**

Rev. Prof. Józef Stala (1966–2025) was a prominent Polish theologian, educator, and editor whose work significantly shaped catechetics, religious education, and family studies. Ordained in 1991, he pursued advanced theological studies and dedicated his academic career to the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, where he held leadership roles and fostered international collaboration. His scholarly achievements include numerous monographs, edited volumes, and educational resources, with a focus on the practical application of catechesis and family pedagogy. Stala contributed to curriculum development, participated in national and international research projects, and organized major academic conferences. Beyond academia, he served the Church and society through roles in diocesan bodies, acting as an expert and consultant to commissions and working groups appointed by the Polish Bishops' Conference and to governmental committees, influencing educational policy and standards. As founder and editor-in-chief of the journal "The Person and the Challenges", he promoted international and interdisciplinary dialogue inspired by John Paul II. Stala's legacy endures through his mentorship, service, and lasting impact on religious education and scholarship.

### **Keywords**

Józef Stala, catechetics, religious education, family studies, The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, The Person and the Challenges

The passing of Rev. Prof. Józef Stala is a great loss to the academic community and to all those associated with the journal *The Person and the Challenges. The Journal of Theology, Education, Canon Law and Social Studies Inspired by Pope John Paul II*. As the founder and longtime editor of the journal, he played a key role in shaping its vision and promoting the values that became the foundation of its mission. In honoring the memory of the Reverend Professor, we wish to recall the most significant moments of his life and career, which left a lasting impact on the development of science, education, and pastoral ministry in Poland and beyond. The following biographical note commemorates this legacy.

### Early life and education

Rev. Józef Stala was born on December 6, 1966, in Mielec, as the son of Edward and Helena (née Gajek). The future priest came from the parish of Borowa near Mielec and completed his secondary education in 1985 in Mielec. After finishing philosophical-theological studies at the Higher Theological Seminary in Tarnów, Stala was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Józef Życiński of Tarnów on May 25, 1991.<sup>1</sup> The young cleric's first assignment as a vicar was in the parish of Bolesław (from July 15, 1991), followed by service at St. Kazimierz parish in Nowy Sącz (from June 30, 1992).

Between 1993 and 1998, Rev. Stala pursued specialized licentiate-doctoral studies in catechetics at the Faculty of Theology of the Academy of Catholic Theology (ATK) in Warsaw. He completed his doctoral studies in theological sciences with a dissertation titled "Theological-Anthropological Foundations of Family Catechesis," (*Podstawy teologiczno-antropologiczne katechezy rodzinnej*) written under the supervision of Rev. prof. dr hab. Jerzy Bajda.<sup>2</sup>

In 2005, Rev. Stala was awarded a habilitation degree in theological sciences with a specialization in catechetics by the Council of the Faculty of Theology at the Pontifical Academy of Theology. This recognition came following the

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<sup>1</sup> Kuria Diecezjalna w Tarnowie, *Schematyzm diecezji tarnowskiej*, Tarnów 2009, Wydawnictwo Diecezji Tarnowskiej, p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> J. Stala, *Podstawy teologiczno-antropologiczne katechezy rodzinnej. Na podstawie dokumentów Magisterium soborowego i posoborowego*, Tarnów 1998, Mała Poligrafia redemptorystów Tuchowie.

evaluation of his scholarly contributions and his habilitation dissertation titled “Catechesis on Marriage and Family in Poland after the Second Vatican Council: An Evaluation Attempt,” (*Katecheza o małżeństwie i rodzinie w Polsce po Soborze Watykańskim. Próba oceny*) published in 2004.<sup>3</sup>

The full professor title in Theological Sciences was conferred upon him by Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, the Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical University of John Paul II, in 2011. His professorial book was titled “Towards Integral Religious Education in the Family: An Attempt at Reflection on the Teaching of John Paul II in the Context of Polish Conditions” (*W kierunku integralnej edukacji religijnej w rodzinie. Próba refleksji nad nauczaniem Jana Pawła II w kontekście polskich uwarunkowań*), Tarnów 2010.<sup>4</sup>

