



AD HONOREM  
IMMACULATAE CONCEPTIONIS  
MARIAE



*Oblatio* and Consecration

Documents of the 1st Theological Symposium of the Marian Fathers' School of Spirituality



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Documents of the 1st Theological Symposium  
of the Marian Fathers' School of Spirituality

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## Foreword

The vitality of a religious community is expressed in many ways, but one of the most important is returning to its origins and striving to renew its charism. The events of recent years, in particular, the Beatification and Canonization of St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, has evoked in his spiritual sons' a genuine and sometimes even a deeply emotional need to rediscover the origins of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers. This desire was noticed and strengthened by Pope Francis, who – on the occasion of the General Chapter – on February 18, 2017, addressed its members with an appeal, urging them to remember the patrimony of the Congregation, and – in particular – to remain faithful to their Founder's charism: "I therefore urge you to carry out this reflection with fidelity to the charism of the Founder and to the spiritual heritage of your Congregation and, at the same time, with a heart and mind open to the new needs of the people. It is true, we must go forward with the new needs, the new challenges, but remember: we cannot go on without memory. It is a tension, continuously. If I want to go on without the memory of the past, of the history of the founders, of the great ones, even of the sins of the congregation, I will not be able to go on. This is a rule: memory, this "deuteronomic" dimension proper to life and which must always be used when a religious congregation, the constitutions, must be updated." The act of the *Oblatio*, made by St. Stanislaus on December 11, 1670, occupies a special place in this historical and also charismatic memory of the Congregation. On that day, a Saint initiated his community. Thus, our evoking this event, its circumstances and the contents of the *Oblatio* becomes this "return to the origins," to which the Church has been encouraging all institutes of consecrated life for many years.

Documents of the 1st Theological Symposium of the Marian Fathers' School of Spirituality assembles articles prepared for the symposium, which was planned for October 20-21, 2020 in Licheń, as part of the General Convention of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers. Unfortunately, the pandemic, which affected the whole world at that time, made it impossible for the authors of the articles to meet and to discuss the proffered issues. However, this did not stop us from publishing these materials. Furthermore, with time, it was possible to add to the previously planned

symposium conferences other papers that interpreted in a broader context the meaning of the act of the *Oblatio* and religious consecration. These two issues are clearly connected with one another, creating a point of reference for the religious identity in the spirituality of the Marian Fathers. Consequently, the title “*Oblatio* and Consecration” was chosen for the planned symposium. For the *Oblatio* made by St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary is an act of consecration, constituting a turning point: it closes his Piarist period and also opens the stage of his new vocation, that is, the founding of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers. By making the act of the *Oblatio*, our Saint becomes the Father and Founder of a new institute and publicly declares the founding charism, already imprinted on his heart by the Holy Spirit. A few years later, he personally recalled these moments and described his experiences in the work entitled *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis* (Founding of the House of Recollection). Recognizing the *Oblatio* as the beginning of a new religious community is tantamount to acknowledging religious consecration as the most important element of the religious identity in the spirituality of the Marian Fathers: it means that someone is recognized as a Marian religious and that the origin of his religious life began with his consecration. It is also true, even if sometime later – for various reasons judged necessary – this consecrated person was unable to live in the community. Such are the theological and spiritual effects of assigning the primacy to religious consecration.

In addition to the symposium papers the book also has an Appendix containing a collection of testimonies of the youngest members of the Congregation of Marian Fathers from our Vietnamese mission, entitled “Charism in the Experience of the Vietnamese Community of the Marian Fathers”. These touching testimonies of the youngest members of the Congregation of Marian Fathers in Vietnam are preceded by an Introduction entitled Beginning of the Marian Congregation in Vietnam and Testimonies of the First Vietnamese Marians. Its author – Fr. Bogusław Gil, MIC, S.T.D. – is a Marian missionary who, after many years of missionary service in Africa (Cameroon and Rwanda), organized a mission in Vietnam. Initially, he was there alone for two years, then two other Marian missionaries (one from Slovakia, the other from the USA) joined him. The Introduction is not only an opening that helps us to understand the testimonies of the first Vietnamese Marians, but also a brief history of the growth of the Marian Fathers’ first religious community in Vietnam.

The 350th Anniversary of the Origin of the Congregation of Marian Fathers is a providential occasion to reflect more closely on the spiritual and

material heritage of this religious community, founded by St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński. At the same time, it provides an opportunity to share this wealth not only ad intra, that is, among the Saint's spiritual sons, but also ad extra, that is, among those who – for various reasons – are interested in the Congregation of Marian Fathers and its holy Founder. This book addresses these needs.

