

REV. WŁODZIMIERZ GAŁAZKA
CARDINAL STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI UNIVERSITY IN WARSAW
WGALAZKA@OP.PL
ORCID: 0000-0001-6933-0276

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RELIGIOUS VOWS AS A PATH TO UNION WITH GOD: FATHER ANSELM GĄDEK'S THEOLOGY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Abstract. This article explores the writings of Father Anzelm Gądek, OCD, with particular attention to his theology of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. For Gądek, religious vows are not merely juridical obligations but a conscious and voluntary surrender to God, made possible only through divine grace. He describes the vows as a gift to the universal Church that enables the daily following of Jesus in love. Poverty is understood as a divine inheritance that detaches the consecrated person from material goods in order to receive the true treasure of Heaven. Chastity is interpreted as an anticipatory nuptial bond with Christ, foreshadowing the eschatological union of the Bridegroom and the Church. Obedience conforms the consecrated person to the will of God through filial trust and service within the community. Together, in Gądek's vision, they constitute a liberating path that enables the consecrated person to draw closer to Christ and bear witness to His presence in the world.

Keywords: religious vows, poverty, chastity, obedience, Mother of the Savior, Mary, Carmelite spirituality, consecrated life.

Streszczenie. Śluby zakonne jako droga do zjednoczenia człowieka z Bogiem.
Refleksja na temat życia konsekrowanego w pismach o. Anzelma Gądka. Autor artykułu podejmuje analizę pism ojca Anzelma Gądka OCD, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem jego refleksji teologicznej na temat rad ewangelicznych: ubóstwa, czystości i posłuszeństwa. Zdaniem o. Gądka śluby zakonne nie są jedynie formalnym zobowiązaniem, lecz świadomym i dobrowolnym oddaniem się Bogu, możliwym wyłącznie dzięki Jego łasce.

O. Anzelm przedstawia śluby jako dar dla Kościoła powszechnego, który umożliwia codzienne naśladowanie Jezusa w miłości. Ubóstwo rozumiane jest jako dziedzictwo Boże, które uwalnia osobę konsekrowaną od przywiązania do dóbr materialnych, aby mogła otrzymać prawdziwy skarb Nieba. Czystość interpretowana jest jako zapowiedź zaślubin z Chrystusem, czyli jedności eschatologicznej Oblubieńca z Kościołem. Posłuszeństwo natomiast uzdalnia osobę konsekrowaną do poddania się woli Bożej poprzez zaufanie i służbę we wspólnocie. Wspólnie śluby te są dla osoby konsekrowanej drogą ku prawdziwej wolności, która pozwala zbliżyć się do Chrystusa i dawać świadectwo Jego obecności w świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: śluby zakonne, ubóstwo, czystość, posłuszeństwo, Matka Zbawiciela, Maryja, duchowość karmelitańska, życie konsekrowane.

INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that the consecrated life finds its fullest expression in the profession and practice of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience,¹ each corresponding to a specific area in which a life dedicated to God in imitation of Christ can be fulfilled—namely, affection, possession, and independence.² In Father Anselm Gądek's view, religious vows signify a conscious and voluntary self-offering to God, an entry into the path of holiness through which true perfection and freedom can be attained.³

Father Gądek's vision is embodied in the lives of the Carmelite Sisters of the Child Jesus, who profess their vows in pursuit of a higher good, their conduct is grounded in a religious intention in accordance with the Code

¹ See Teresa Paszkowska, *Misterium konsekracji osób w perspektywie duchowości Soboru Watykańskiego II* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2005), 204–220. The traditional order of the vows, which Anzelm Gądek also followed in his writings, was changed by the Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* (sec. 43) and the Decree *Perfectae caritatis* (sec. 2), where chastity was listed first. See Elio Gambari, *Życie zakonne po Soborze Watykańskim II*, trans. and ed. Jan Efrem Bielecki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Karmelitów Bosych, 1998), 104–105.

² See Czesław Parzyszek, *Życie konsekrowane w posoborowym nauczaniu Kościoła* (Ząbki: Apostolicum, 2007), 415.