## Academic career

Since 1998, Rev. Stala maintained a continuous affiliation with the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow (formerly the Pontifical Academy of Theology). His academic journey began at the Theological Institute in Tarnów, which later became the Faculty of Theology Section in Tarnów (WTST), where he served as the head of the Department of Pedagogical and Catechetical Sciences. Upon his appointment as Associate Professor at UPJPII in 2008, the distinguished scholar assumed numerous administrative responsibilities, including the Erasmus program coordinator for the faculty in WTST (2008–2014 and from 2020),<sup>5</sup> a member and subsequently chairman (2010–2020) of the Senate Commission for Supporting Scientific Activities at UPJPII in Krakow, Vice-Dean for Science, Development and International Cooperation at WTST (2011–2014),<sup>6</sup> and later

<sup>3</sup> J. Stala, *Katecheza o małżeństwie i rodzinie w Polsce po Soborze Watykańskim II. Próba oceny*, Tarnów 2004, Biblos.

<sup>4</sup> J. Stala, *W kierunku integralnej edukacji religijnej w rodzinie. Próba refleksji nad nauczaniem Jana Pawła II w kontekście polskich uwarunkowań*, Tarnów 2010, Polihymnia.

<sup>5</sup> J. Stala, *Aktualne możliwości kształcenia polskich studentów za granicą w kontekście 25. rocznicy powołania programu “Erasmus”*, “Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne” 32 (2013) no. 2, pp. 103–112.

<sup>6</sup> J. Stala, *Uniwersytecka “melodia”. Tarnowski przyczynek do współpracy międzynarodowej Uniwersytetu Papieskiego Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*, “Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne” 33 (2014) no. 2, pp. 193–203.

Vice-Rector for Scientific Potential and International Cooperation at UPJPII in Krakow (2014–2020).

As the university's ambassador for internationalization, Rev. Stala not only established numerous bilateral cooperation agreements with foreign institutions but also personally engaged in collaborative academic work, delivering lectures and conducting teaching activities at academic centers across Europe, including those in Ružomberok and Banská Bystrica (Slovakia), Ljubljana (Slovenia), Prague (Czech Republic), Tbilisi (Georgia), and Kaunas (Lithuania).

## Scholarly and educational achievements

Students were always of paramount importance to Rev. Professor Stala, who consistently supported their academic development and educational advancement. Throughout his career, he supervised 72 master's theses and 8 doctoral dissertations across various disciplines, including theological sciences, pedagogy, family studies, and sociology. His academic mentorship expanded through his role as a reviewer for 16 doctoral proceedings and 4 habilitation reviews for the conferment of the habilitation degree in theological sciences.

The scholarly output of Rev. Prof. Józef Stala is remarkable, both in terms of volume and interdisciplinary scope. He authored or co-authored 12 scientific monographs and served as the editor for 56 collective volumes. In addition, he published 138 articles in scientific journals, 122 chapters in multi-author monographs, and 13 entries in dictionaries and encyclopedias. His bibliography also includes 68 book reviews published in scientific periodicals and 28 conference reports.<sup>7</sup> His work has appeared in Polish, English, German, Portuguese, Slovenian, Croatian, and Slovak. In collaboration with Prof. Elżbieta Osewska, he developed 9 packages for religious education in preschools and 22 packages for primary schools and co-authored 26 other religious education resources.

Rev. Stala distinguished himself through his active participation in numerous scientific projects, expert groups, and scholarly forums where he addressed pastoral challenges emerging within the context of ongoing social transformations. His work focused on developing innovative approaches to

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<sup>7</sup> ks. prof. dr hab. Józef Stala, <http://oldwww.upjp2.edu.pl/edumod/pracownik/331/> [10.05.2025]

catechesis<sup>8</sup> and family pedagogy,<sup>9</sup> age-appropriate religious instruction,<sup>10</sup> and Christian formation in the postmodern context.<sup>11</sup> His scholarly interests also included family dynamics<sup>12</sup> and approaches to marriage preparation.<sup>13</sup> Beyond academic inquiry, his organizational leadership resulted in the successful coordination of 13 international scientific conferences, 17 national symposia, and 12 regional academic gatherings.<sup>14</sup> His scholarly influence extended through his

<sup>8</sup> J. Stala (ed.), *Dzisiejszy katecheta: stan aktualny i wyzwania: praca zbiorowa*, Kraków 2002, WAM; J. Stala (ed.), *Katechizować dzisiaj: problemy i wyzwania: praca zbiorowa*, Kielce 2004, Jedność.