*Andrzej Pakuła MIC*

Rome, November 24, 2020, on  
the 321st Anniversary of the Approval  
of the Congregation of Marian Fathers by Pope Innocent XII



**The Act of the *Oblatio* as a charismatic work  
of St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński.  
The time of the creation, context and the meaning  
of the first formula of the religious vows  
of the Congregation of Marian Fathers**

The content, composition and function as a formula of profession of the *Oblatio* is an expression of the personal spirituality of our holy Father Stanislaus, including his understanding of religious vows and the nature of the religious life. In order to fully understand the meaning of this text and to grasp its spiritual depth, it is important to define the time of its creation, the circumstances<sup>1</sup> surrounding this event and its importance, both for Father Stanislaus and for the religious community that he founded.

**The Context of the *Oblatio***

The text of the *Oblatio* was preserved as an integral part of a short work entitled *Foundation of the House of Recollection (Fundatio Domus Recollectionis, afterwards: FDR)*. This work has an autobiographical character and is written in the first person singular. Therefore, it seems only proper to present it here in the same way, without taking out of context the events and narratives, in which it was placed by the Author himself. This

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<sup>1</sup> The text of *Oblatio* and most of the related research done before 1973 were presented in the *Positio*, prepared for the purposes of St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński's canonization process: *Positio (Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, Officium Historicum, Poznaniensis Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Stanislai a Iesu Maria Papczyński, Fundatoris Clericorum Regularium Immaculatae Conceptionis BVM († 1701), Positio super Introductione Causibae et super virtutibus ex officio concinnata*, Romae 1977; hereinafter: *Positio*). Additional and later papers by various authors generally trust this *Positio* in terms of historical data, yet they significantly differ in the interpretation of the source document itself, the circumstances of its creation and its significance both in the life of St. Stanislaus, as well as in the founding of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, initiated by the act of the *Oblatio*.

approach will allow us to better grasp the importance of the *Oblatio* both for its author and for the community that he created. However, since the subject of this analysis is not the FDR, but the *Oblatio*, there is no need to present the full text of the FDR. Thus, it was decided to examine only the part of the FDR text before and including the second and last presentation of the *Oblatio*, that is, the moment where St. Stanislaus reports that the first candidate to the Congregation or John of the Immaculate Conception (Stanislaus Krajewski), made his vows using the same formula, written by the Marian Founder. The subsequent parts of the FDR speak of the history of establishing the first religious house in Puszcza Korabiewska and are not directly related to the *Oblatio*.

The work containing the *Oblatio*, i.e. FDR, was given this title by St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński in his subsequently lost manuscript. The original still existed in 1773, and it was submitted to Rome along with other written works for the needs of St. Stanislaus's beatification process. Two years later, i.e. in 1775, it was examined by the Congregation for Rites. The FDR text, including the *Oblatio*, was also preserved in a copy of *Protocollum Ordinis Immaculatae Conceptionis*, prepared around 1774.<sup>2</sup>

Although the entire short work was entitled FDR, yet it was not so much about the establishing of the first Marian Fathers' monastery called *Domus Recollectionis* in Puszcza Korabiewska (today's Puszcza Mariańska), but about the very beginnings of the shaping of the new religious institute. The most probable date of the FDR's creation is 1675. Its author, St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary describes his life from a historical perspective and presents the sequence of events and his personal experiences of the faith which led to his undertaking a new mission, i.e. founding the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M. Above all, however, he places them in the context of his own experience of faith. Therefore, the starting point and the foundation on which he sets the story of his life and of the first years of the emergence of the new religious community is God's grace of being chosen to become the Father and Founder of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, despite his experience of unfitness and weakness, as he declared in FDR. Since "nothing is impossible for the Almighty" (FDR 1), God's choosing an "unfit instrument" for such a great work further reveals His mercy and power more clearly. In FDR, the author does not hide his past and the fact of his leaving the Congregation of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Positio*, p. 354.

Pious Schools, which was to him “more dear than life”; he does not conceal the enormous suffering caused by the departure from the much loved Piarist community. This period of his life, already associated with the “vision imprinted upon my soul” of the new institute (FDR 6), he describes in very dramatic words: “Furthermore enormous confusions, scruples, doubts, anguishes, fears distressed me and nearly tortured me. For who would have so lax a conscience, that he would pass without them from the state of vows, even simple, to a mere secular [state]?” (FDR 3). In this context, the holy Marian Founder includes the *Oblatio* in the FDR as yet another expression of his experience both mystical, community-founding, and charismatic: mystical, because he made the act of the *Oblatio* out of a divine inspiration (“Divine Majesty suggested to me, that while I was going to be released from these, in the same act I would bind myself freely to God by other vows, which I did by offering myself”, FDR 3); community-founding, because by this act of *Offering himself* he initiated the Congregation; and charismatic, because the gift that he received from the Holy Spirit was for the good of the Church.