³ See Anzelm Gądek, “Kazania o tajemnicach Pańskich” (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as KR), vol. 24, 25.

of Canon Law (c. 1191, §1). By committing themselves to the practice and proclamation of the evangelical counsels, the Sisters bear witness to the enduring power of the beatitudes, which inspire consecrated persons to strive for holiness within the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.⁴ Gądek compared religious vows to a “second baptism”—not of water, but of the spirit of love and sacrifice offered to God.⁵ At the same time, he stressed that a full understanding of this truth requires proper formation, both interior and exterior, achieved through prayer, mortification, observance of religious law, and above all, fidelity to the spirit of the congregation.⁶

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, Gądek emphasized that religious vows are inseparably linked to the life and teaching of Christ (in accordance with *Lumen gentium*, sec. 44). Chastity, poverty, and obedience confer upon the consecrated life a distinctly Christocentric character, making it a path of Christian perfection for those who seek not their own glory but the glory of God—even at the cost of life itself.⁷ Through the vows, consecration strengthens and secures an individual’s vocation, enabling them to glorify God while overcoming their own limitations.⁸ Thus, the Carmelite Sisters commit themselves to live and act in faith and hope as faithful children of God,⁹ offering themselves entirely to Him through the small sacrifices of daily life

For Gądek, living according to the evangelical counsels is a sign of the transcendent Kingdom of Heaven¹⁰—a sign that ensures unity both with the three individual Persons of the Trinity and among the consecrated themselves.¹¹ Following Vatican II (*Lumen gentium*, secs.

⁴ See KR, vol. 24, 300.

⁵ See KR, vol. 24, 277.

⁶ See Anzelm Gądek, “Listy do karmelitanek Dzieciątka Jezus” (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as LJ), vol. 17, 350.

⁷ See LJ, vol. 17, 312.

⁸ See LJ, vol. 17, 313; Gambari, *Życie zakonne*, 106.

⁹ See Anzelm Gądek, “Listy do karmelitanek Dzieciątka Jezus i osób świeckich” (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as LA), vol. 21, 92.

¹⁰ See Anzelm Gądek, “Kazania w ciągu Roku Liturgicznego” (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as KaL), 231–232.

¹¹ See Anzelm Gądek, “Konferencje do różnych zgromadzeń zakonnych i osób świeckich” (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as KP), vol. 29, 27.

44 and 46; *Perfectae caritatis*, sec. 5), he further underlined that living according to the vows is not only a sign of personal holiness but also, above all, a manifestation of the presence of God and His Kingdom in the soul.¹² This divine presence changes a person's life and conduct so as to reflect the virtues, gifts, and purposes of God.¹³

1. POVERTY

Father Anzelm Gądek's understanding of poverty in the consecrated life as a gift from God is consistent with the post-conciliar teaching of the Church. This view is rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation: when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, consecration was not manifested through riches or royal splendor, but through the fullness of poverty offered to God.¹⁴ From this gift of consecrated poverty flows the capacity to detach oneself spiritually from worldly goods in order to acquire the supreme treasure: the Kingdom of Heaven. Religious poverty, or *spiritual poverty* as Gądek preferred to call it, is the inheritance of the Father through which every Carmelite Sister receives a hundredfold in return for what she has surrendered upon entering the Order. Under the influence of this gift, a supernatural order is established in the soul and in one's actions, and consecrated persons gradually acquire the likeness of God in their spiritual character.¹⁵

Father Gądek also discussed a secondary concept related to the idea of poverty as a gift from God—that is, imitation of God's Son. This

¹² See KP, vol. 30, 99.

¹³ See Anzelm Gądek, "Konferencje do karmelitanek Dzieciątka Jezus z lat 1961–1962" (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as KJ), vol. 29, 143.

¹⁴ See KR, vol. 24, 296; Jacek Kiciński, *Powołanie – konsekracja – misja. Personalistyczny aspekt teologii życia konsekrowanego we współczesnym Magisterium Kościoła* (Wrocław: Papieski Wydział Teologiczny, 2008), 96, 101; Jerzy Wiesław Gogola, *Rady ewangeliczne. Teologia, praktyka, formacja* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Karmelitów Bosych, 2003), 160, 171.