<sup>9</sup> J. Stala, *Familienkatechese in Polen um die Jahrhundertwende: Probleme und Herausforderungen*, Tarnów 2008, Biblos; J. Stala, E. Osewska (eds.), *Religious Education/Catechesis in the Family: A European Perspective*, Warszawa 2010, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW; J. Stala (ed.), *Dzisiejsi rodzice: problemy i wyzwania: praca zbiorowa*, Tarnów–Lublin 2009, Polihymnia.

<sup>10</sup> R. Chałupniak, E. Osewska, J. Stala (eds.), *Wychowanie dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym*, Tarnów 2005, Biblos; A. Hajduk, J. Stala (eds.), *Wychowanie dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym. Cz. 2: Wychowanie religijne i katecheza*, Tarnów 2006, Biblos; H. Iwaniuk, J. Stala (eds.), *Wychowanie młodzieży w średnim wieku szkolnym. Cz. 2: Wychowanie religijne i katecheza*, Tarnów 2007, Biblos; R. Czekalski, J. Stala (eds.), *Wychowanie młodzieży na poziomie szkół ponadgimnazjalnych. Cz. 2: Wychowanie religijne i katecheza*, Tarnów 2007, Biblos; K. Misiaszek, J. Stala (eds.), *Katecheza dorosłych*, Tarnów 2009, Biblos.

<sup>11</sup> E. Osewska, J. Stala, *Die katholische Schule zu Beginn des XXI. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel Polens und Englands*, Warszawa 2015, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW; J. Stala, E. Osewska, *Anders erziehen in Polen. Der Erziehungs und Bildungsbegriff im Kontext eines sich ständig verändernden Europas des XXI. Jahrhunderts*, Tarnów 2009, Polihymnia; E. Osewska, J. Stala, *Les transformations socio-politiques et l'éducation religieuse et morale dans l'école Polonaise*, "Studia Pastoralne" 8 (2012), pp. 140–147.

<sup>12</sup> J. Stala, E. Osewska (eds.), *The contemporary family. Local and European perspectives*, Kraków 2015, Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie Wydawnictwo Naukowe; J. Garmaz, J. Stala (eds.), *Strengthening Families*, Kraków 2016, Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie Wydawnictwo Naukowe; E. Osewska, J. Stala, C. Rossi (eds.), *Families: Opportunities and challenges*, Kraków 2019, Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

<sup>13</sup> J. Stala (ed.), *Nauki o rodzinie w służbie rodziny: praca zbiorowa*, Kraków 2014, Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

<sup>14</sup> J. Stala, *VII ogólnopolska konferencja naukowa Współpraca rodziny i szkoły w procesie wychowania (Tarnów, 21 maja 2012)*, "Polonia Sacra" 16 (2012) no. 2; J. Stala, *Bericht über die Gesamtpolnische Wissenschaftskonferenz "Familienwissenschaften – Gegenwart und Zukunft"*, *Hauptversammlung der Polnischen Gesellschaft für Familiologie, Päpstliche Universität Johannes Paul II. in Krakau*, 13. Januar 2017, "The Person and the Challenges" 7 (2017) no. 1, pp. 255–261; E. Osewska, *International conference: Educating Young People for the 21st Century*, "The Person and the Challenges" 8 (2018) no. 1, pp. 227–230; J. Stala, *Internationale polnisch-kroatische Konferenz: "Wpływ papieża Polaka, św. Jana Pawła II na*

contributions as a presenter at 41 international, 47 national, and 57 regional scientific conferences, demonstrating his sustained commitment to academic dialogue and knowledge dissemination.