### **The place of the creation, the time and the purpose of the *Oblatio***

We do not know the exact time when St. Stanislaus Papczyński wrote the *Oblatio*. The place of its creation is similarly unknown. The date and place provided at the end of the document (Kazimierz near Krakow, in the Residence of the Poor Fathers of Our Lady of the Order of the Pious Schools, [...] on December 11, 1670) refer only to the time and place of the text’s [public] reading. One thing is certain: the *Oblatio* was created prior to Fr. Stanislaus’s receiving the indult of departure and it was prepared so carefully as to include all of the essential elements of a religious profession. The author himself testifies to this, writing in the FDR that he recited the formula [of the vows] at the time of receiving the indult of departure, in the presence of the Piarist Vicar Provincial, Fr. Michael Kraus and other people who were in attendance.

The *Oblatio* is the profession of religious vows in the new Marian community, used not only by St. Stanislaus on December 11, 1670, but also by candidates who joined the Marian Congregation later. The Founder clearly writes about it in FDR, as he reports the religious vows of the first candidate and also provides the same formula of the profession: “as the above

form composed and defined by me” (FDR 15). Father C. Krzyżanowski, MIC, the leading researcher of St. Stanislaus’s life, the author of the *Positio* and many other works, who published the *Oblatio* for the first time had no doubts in this regard; he thus described the formulas: “It should be noted that in those days, as the candidates’ admission to the nascent Marian Fathers’ Institute, they used the formula [of the vows] adapted to the *Oblatio* of the Servant of God.”<sup>3</sup>

### **The *Oblatio* and its controversial interpretations**

Historical-contextual research on the life of St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, related mainly to his beatification process and the later editions of his writings in the original Latin and in translations into national languages, inevitably caused, in a certain sense, different interpretations of the facts concerning both the life of the Saint and the beginnings of the Congregation of Marian Fathers founded by him. The beliefs of C. Krzyżanowski, MIC had the greatest influence and they are still dominant to a large extent today. While doing his scholarly research, he not only found forgotten or unknown source materials and published them, but he also left his personal stamp on them.

One such issue is the matter of the composition of the *Oblatio*, the understanding of its meaning and the creation of the Congregation of Marian Fathers in the context of St. Stanislaus’s departure from the Piarists. And so, although C. Krzyżanowski does not consider the text of the *Oblatio* as a canonical formula, but rather, a private matter, yet a bit further in the same introduction to the critical edition of the *Oblatio*, he also writes that “the candidates making their vows used a formula adapted to the *Oblatio* of the Servant of God.” Therefore, it had to be a canonical and public act, not a private one.<sup>4</sup> We know that the formula of the vows was exactly the same as the Founder’s *Oblatio*, and the adjustment was only to insert the personal details of the professed.<sup>5</sup> In this context, the research of F. Smagorowicz, MIC was important. It was published in two articles: the first in 2003 and the second in 2012. In these articles, he not only reminded us of the oldest

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<sup>3</sup> *Positio*, p. 213.

<sup>4</sup> C. Krzyżanowski thus formulated it: “si vincolava di nuovo non canonicamente, [...], privatamente” [he bound himself again non-canonically, [...] privately], *Positio*, p. 210.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. FDR 15. Also cf. *Positio*, pp. 213, 364.



tradition of the Congregation, but he also drew attention to the need for a contextual interpretation of the historical source materials.

The second thesis of C. Krzyżanowski, MIC concerns St. Stanislaus's departure from the Piarists and his founding the Congregation of Marian Fathers. Essentially, it expresses the conviction that he proffered in his introduction to the *Oblatio*: "We don't know when this new religious vocation appeared. One thing is certain: it was neither the singular reason nor one of many reasons for his departure from the Piarists. In a word: Father Papczyński left the Piarist Order not to found the Marian Order, but he founded the Marian Order because he left the Piarists."<sup>6</sup>

Father Krzyżanowski had offered the same conviction in the *Positio*, as the Postulator General, writing that the first biographer of our holy Father Founder, Mansueto Leporini, had wrongly described the reasons for the former's departure from the Piarist Order.<sup>7</sup> After all, Leporini does not comment on this subject, but he describes the manner, in which God led St. Stanislaus to become the founder of a new congregation.<sup>8</sup>

C. Krzyżanowski's convictions are linked to one of St. Stanislaus's work, written probably in 1671 and entitled *Apologia pro egressu e Scholis Piis* [Apology for the departure from the Institute of the Pious Schools]. However, the Saint wrote this *Apology* polemically, strictly conforming to the art of rhetoric in regard to apologetic writings (after all, he was a professor of rhetoric) and opposing the erroneous opinions about him that appeared after he left the Piarists. In fact, he gives four motives there, namely: hostility, the relaxed observance of the old religious rule, love, and impediments in the use of innate abilities. Already in the first sentence, he states the