¹⁵ See Anzelm Gądek, "Listy do osób świeckich" (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as LŚ), vol. 22, 52; Paweł Góralczyk, "Ubóstwo realne dla Królestwa Niebieskiego," in *I nic nad Boga. Apostolski wymiar życia konsekrowanego*, ed. Alfred Dyr and Paweł Góralczyk (Ząbki: Apostolicum, 1999), 115–128.

imitation, he argued, enables the Carmelite Sisters of the Child Jesus to receive and conduct proper spiritual formation.¹⁶ By responding to God's gift with the whole of one's being, it is possible to achieve communion with Him and experience it at every level of spiritual life.¹⁷ Such total self-offering is modelled on the Three Divine Persons, who guide the human soul to the summit of perfection and allow it to rejoice in love through complete union with Them.¹⁸ To adopt this model—where evangelical poverty is understood as a response to God through imitation—requires a voluntary realignment of one's relationship to all earthly goods.¹⁹

For Gądek, the vow of poverty entails renouncing the right to possess or control material goods. By relinquishing earthly possessions, consecrated persons become rich in the treasures of Heaven. Religious poverty thus reflects a form of spiritual childhood that leads to examination of conscience and, together with the renunciation of possession, signifies a betrothal to Christ.²⁰ Furthermore, both spiritual and material poverty serve to deepen filial trust in the Father at the level of spiritual courage and fortitude. By embracing the measure of poverty offered by God, the Sisters first learn to overcome themselves and only then to face external challenges.²¹

According to Gądek, both forms of poverty foster an awareness of God's presence, which directs the Carmelite Sisters toward the ultimate

¹⁶ See LJ, vol. 12, 315.

¹⁷ See LJ, vol. 12, 60; Kiciński, *Powołanie – konsekracja – misja*, 100.

¹⁸ See MU, 162–163; Jerzy Wiesław Gogola, *Ogólne wprowadzenie do formacji zakonnej*, Formacja zakonna, vol. 1, ed. Jerzy Wiesław Gogola (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Karmelitów Bosych, 1995), 63.

¹⁹ See MU, 159–160; Antoni Jozafat Nowak, *Osoba konsekrowana*, vol. 1, *Ślub ubóstwa* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1992), 48.

²⁰ See LJ, vol. 20, 326; Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae caritatis* (hereafter cited as *PC*), Vatican website, October 28, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html, sec. 13; Jerzy Wiesław Gogola, "Ubóstwo konsekrowane jako świadectwo miłosierdzia," *Życie Konsekrowane* 1 (2004): 76; Nowak, *Ślub ubóstwa*, 59, 74; Antoni Jozafat Nowak, "Świętość ubogich – ubóstwo świętych," *Życie Konsekrowane* 5 (2004): 41.

²¹ See LJ, vol. 20, 112; *PC*, sec. 13; Gogola, *Rady ewangeliczne*, 199; Kiciński, *Powołanie – konsekracja – misja*, 98.

purpose of their congregation. By discovering their inner treasures, they are capable of greater outward development commensurate with their “inner capital.”²² For this reason, Gądek encouraged the Sisters to utilize and develop the personal talents entrusted to them by God. In his view, those who nurture the skills of their vocation are invited into communion with God, whereas those who bury their talents forfeit that opportunity.²³ At the same time, he emphasized that only the Son of God can transform purely human talents—whether cultural or material—by placing them at the service of poverty, thereby reshaping the modern person into one shaped by God, who grounds the world’s economy in the economy of salvation.²⁴

In stressing the importance of poverty, Father Gądek urged consecrated persons to reach out to those to whom Christ Himself showed particular concern in proclaiming the Good News, including the physically and spiritually afflicted, the poor, and the abandoned.²⁵ In that regard, he pointed to the importance of proper formation that follows a number of specific objectives. First, one’s religious life must be centered on the poor Christ, following the model of Saint Joseph.²⁶ Second, one must learn to place trust in divine providence. Third, formation that leads to religious poverty demands inner mobilization to discover the true treasures hidden within the person.²⁷ Fourth, one must be freed from the human self by offering to God the sacrifice that He desires and in return receiving the experience of freedom from all sin.²⁸ Fifth, one must cultivate availability, often through love of God and one’s neighbor and through suffering,

²² See LJ, vol. 20, 266.

²³ See Raniero Cantalamessa, *Ubóstwo*, trans. Marek Przeczewski (Kraków: eSPE, 2001), 103.

²⁴ See MU, 24.

²⁵ See Anzelm Gądek, “Konferencje zakonne” (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as KoZ), 245.

²⁶ See Anzelm Gądek, “Kazania o świętych” (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as KaŚ), 194; PC 13; John Paul II, *Vita consecrata*, apostolic exhortation (hereafter cited as VC), Vatican website, March 25, 1996, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata.html, sec. 90; Kiciński, *Powołanie – konsekracja – misja*, 98, 100.

²⁷ See Anzelm Gądek, “Listy do karmelitanek Dzieciątka Jezus i osób świeckich” (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as LA), vol. 21, 43.