Recognized for his scholarly accomplishments, Rev. Prof. Stala led both domestic and international scientific and popular science projects supported by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.<sup>15</sup> During 2021–2022, he coordinated the “We Cherish Family Life” (*Pielegnujemy życie rodzinne*) initiative under the “Excellent Science – Support for Scientific Conferences” program. Simultaneously, he oversaw “In Service to Society: Poland in Defense of Human Rights at Home and Abroad” (*W służbie społeczeństwu. Polska w obronie praw człowieka na świecie i w kraju*) as part of the “Excellent Science – Support for Scientific Monographs” program, culminating in a multi-author publication from the Pontifical University of John Paul II Press in Kraków.<sup>16</sup> From 2023 to 2024, his third ministerial project focused on enhancing the international scholarly journal “The Person and the Challenges” through the “Development of Scientific Journals” program. In addition, Rev. Stala was involved in numerous other projects and initiatives, of which examples are mentioned below. In 2008, he directed

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*społeczność chorwacką*” (*Der Einfluss des polnischen Papstes, des hl. Johannes Paul II., auf die kroatische Gesellschaft*), “The Person and the Challenges” 8 (2018) no. 1, pp. 231–236; E. Osewska, *Bericht Über Die Internationale Konferenz: “Polonia Restituta”, Krakau, 29. April 2019*, “The Person and the Challenges” 9 (2019) no. 2, pp. 257–259; J. Stala, *Bericht über die Gesamtpolnische Konferenz: “Rodzina – Wychowanie – Przyszłość” (Familie – Erziehung – Zukunft) und die Hauptversammlung der Polnischen Gesellschaft für Familiologie, Päpstliche Universität Johannes Paul II., Krakau, 27. Februar 2020*, “The Person and the Challenges” 11 (2020) no. 2, pp. 259–264; J. Stala, *Bericht über die Internationale Konferenz: “Europa między nihilizmem post-oświeceniowym a kwestią islamską”*, “The Person and the Challenges” 10 (2020) no. 1, pp. 319–323; B. Obelenienè, *The most relevant topic of our time at the International Conference ‘Dignity and Vocation of Woman’ on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Pope John Paul II*, “The Person and the Challenges” 11 (2021) no. 1, pp. 291–295; E. Osewska, *A report from the International Academic Conference We Cherish Family Life (Pielegnujemy życie rodzinne) organised by the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow and Polskie Stowarzyszenie Familiologiczne, Krakow, 21–22 October 2022*, “The Person and the Challenges” 13 (2023) 1, pp. 307–311.

<sup>15</sup> Completed Projects Funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Office of Scientific Projects, Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, accessed May 10, 2025, <https://bpn.upjp2.edu.pl/projekty/ze-srodkow-budzetu-panstwa/ministerstwo-nauki-i-szkolnictwa-wyzszego/zakonczone>.

<sup>16</sup> M. Butrymowicz, J. Stala (eds.), *W służbie społeczeństwu: Polska w obronie praw człowieka na świecie i w kraju: praca zbiorowa*, Kraków 2022, Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

the project “Towards Integral Religious Education in the Family An Attempt at Reflection on the Teaching of John Paul II in the Context of Polish Conditions” (W kierunku integralnej edukacji religijnej w rodzinie. Próba refleksji nad nauczaniem Jana Pawła II w kontekście polskich uwarunkowań). In 2011, he led the “Children with John Paul II” (Dzieci z Janem Pawłem II) project, and in 2013, “Modern Family: Local and European Perspectives” (Współczesna rodzina: perspektywy lokalne i europejskie). He directed the “World Youth Day: Sources and Development of the Idea” (Światowe Dni Młodzieży. Źródła i rozwój idei) project in 2016, and two years later, he led the project “Strong Family as the Foundation of a Healthy Society” (Mocna rodzina fundamentem zdrowego społeczeństwa).