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<sup>6</sup> C. Krzyżanowski included this sentence in the introduction to *Oblatio* (*Pisma zebrane*, p. 1258; *Positio*, p. 211).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Positio*, p. 211.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth quoting here the excerpt from St. Stanislaus's biography, written four years after his death: "§31. Seeing his [Fr. Stanislaus's] patience and work undertaken for the glory of God and His Most Gracious Mother, by applying various stimuli through inspirations and divine revelations that were recognized by confessors and theologians as true and unfailingly known, the merciful Lord called him to establish a new Institute in His Church, in order to increase devotion to the Immaculate Conception, to assist parish priests in pastoral work and to bring succor to the deceased. § 32. Therefore, obedient to the voice of God and his own commendable readiness, he changed his first vocation, and on Wednesday, in the octave of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on December 11, 1670, Father Michael of the Visitation released him – with the consent of the Supreme Vicar of Christ, Clement X and the Superior General – from his simple vows and oaths of perseverance. At that time, he offered himself anew in his Institute to God and His Mother, having received the blessing from the aforementioned father 'May God strengthen what he has done in you,'" *Positio*, pp. 630-640.

matter that he refers to, namely: "...I hear various opinions coming from different people, and even from prudent men, about my actual abandonment of my former vocation," (*Apology...*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 31). Thus, he composes the *Apology* as a defensive speech to refute these opinions, and he contests the specific allegations of his accusers, in accordance with the principles described in his *Prodromus Reginae Artium* [Messenger of the Queen of Arts]: "Defensio bona erit, si innocentia personae delatae ad iudicium ostendetur, si crimen refelletur, aut negabitur, aut alleviabitur," [the defense is only good if it succeeds in proving the innocence of the accused, if it either overturns the allegations of a crime or negates or weakens them].<sup>9</sup> It must be understood that he mentions nothing of the departure from the Piarists in the context of his intention to found a new congregation – because there were no such allegations – no matter when the idea of a new Institute appeared in his heart.

A completely different point of view is found in FDR, into which our holy Father Founder also inserted the *Oblatio*. This work is not polemical. Throughout the narrative, it has the character of a positive presentation of one's spiritual experiences and a chronological description of events. The story is permeated with his firm conviction of faith that God Himself leads him on such a path which included the necessity to abandon his first vocation in order to become the father and founder of a new religious community, should it even go through disputes, tensions and accusations, consequently leading to his departure from the Piarists. In short: to found the Marian Order, he had to leave the Piarist Order. This is the perspective of Divine Providence. As everything indicates, Saint Stanislaus Papczyński does not mention in any of his petitions for permission to leave the Piarist Order that he intends to establish a new Congregation. It is true that the first three petitions have not survived: the first was written around mid-August 1699, the second, around mid-October 1699, and the third, on December 20, 1699. The reply to the third request has been partially preserved; however, this document does not mention it, either. The fourth petition of November 22, 1670, which has survived until today, refers only to the Papal brief, which imparts to the Superior General of the Piarists the privilege of granting an indult of departure to those Piarists who do

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<sup>9</sup> Since this work was not translated into English, we provide the original Latin text from: S. Papczyński, *Prodromus Reginae Artium*, critical edition by C. Krzyżanowski, Varsaviae pp. 107-108 (English translation is mine – MB).

not wish to make solemn religious vows. In FDR, St. Stanislaus Papczyński perceives his story as a spiritual journey and gives the witness of faith to it. In his biography of the Saint, written four years after his birth to heaven, M. Leporini sees these events in the same way. And there is no error here. He perceives it from a different point of view. Moreover, even assuming that the whole crisis was triggered by the causes described in the *Apology*, yet, thanks to his faith and God's special gifts, St. Stanislaus Papczyński matures to a new vocation and discerns the new path that Divine Providence is leading him on. In the end, he becomes that "unfit instrument [used by God] for founding the lowest and the smallest Congregation of the Fathers of the Blessed Virgin Mary Conceived without sin" (FDR 1). All this happened over the space of several years and we do not have access to the source documents of this period. Nor do we know when the "Divine vision" of the new community was "imprinted upon his soul" (FDR 6, 9). Certainly, it happened during his membership in the Piarists,<sup>10</sup> as evidenced primarily by the fact that the formula of vows had been written before he received the indult of departure and inserted in his *Oblatio* the main features of the new community, that is, its name, purpose, etc.