²⁸ See KaŚ, 323.

as symbolized by the manger and the cross.²⁹ The ultimate goal of this formation is, in Gądek's view, to foster engagement, which empowers the consecrated persons to glorify God, attain union with Him in childlike simplicity, and bear witness to love purified of self-interest.³⁰

In Father Gądek's teaching, the attitude of poverty is not about cultivating destitution or renouncing everything for its own sake. Rather, it is an integrated disposition of entrusting oneself entirely to God. This represents the path of spiritual childhood, through which the consecrated person deepens the gift of poverty in a spirit of trust, hope, and confidence.³¹

2. CHASTITY

Father Anzelm Gądek emphasized that chastity is an anticipatory nuptial bond established by God that confirms, purifies, and strengthens a consecrated person's covenant with the Child Jesus—a covenant which will be truly fulfilled in the world to come.³² This bond reveals the fundamental value of virginity freely offered to God, so that the vow of chastity becomes a mystical union with the Lord.³³ For those in Carmel, the highest model of consecrated chastity is the Virgin Mary. Inspired by the Mother of Jesus, the Sisters strive to embody a virtue that fosters purity in others.³⁴ This Marian reference is central to the consecrated life, and the Sisters' visible commitment to chastity stands as a testimony to their formation.³⁵

²⁹ See KoZ, 115.

³⁰ See LJ, vol. 14, 246; Andrzej Derdziuk, "Wspólnotowy i wspólnototwórczy charakter osób konsekrowanych," *Życie Konsekrowane* 4 (2002): 30–31.

³¹ See KR, vol. 24, 257; Gogola, *Rady ewangeliczne*, 185.

³² See Anzelm Gądek, "Listy do przełożonych wyższych karmelitów bosych" (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as LP), vol. 7, 374.

³³ See KR, vol. 24, 276; see PC, sec. 12; Gogola, "Ogólne wprowadzenie," 60.

³⁴ See KoZ, 84; Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, Vatican website, November 21, 1964, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, sec. 63; Kiciński, *Powołanie – konsekracja – misja*, 74.

³⁵ See KoZ, 305; Gambari, *Życie zakonne*, 337; Gogola, *Rady ewangeliczne*, 369.

In his reflections on chastity, Gądek observes that the state of virginity leads consecrated persons into direct participation in the nuptial mystery. Virgin love, he argues, embraces the Person of Christ in an immediate and intimate union without mediation.³⁶ This spiritual marriage—complete and definite with God—requires the sacrifice of the whole person, body and soul, and results in a rebirth from God and for God.³⁷ Through the vow of chastity, the consecrated person aspires to a state in which the body itself lives according to spiritual values. In this context, Gądek recalls the Gospel message that chastity is a gift from God³⁸ and that direct union with the Bridegroom anticipates eternal life. Thus, chastity serves as a reminder of the sacred nuptials instituted by God and destined to be revealed in their fullness as an eternal reward in the world to come.³⁹ Virginity therefore carries an eschatological significance, foreshadowing the final union with Christ, the only true Bridegroom.⁴⁰

Gądek further explained that recognizing chastity's ultimate goal—union in Heaven with Christ the Bridegroom—makes the consecrated life a source of profound happiness and joy for the Carmelite Sisters, a path of continual growth in uncovering the mystery of spiritual childhood.⁴¹ Following Saint Paul (1 Cor 7:32–35), John Paul II affirmed that the unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, and his interests are not divided between the world and God.⁴² Gądek, however, also stressed the importance of sacrifice, through which consecrated persons seek deeper

³⁶ See MU, 81–82.

³⁷ See KR, vol. 24, 240.

³⁸ See KR, vol. 24, 296.

³⁹ See KaŚ, 209.

⁴⁰ See MU, 9; PC, sec. 25; VC, sec. 26; Kicinski, *Powołanie – konsekracja – misja*, 85–88.

⁴¹ See Anzelm Gądek, "Listy do karmelitanek bosych i sióstr różnych zgromadzeń zakonnych" (unpublished manuscript, hereafter cited as LZ), vol. 11, 77; Gogola, *Rady ewangeliczne*, 306.