His scholarly reputation extended well beyond Poland, as Rev. Prof. Stala was invited to participate in the European Project ETHOS conducted by the Catholic University College Graz in Austria from 2012 to 2014. Subsequently, from 2018 to 2022, he was entrusted with the chairmanship of the Steering Committee for the “Consolidated Development Plan of UPJPII” (Skonsolidowany Plan Rozwoju UPJPII) project co-financed by the European Social Fund. Between 2020 and 2023, he coordinated the implementation of the international research project “Dynamics of Alcoholism and Addiction in the Family System and Relational Family Therapy.”

## Service, honors, and professional affiliations

Rev. Professor Stala combined his academic work with various functions in service to both his local diocese and the broader Church in Poland. He served as a staff member of the Catechetical Department of the Diocesan Curia in Tarnów and held the position of diocesan visitor for religious education (1998–2005). For many years, he was active in the Archbishop Jerzy Ablewicz Foundation, which provided scholarships to support children and youth from poor or large families, where he served as a member and secretary of the board. His diocesan responsibilities also included participation in the Program Council of “Dobra Nowina” Radio, acting as a delegate of the Bishop of Tarnów for the evaluation of books with religious content (from 2000), and involvement in both the Presbyteral Council and the V Synod of the Diocese of Tarnów.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> P. Madej, *Memento. Śp. ks. prof. dr hab. Józef Stala*, accessed May 10, 2025, <https://diecezjatarnow.pl/memento/sp-ks-prof-dr-hab-jozef-stala/92>

From 2002, Rev. Stala evaluated religious education curricula and catechetical textbooks as an Expert Consultant for the Catholic Education Commission (Komisja Wychowania Katolickiego) of the Polish Bishops' Conference. During 2003–2004, he co-developed a parish catechesis program for youth, aligning it with Poland's educational reforms. Later, in 2009–2010, he contributed to revising the "Core Curriculum for Catechesis" (Podstawa programowa katechezy) and the "Religious Education Program" (Program nauczania religii), focusing on preschool education and responding to Poland's 2010 educational reforms.<sup>18</sup>

Recognition of academic expertise extended beyond ecclesiastical circles to state authorities, resulting in several significant appointments for Prof. Stala in educational policy development. He collaborated with the Ministry of Education and Science and served on important governmental committees focused on family studies and educational development. Between 2012 and 2019, he served as an expert assessor in theological sciences and family studies for the Humanities and Theological Sciences Section of the Polish Accreditation Committee (Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna). His contributions were further acknowledged in 2022 when the Minister's Plenipotentiary for Family Affairs appointed him to the "Team for developing directions for family sciences" (Zespół do spraw opracowania kierunków rozwoju nauk o rodzinie)<sup>19</sup> in March, followed by his appointment to the Council of the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (Rada Fundacji Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji)<sup>20</sup> in May.

His academic expertise was recognized by numerous associations that invited him to join their ranks. He was a member of the Association of Polish Catechists (Stowarzyszenie Katechetyków Polskich) (1997), the Polish Theological Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne) (2005), the Tarnów Scientific Society (Tarnowskie Towarzystwo Naukowe) (2007), the European Catechetical Team – EEC

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<sup>18</sup> P. Tomasiak, *Powstanie i ewolucja polskich programowych dokumentów katechetycznych w latach 2001–2018*, "Studia Katechetyczne" 15 (2019), pp. 11–28.

<sup>19</sup> Kluz M., *Ks. prof. dr hab. Józef Stala powołany do Zespołu ds. opracowania kierunków rozwoju nauk o rodzinie*, [Rev. prof. dr hab. Józef Stala appointed to the Team for the Development of Family Sciences], accessed May 10, 2025, <https://upjp2.edu.pl/aktualnosci/ks-prof-dr-hab-jozef-stala-powolany-do-zespołu-ds-opracowania-kierunkow-rozwoju-nauk-o-rodzinie-1949.html>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ks. prof. dr hab. Józef Stala członkiem Rady Fundacji Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji 9 V 2022*, accessed May 10, 2025, <https://upjp2.edu.pl/aktualnosci/ks-prof-dr-hab-jozef-stala-czlonkiem-rady-fundacji-rozwoju-systemu-edukacji-9-v-2022-2022.html>.