By researching the oldest source materials, we re-discover, on the one hand, matters and things that have been forgotten or neglected in the past, and on the other hand, we sharpen our awareness of the present and future generations of the Congregation of Marian Fathers. The *Oblatio* is of particular importance here as the point of our Congregation's origin, deliberately planned and carried out by St. Stanislaus Papczyński. This new cognizance, as it were, has found its reflection in the newest Constitutions.

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<sup>10</sup> C. Krzyżanowski makes no conjecture about the time of this mystical experience, but only states: "it is not known when God inspired him with this idea" (*Positio*, p. 211). On the other hand, T. Rogalewski, MIC, in his extensive biography of our Founder, based however on the *Positio*, ventures to say that it could have been "during the time of his incarceration in Podoliniec and Prievidza," i.e. in the period from January 28 to March 22, 1669. Cf. T. Rogalewski, MIC, *Stanislaus Papczyński (1631-1701). Founder of the Congregation of Marian Fathers and Inspirer of the Marian School of Spirituality*, Stockbridge, 2001, p. 193.

## Foundation of the House of Recollection

*Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*<sup>11</sup>

**Puszcza Korabiewska, 1675 (?)**

1. Divine goodness and wisdom begins and brings to an end what it wants, in spite of countless difficulties standing in the way, and the very unfitness, according to human judgment, of the means. For nothing is impossible for the Almighty. This shone forth most clearly in me the most wretched, most despicable sinner, most inadequate, most unfit instrument for founding the lowest and the smallest Congregation of the Fathers of the Blessed Virgin Mary Conceived without sin. In me the spirit was unequal to [the task], no virtue, little prudence, all were by far too small, for dreaming of rather than for undertaking a matter of such great difficulty. But God himself, God (to whom be everlasting and endless glory, and thanksgiving), as he inspired me for this work of his admirably, that is lovingly, mercifully, wisely, wonderfully, so he himself accomplished it and is accomplishing it for ever and ever.

2. Not a few knew that I was in the Congregation of Pious Schools, which was more dear to me than my life, in that most sweet Society of the Poor of the Mother of God. It is very difficult to explain how highly I valued my vocation stirred up solely by God. Moreover, I belonged to that most holy company, bound to it not only by the bond of love, but truly also bound by a commitment of the oath of persevering in it for ever. I wanted the first to be indissoluble; the other was dissolved by the one, to whom was given the highest authority of binding and of loosing, the Vicar of the Most Holy Jesus Christ, the legitimate Successor of Saint Peter, Pope Clement X. And yet ah! It came to this by what way of the cross!

3. Furthermore, enormous confusions, scruples, doubts, anguishes, fears distressed me and nearly tortured me. For who would have so lax a conscience, that he would pass without them from the state of vows, even simple, to a mere secular [state]? Although just before the time of the release [from simple vows] Divine Majesty suggested to me, that while I was

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<sup>11</sup> The texts of FDR and the *Oblatio* are identical to the ones that appeared in *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, from where they are copied. However, their construction is different: in *Historical Writings*, they appear as two separate documents, while here they are given together, according to their Latin original.

going to be released from these, in the same act, I would bind myself freely to God by other vows, which I did by offering myself taken out of my heart, and made publicly, although in a rather quiet voice; its tenor is such<sup>12</sup>:

**I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczyński according to the flesh, Son of Thomas from Podegrodzie of the Diocese of Cracow, being forty years of age, offer and consecrate to God the Father Almighty, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and also to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary, Conceived without original sin, my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, my whole mind, my whole spirit, my interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself, so that in this way, I may be henceforth the whole-hearted servant-slave of the same Almighty [God] and of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. And so I promise that I shall, to the end of my life, serve Them chastely and zealously in the Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (which by the grace of God I resolve to found). I also promise that I will adjust my way of life to its laws, statutes and rites, and that I will never act nor permit or consent, not even indirectly, that these be in some way abolished, or changed, or that dispensation be given from them, except that a grave and lawful necessity requires it.**

Moreover, I promise reasonably understood obedience to His Holiness the Vicar of Jesus Christ and to his delegated official authorities, as well as to all my mediate and immediate Superiors, and that I shall possess nothing privately, but have all in common. I confess that I believe in everything that the Holy Roman Church believes, and in what she will teach everyone to be believed in the future, I especially confess, in truth, that Mary the Most Holy Mother of God was conceived without original sin, and I promise that I will spread and defend her honor even at the cost of my life. So help me God and this Holy Gospel of God. Kazimierz near Cracow, in the Residence of the Priests of the Order of the Pious Schools of the Poor of the Mother of God, in the presence of Very Reverend Father Michael of the Visitation Vice-Provincial of the Polish Province, of the Religious Father Joseph of the Mother of God President of the said Residence, and Venerable Clerics of Minor Orders Casimir of the Angels, and Bernard of the Lord's Passion, on December 11, 1670.