⁴² See Jan Paweł II, "Konsekrowana czystość w oblubieńczej jedności Chrystusa i Kościoła (Katecheza z 23 listopada 1994 r.)", in *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 7, *Katechezy*, part 2 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2006), 717.

conformity to Christ, motivated by a desire for happiness akin to that of the Son of God.⁴³

In his teaching on the importance of chastity in religious life, Gądek also invoked the image of Christ bound by an indissoluble covenant to His Bride, the Church. The permanence of this covenant lies at the heart of the enduring significance of perpetual vows, whose wording closely parallels that of the sacrament of matrimony.⁴⁴ For this reason, the vow of chastity enables the Sisters to grasp the obligations imposed by Christ, who declared that no one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). By bearing witness to their fidelity to Christ, consecrated persons physically embrace their spiritual rebirth—a rebirth that continues until death⁴⁵—and fulfill the will of the Heavenly Father in imitation of the Virgin Mary.⁴⁶

3. OBEDIENCE

Father Anzelm Gądek describes obedience as a value rooted in God's salvific plan and expressed through the particular scope and form of the religious charism. This understanding is grounded in the biblical message, which affirms that God's thoughts—especially with regard to obedience—transcend human reasoning, and that human ways do not mirror God's ways (Is 55:8–9).⁴⁷ Reflecting on obedience after Vatican II, Jerzy Gogola characterized it as supernatural, rooted in faith, inspired by the Holy Spirit in love, and complete—that is, active, responsible, co-responsible, and

⁴³ See KoZ, 342; Ubaldo Terrinoni, *Słowo Boże i śluby zakonne. Obrazy biblijne 2. Czystość*, trans. Patrycja Mikulska (Kraków: Salvator, 2004), 8; Wiesław Stanisław Gogola, *Zasady wierności charyzmatowi Założyciela. Studium z teologii życia konsekrowanego w świetle dokumentów Kościoła od Vaticanum II po Vita consecrata na przykładzie charyzmatu terezjańskiego* (Kraków, Karmelitański Instytut Duchowości, 2000), 267.

⁴⁴ See KR, vol. 24, 277.

⁴⁵ See KR, vol. 24, 254–255; Włodzimierz Gałzka, *Charyzmat zakonny, Święty Zygmunt Szczęsny Feliński* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo UKSW, 2010).

⁴⁶ See KR, vol. 24, 292.

⁴⁷ See LJ, vol. 20, 149; Antoni Jozafat Nowak, *Osoba konsekrowana*, vol. 2, *Ślub posłuszeństwa* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1994), 124.

founded on the use of both natural and divine gifts.⁴⁸ Even before the Council, Gądek had already emphasized these qualities in his teaching. He maintained that the supernatural nature of obedience enables a person to live a simple, humble, and sincere religious life, sanctified and enlightened by grace, and rooted in faith and love. It also allows for full communion with the Child Jesus in the spirit of spiritual childhood,⁴⁹ and thus for complete conformity to God.⁵⁰

In Carmelite spirituality, obedience is practiced through compulsory submission to another person.⁵¹ The Carmelite Sisters of the Child Jesus submit to their lawful superiors in a spirit of faith and, under their guidance, serve others. Following the prescriptions of the Rule and the Constitutions, they devote all their intellectual and volitional strength to fulfilling the tasks entrusted to them, thereby contributing to the fulfillment of God's plan and design. In this sense, as Gądek argued, obedience becomes both the sign of a consecrated person's faith and the measure of their dependence on God⁵²; it is also the motivation behind all good thoughts, words, and deeds.⁵³ Moreover, he regarded obedience as the foremost criterion of perfection and, at the same time, an essential element of community life.⁵⁴ Indeed, he insisted that no path leads more swiftly to the goal of religious life than the path of obedience.⁵⁵

Although Gądek consistently underscored the value of obedience to superiors, he firmly rejected what he called "slavish" or "thoughtless" obedience. In his view, it is unacceptable to demand the fulfilment of a vow or the practice of a virtue under compulsion, for this would amount to servility rather than true obedience. What is required instead is filial,

⁴⁸ See Gogola, *Zasady wierności charyzmatowi Założyciela*, 269–270.

⁴⁹ See LJ, vol. 17, 97.

⁵⁰ See KR, vol. 24, 306.

⁵¹ See KoZ, 39.

⁵² See LJ, vol. 20, 327; Nowak, *Ślub posłuszeństwa*, 63–64.

⁵³ See LJ, vol. 16, 207; PC, sec. 14; Stanisław Olejnik (ed.), *W odpowiedzi na dar i powołanie Boże* (Warsaw: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, 1979), 68–69; Gambari, *Życie zakonne*, 379; Gogola, "Ogólne wprowadzenie," 68.

⁵⁴ See LJ, vol. 16, 223.