(2010), the Polish Family Association (Polskie Stowarzyszenie Familiologiczne) (2011), and the European Society for Catholic Theology – ESCT (2012).<sup>21</sup>

Rev. Józef's commitment and outstanding achievements were acknowledged with several awards and honors. In recognition of his devoted service to the diocese, Rev. Stala was appointed Honorary Canon of the Collegiate Chapter in Wojnicz in 2014.<sup>22</sup> His exceptional and creative scientific, didactic, and organizational contributions earned him the Rector's Award three times (2010, 2013, 2018). The year 2019 brought two distinctions: the Medal of the National Education Commission (Medal Komisji Edukacji Narodowej) and the Silver Cross of Merit (Srebrny Krzyż Zasługi).<sup>23</sup> Later, in 2021, the Minister of Education and Science, Prof. Przemysław Czarnek, presented him with a lifetime achievement award.<sup>24</sup> The crowning recognition came in 2023, when, on the order of the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, he was presented with the Medal of the Centenary of Regained Independence (Medal Stulecia Odzyskanej Niepodległości).<sup>25</sup> Posthumously, on April 17, 2025, he was further honored by the President with the Gold Cross of Merit (Złoty Krzyż Zasługi).<sup>26</sup>

## Editorial work and journal leadership

Rev. Stala collaborated with the editorial boards of many scientific journals, serving as a member of the editorial team or scientific council for "Studia Pastoralne," "Melita Theologica," "Bogoslovni vestnik," "Perspectiva. Legnickie Studia

<sup>21</sup> *Ks. prof. dr hab. Józef Stala*, accessed May 10, 2025, <http://oldwww.upjp2.edu.pl/edumod/pracownik/331/>

<sup>22</sup> Parish of Wojnicz, "Skład Kapituły" [Chapter Members], official website of the Collegiate Chapter in Wojnicz, accessed May 10, 2025, <https://wojnicz.diecezjatarnow.pl/sklad-kapituły/>

<sup>23</sup> J. Szczurek, *Chronica*, "Analecta Cracoviensia" 52 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.15633/acr.4055>.

<sup>24</sup> M. Kluz, *Ks. prof. Józef Stala uhonorowany Nagrodą Ministra Edukacji i Nauki*, December 23, 2021, accessed May 10, 2025, <https://upjp2.edu.pl/aktualnosci/ks-prof-jozef-stala-uhonorowany-nagroda-ministra-edukacji-i-nauki-1884.html>

<sup>25</sup> *Medale dla nauczycieli akademickich Wydziału Teologicznego Sekcja w Tarnowie UPJPII 16 X 2023*, official website of the Faculty of Theology, Section in Tarnów, accessed May 10, 2025, <https://wt-tarnow.upjp2.edu.pl/aktualnosci/medale-dla-nauczycieli-akademickich-wydzialu-teologicznego-sekcja-w-tarnowie-upjpii-16-x-2023-11.html>

<sup>26</sup> *Postanowienie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 10 lutego 2025 r. nr rej. 70/2025 o nadaniu odznaczenia* (Monitor Polski 2025, poz. 330), accessed May 10, 2025, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WMP20250000330/O/M20250330.pdf>

Teologiczno-Historyczne,” “Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego,” “Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne,” “Studia Teologiczne. Białystok–Drohiczyn–Łomża,” “Roczniki Pedagogiczne,” “Studia regionalne,” and “Saeculum Christianum.” He edited the following publication series: “Education Today. Problems and Challenges” (Edukacja dzisiaj. Problemy i wyzwania), “Family Sciences” (Nauki o rodzinie), “Social Formation” (Formacja socjalna), and also co-edited the publication series “Academica” and “Bibliotheca Tarnoviensis.”