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<sup>12</sup> The text is bolded by the author of this paper to emphasize the insertion of the *Oblatio*.

4. And this Father, who in the name of the General imparted to me the release, confirmed [this oblation] by the acclamation: May God strengthen what He has worked in you.

5. And indeed he strengthened [it], because I asked and obtained permission from the Most Reverend Lord Vicar (Nicolaus Oborski, Bishop of Cracow, who was a very prudent man and he was already inclined to help me in the foundation of a new Congregation, but later – it is entirely unknown to me by whose instigation – he changed his mind) to assume the white habit, and I was by now to be vested with it by a certain Domestic Prelate of the Bishop in his palace, where at that time I was being protected for reasons of security, during the very celebrations of the Immaculate Conception.

6. Nevertheless by Divine disposition, it so happened, that – when the matter was brought to naught – I was summoned to Warsaw by my singular patron, the Most Distinguished Lord John Gebicki, at that time Bishop of Plock, afterwards of Cracow. And indeed he was offering me the dignity of a Canon of the Plock Cathedral; which I refused for the love of God and because of my intention to honor the glory of His Mother, although by this deed, the Patron was gravely offended by me, who greatly desired to join me adorned by this dignity to his closest associates. There was no lack of Most Holy Religious Institutes, which were inviting me into their company, assuredly I was unwilling, since I eagerly desired greater perfection. After all, the Divine vision, which was imprinted upon my soul in respect to the founding of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the B. V. M., having spurned all things, and also the possibility of a return to the Institute of Pious Schools having been hindered, was compelling me to the goal of that vision.

7. And so again, I approached the Most Distinguished Lord Stephan Wierzbowski the Bishop of Poznan in whose Diocese I was staying, and from him, I easily obtained the permission to put on a new habit. For he is an upright and virtuous man, most ardent in promoting the glory of God. Wherefore, having given up the post with the Bishop of Plock, according to the counsel and order of my Confessors, having been requested [to do so], I went to the court of a certain nobleman James Karski, a very good man. Having finally settled the case with the Institute of the Pious Schools, not without some injustice done to me, with the knowledge of the Holy Ap-



ostolic Nunciature, within the octave of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I, already in the white colored [habit], devoted myself as a new candidate of this Mother for everlasting service. And immediately, I went to the Most Distinguished Lord Angelo [Ranucci] the Nuncio in Warsaw to prove my obedience, to ask for his blessing and to reveal my desires.

8. All these matters at that time turned out favorably for me. For although admiration seized many on seeing me [turning] white from black, they even sang this from the Poet: “So suddenly the Swan who was just a raven”; however they were thus animated by the Divine Majesty, so that they even applauded this change, they highly praised [my] plan, and wished me a most hallowed success; [these] among the others [were] the Apostolic Nuncio himself, a certain Bishop, [some] well known Religious, although [there were] some [who] perceived [me] as crazy, some even persecuted [me], because it was necessary that these beginnings had to be founded on some suffering. – Granted that I am omitting other matters, I now come to the very beginning of the Tiny-Congregation, [recounting] what sort of beginning it was.

9. I lived at the house of the Lord Nobleman Karski for nearly two years as I was searching for the ways to begin the Society of the Immaculate Conception already formed in my mind by the Divine Spirit. But companions of the kind that a beginning of so great a work required, were wanting. And although some [candidates] presented themselves both from the laity and Religious, I was afraid to attach them to myself, first because their virtue did not appear evident, then because of the lack of a place [for the foundation].

10. Also the Bishop of Poznan, although well-disposed to me, because he had been misinformed by someone, was entirely opposed to the establishment of a new Congregation in his Diocese, especially not having the consent of the Holy Apostolic See for it. I endeavored to deal with this problem of consent incessantly for two years and therefore, I endured many hardships, and I incurred some expenses. But because the agent was treacherous and crafty, who fed me with promises, not even trying to deal with the matter, therefore it pleased me to undertake the matter in a different way in accord with the counsel of a certain Pauline Religious, the Most Reverend in Christ Father Francis Wilga of the Camaldolese Order, Superior in the Kingdom of Poland, following the example of the Holy Founders, namely

first to admit some Companion, and then, having a place, to arrange the matter by the Roman authority.

11. Consequently, it came to my mind that about four miles from my place of residence there is a certain Hermit. It seemed good to explore whether he would feel inclined to be my companion according to my plan. I went to the Hermitage, and when I explained it candidly and frankly to him, he whole-heartedly seized the matter, offered his place and himself to me, and induced the other, his companion, to the same way of thinking; he seemed to desire it so fervently and to put it into action, that he both invited me to the Hermitage by letters rather often, and he approached me rather frequently, asking and exhorting, that I be willing to be their Superior, that I be willing to found at that place the new Society, and showing himself most ready to embrace the laws, yes indeed even the most strict, which I offered to him for examination.