⁵⁵ See LJ, vol. 17, 158.

childlike obedience that springs from love for God.⁵⁶ Likewise, Gądek warns against thoughtless obedience, such as when a Sister mistakes a casual remark for a binding command from her superior.⁵⁷ Such misinterpretations often distort the meaning of consecrated life, particularly in prayer and mortification, by confusing discipline, attentiveness, and reliance on superiors.⁵⁸

In his counsel to superiors, Gądek urged them to exercise great care in the commands that they issue and to embody obedience in their own conduct, thereby modelling the service to God and the Congregation expected of the Carmelite Sisters.⁵⁹ To that end, he insisted that any command given and accepted in a spirit of obedience must be rooted in faith; otherwise, even if the command is carried out, it will not bring the consecrated person closer to the desired perfection.⁶⁰ At the same time, he stressed that even a strict understanding of obedience does not eliminate personal responsibility and that accepting and carrying out a superior's decision must always remain a personal choice. For Gądek, this responsibility arises from the very nature of the Carmelite vocation, which entails imitating the Child Jesus in love and persevering in faith and service.⁶¹ Only in this way can God's glory be revealed and both individuals and communities be sanctified.⁶²

In summary, Gądek insisted that superiors must make decisions responsibly, taking into consideration the path that God sets before each Sister,⁶³ and that such decisions must be guided by love so that those who serve others may do so rightly. In his view, this approach enables those in Carmel to follow their superiors' instructions and to overcome daily

⁵⁶ See KJ, vol. 29, 218–219; PC, sec. 14.

⁵⁷ See KoZ, 107.

⁵⁸ See KJ, vol. 29, 68.

⁵⁹ See LJ, vol. 16, 306.

⁶⁰ See KoZ, 107.

⁶¹ See LJ, vol. 13, 13; Gogola, *Rady ewangeliczne*, 118.

⁶² See LA, vol. 21, 25; Kiciński, *Powołanie – konsekracja – misja*, 121.

⁶³ See LJ, vol. 19, 105; Jacek Kiciński, "Posłuszeństwo drogą duchowej wolności," *Życie Konsekrowane* 2 (2002): 67–75.

challenges, thus making their journey toward true obedience simple, sincere, joyful, and sacrificial.⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

In Father Anzelm Gądek's vision, the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience form an indivisible whole, each vow illuminating a distinct dimension of the consecrated life while together shaping a coherent path of holiness. Poverty, understood as a divine gift, detaches the consecrated person from worldly possessions in order to receive the true inheritance of the Father. Chastity, as an anticipatory nuptial bond, unites the consecrated directly with Christ the Bridegroom and foreshadows the eschatological fulfillment of eternal life. Obedience, rooted in God's salvific plan, conforms the consecrated person to the will of God through filial submission, thereby ensuring communion with Christ in the spirit of childhood.

Taken together, these vows reveal the Christocentric character of the consecrated life that orients the whole person toward God. For Gądek, they constitute a second baptism, a continual rebirth in love and sacrifice, through which consecrated persons become living signs of the Kingdom of Heaven. The universal Church, he insists, treasures these vows as the "multicolored robe of Christ," a visible sign of grace bestowed upon the community of believers. Their practice is not the result of human effort alone but the fruit of God's special gift, enabling the daily following of Jesus in the exercise of love.

Through the vows, consecrated persons not only perceive the love of consecration but also enact it in the mysteries of the manger, the cross, and the Eucharist. They lead both individuals and entire communities to the heights of spiritual childhood in Carmel. Because vocation is never a private possession but a gift for the Church and the world, the vows become a path to true freedom: they liberate the consecrated person from obstacles that might hinder ardent love and the perfect fulfillment of God's

⁶⁴ See LA, vol. 21, 9; Andrzej Baran, "Formacja formatorów i przełożonych," *Życie Konsekrowane* 2 (2003): 60–61.

will. In this way, the Carmelite Sisters of the Child Jesus, experiencing the gift of God, feel His action within themselves and radiate His love outward to others.

Ultimately, Gądek presents the evangelical counsels not as burdensome renunciations but as liberating graces. They free the consecrated person from self-possession, self-interest, and self-will, so that she may live in simplicity, joy, and sacrificial love. In this way, the vows become a testimony to the enduring relevance of the Beatitudes and a visible sign of God's presence in the world. For Gądek, the consecrated life is nothing less than a participation in the mystery of Christ Himself—a life that glorifies God, sanctifies the individual, strengthens the community, and builds up the Body of Christ in hope of the eternal Kingdom.

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