A major achievement and lasting legacy of Rev. Prof. Józef Stala was the establishment and management, together with Prof. Elżbieta Osewska, of the international scientific periodical “The Person and the Challenges: The Journal of Theology, Education, Canon Law and Social Studies Inspired by Pope John Paul II.” This journal was founded in 2011, the year of Pope John Paul II’s beatification, and from the beginning was conceived as an intellectual tribute to this saintly compatriot, visionary, and thinker.<sup>27</sup> It was the kind of monument that the Holy Father himself desired: not material, but an initiative that genuinely changed the world for the better.<sup>28</sup>

The mission of the established periodical was to diagnose the state of contemporary culture and the spiritual condition of humanity and to analyze the broader socio-cultural situation while promoting Christian values. From its inception, the journal was conceived as a voice directed to the world, which is why it was published in congress languages (English, German, Spanish, Italian, and French), and the editorial board fostered collaboration with academic institutions across multiple disciplines, both domestically and internationally.

A significant step toward the openness and popularization of the journal was the introduction of an open access model in 2012 using the Creative Commons license (CC BY 4.0) and indexing in numerous international databases, such as: The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (CEJSH), Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL), Directory of Open

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<sup>27</sup> J. Stala, *Die Person und die Herausforderungen der Gegenwart im Licht der Nachfolge und der Lehre des Heiligen Vaters Johannes Pauls II.* “The Person and the Challenges” – ein internationales wissenschaftliches Periodikum, “The Person and the Challenges” 1 (2011) no. 1, pp. 13–23.

<sup>28</sup> Catholic Review. (2025). Polish talent foundation “best living monument” to St. John Paul II 20 years after his death. Retrieved May 10, 2025, from <https://catholicreview.org/polish-talent-foundation-best-living-monument-to-st-john-paul-ii-20-years-after-his-death/>

Access Journals (DOAJ), ERIH PLUS, Web of Science (Emerging Sources Citation Index), Polish Scientific Bibliography (POLON), and Science Library.

From the founding of the journal in 2011 until his death, Rev. Prof. Józef Stala served as the Editor-in-Chief of “The Person and the Challenges: The Journal of Theology, Education, Canon Law and Social Studies Inspired by Pope John Paul II.” Through his meticulous oversight, he ensured the journal’s continuous development, its recognition on the international stage, and the building of a strong academic brand. In this capacity, he left the current Editorial Board an unsurpassed model of scholarly commitment and editorial dedication.

## Memory and legacy

The scholarly legacy of Rev. Prof. Józef Stala represents an extraordinary breadth of academic achievement rarely found in a single career. His body of work exemplifies the intellectual rigor and unwavering commitment that defined his academic persona. Through methodical research, innovative thinking, and strategic vision, he made valuable contributions to multiple disciplines – catechetics, religious pedagogy, and family education – with recognition extending to academic circles beyond Poland. Rev. Stala embodied the integration of scholarly excellence with practical engagement, demonstrating exceptional organizational leadership in conference development, research team coordination, and editorial stewardship. Perhaps most significantly, his impact as an educator transcended the classroom; he cultivated meaningful mentoring relationships with students and doctoral candidates while maintaining collaborative partnerships with colleagues across the academic community.

Rev. Józef perceived the fulfillment of his duties not merely as performing professional obligations, but primarily as fulfilling a life vocation. The inspiration from John Paul II’s teaching, which permeated his activities, was for him an ideal that he wished to instill in society, supporting the building of the individual, the family, and the school community on solid religious foundations. Pastoral care was present in most initiatives he undertook, both theoretical and practical. The religious education of children and youth, as well as strengthening marriages and families, constituted a constant point of reference for his scientific, popularizing, and pastoral activities.

Rev. prof. dr hab. Józef Stala passed away on February 6, 2025, after battling a persistent illness for several years. The funeral ceremonies occurred

on February 11 at the parish church of St. Nicholas in his hometown of Borowa near Mielec, where the body of the deceased was laid to rest in the local cemetery. In the memory of many people, Rev. Józef will remain as a kind and good person, and his scientific achievements and numerous works that he co-created or initiated will become a lasting testimony to his life and devotion to others.

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