12. And indeed, at the beginning, I was very inclined toward seizing this occasion of managing my matter; but many things were holding me back, among other things, the independence of the man unacquainted with obeying, his desire to attribute to himself, I know not what, the title of a Founder, a changeable spirit, an erratic fame, a fiery nature, severity, cunning, obstinacy, incompetence for everything, let these be said without defamation.

13. What was I to do? I would implore God, I did as much as my sins allowed, but from my prayer, I was getting contrary responses, and I was forbidden entirely to enter companionship with that man. Should I consult experienced and learned men? – they were not available. [Finally], one appeared from the Order of Saint Francis, who did not advise entirely against it; an other, who at a certain time in the past in Cracow inquired about this Society to be founded by myself, even commanded it: he declared that it is the Divine will that I should undertake this work; he also came down to Studzianna for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, in the very act of Confession, he counseled me, that I should go to the Hermitage and start something with the help of God, and God will complete all the rest.

14. Therefore, I permitted this Hermit to assume the habit of my pattern (which I had accepted by Divine inspiration), and I declared him as my Companion in the Sacred Nunciature, previously however, having accept-



ed from him the oblation to the Society of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. [with the promise] to live and persevere according to its rule, and this under a personal oath, which he made before me in Lubocz, as is evident below [cf. § 15]. Finally, I myself was having the intention of going to the Hermitage, previously obtained permission from the Bishop to remain there for the purpose of a spiritual renewal. At that time, I was unable to obtain permission to celebrate Mass in the private Oratory, therefore, it had to be requested from the Apostolic Nuncio, the Most Distinguished Lord Francis Buonvisi, who willingly granted it; he recently at that time had taken over his office.

15. Now the oblation of that Hermit was as follows:<sup>13</sup> **I, John of the Immaculate Conception, having the secular name of Stanislaus Krajewski, according to the flesh son of Bartholomew Krajewski and Regina Krasnopolski, of the Diocese of Przemyśl, being thirty nine years old, offer and consecrate to God the Almighty Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and also to the Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary conceived without original sin, my heart, my soul, my intellect, memory, will, feelings, my mind, my whole spirit, my external and internal senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself etc., as the above form composed and defined by me. Lubocz on July 4, 1673.**

*NB: The subsequent parts of the original FDR text speak about the founding of the House of Recollection in Puszcza Korabiewska.*

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<sup>13</sup> This text is bolded also to emphasize the location of *Oblatio* (AP).

## The date of origin of the Congregation of Marian Fathers<sup>1</sup>

Within the Church, new religious families were always coming into existence and continue to appear. The process of their establishment was usually long and complex. Sometimes entire decades went by, before a certain community living in accordance with the Evangelical Counsels gained the consciousness of self and received Episcopal or Papal approval. The period of time that elapses between the date of the order's actual origin and the official recognition of this fact by the Church is probably the most important for the future religious family, because during this time, the community forms its countenance, character, and charism. The boundaries of this period are usually marked by two dates: the date of the founding of a congregation and the date of its approval by the Pope given in the form of a decree. The *Annuario Pontificio* provides both dates for each congregation existing under pontifical law: the date of its founding and the date of its approval [*fondazione e approvazione*]. Frequently, it is difficult to establish precisely this first date. Many congregations cannot give an exact date of their coming into existence. It seems to fade away somewhere in the natural course of events and becomes only conventional. The immediate participants in the events related to the origin of an institute were not always aware of the fact that a new congregation was created. And later, when the realization of the importance of this fact came, nobody could remember exactly how it all happened, because nothing had been documented, recorded, lastingly preserved.

And how did it happen in the case of our Congregation? While reading Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński's biography, I could not resist the impression that the date of our Congregation's origin has been unjustifiably moved three years ahead. In my opinion, the Marians actually have existed since De-

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from: S. Smagorowicz MIC, *The date of origination of the Congregation of Marian Fathers*, MIC Information No. 41 (4/2003), p. 18-22.

ember 11, 1670, whereas a later date of our Congregation's founding has been commonly accepted, namely: October 24, 1673. What has happened on each day?

**The true date:  
Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński's *Oblatio* on December 11, 1670**

On December 11, 1670, Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński received a dispensation from his religious vows and the oath of perseverance in the Piarists Order. The ceremony, took place at the Piarists' residence in Kazimierz near Krakow, according to the form prescribed by the General Superior of the Piarists. However, immediately after the ceremony a totally unexpected event took place. In a subdued, but resonant voice, Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński declared:

In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified. Amen.

– I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczyński, by flesh son of Thomas from Podegrodzie, in the diocese of Cracow, being 40 years of age, offer and dedicate to the Omnipotent God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and to the Mother of God, always Virgin Mary conceived without original stain, my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, whole mind, whole spirit, interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing to myself, so that from now on I may thus become entirely a servant of the same Omnipotent God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

– Therefore, I promise to fervently serve Them in chastity to the end of my life, in this Society of the Marian Clerics of the Immaculate Conception (which I desire to found by the grace of God), and conform my morals to its laws, statutes and rites, and to never act, or permit or consent, not even indirectly, that these be in some way suppressed, or changed, or dispensed from, unless for a serious and legitimate necessity.

– Moreover, I promise obedience, understood in a sound way, to the Most Holy Vicar of Jesus Christ and to his delegated authority, and to my all indirect and immediate Superiors, and I promise that I shall have nothing privately, but everything in common.

– I avow that I believe in whatever the Holy Roman Church believes and will successively teach to be believed, mostly indeed I avow

that the Most Holy Mother of God Mary was conceived without original stain and I promise to propagate and defend her honor even by suffering the loss of my life. Thus, may help me God and this Holy Gospel of God.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Oblatio* as the very first form of the Marian profession of vows**

While reading the above text, one cannot resist the impression that this is simply Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński's religious profession of vows in the Society of Marian Fathers. As a matter of fact, all three Evangelical Counsels, namely: chastity, poverty, and obedience are mentioned there. It also speaks about to of a total and irrevocable offering made of oneself. In fact, the text represents a religious consecration. We have many reasons to believe that Fr. Stanislaus himself regarded this act in the same way. Along with the sublime and solemn form of this text, also its title, given to it by its author, points to the text's character of a consecration. It is an *Oblatio*, meaning – an offering of oneself. The term oblation signified making an offering. It was particularly related to the offering made during the Holy Mass. It was also used in religious life to indicate to an act, by which a religious was offering himself to the service of God. Even today many religious institutes bear the name of the Oblates of a Saint who is a Patron of the religious family.

The following circumstances also attest to the fundamental significance of the *Oblatio*:

– Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński performs this act out of his own free will and under the influence of a Divine inspiration, as he states in his *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*: “Near the time of the dispensation [from the vows] the Divine Majesty suggested, that while [I was to be released] from these, in the same act I would freely bind myself to God by others; and I did it by an offering fetched out of my heart and made publicly, although in a lower voice.”<sup>3</sup>;

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<sup>2</sup> Note of the translator: The text of the *Oblatio* is translated here into English not from the Polish translation made by the author of the article, but from the original Latin, as it appears in: S. Papczyński, *Scripta Historica, Fontes Historiae Marianorum* 8, pp. 29-30. The same applies to the translation of other documents quoted in this article. It is to be noted that the original Latin texts quoted by the author are given in the respective footnotes of the Polish edition of the article. In the present English edition these Latin original texts have been omitted in the footnotes.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

– Immediately after making this *Oblatio*, Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński intended to replace the black Piarist habit with a white Marian one. The frock was always regarded as a sign of religious consecration. The change of the habit would become a clear sign to everyone that Fr. Stanislaus belonged to a new religious institute. For reasons unknown, the ceremony of investiture with the white habit did not take place. Probably the Bishop of Cracow did not give his consent. This caused a new conflict with the Piarists, because in the resulting situation Fr. St. Papczyński did not want to depose the Piarist habit, still worn by him, in spite of his earlier written promise to do so<sup>4</sup>. This attitude, although troublesome for some of Fr. Stanislaus's biographers, seems to be entirely understandable, considering the fact, that Fr. Stanislaus could not possibly conceive to cease being a religious, even for a short while, and to return to the secular state as a diocesan priest. Hence, he stubbornly kept the habit, even though it was a black one. Around September 15, 1671, in Lubocza, Fr. St. Papczyński replaced it with the much-desired white habit, upon permission from the Apostolic Nuncio<sup>5</sup>.

– When Fr. S. Papczyński decided to accept its first candidate to the Congregation, cleric Stanislaus Krajewski, Superior of the hermits in the Korabiew Forest, he received from him an *Oblatio*, the wording of which was almost identical with his own, and invested him with white habit. This act took place in Lubocza on July 4, 1673, that is before the Marian house in Korabiew Forest was founded. The remark made by Fr. Stanislaus after the first sentences of the *Oblatio* of Br. Stanislaus Krajewski, has a capital importance: "...etc., as above in the form that I myself used and prescribed"<sup>6</sup>. From this we may conclude that Fr. Founder considered the *Oblatio* to be the generally binding form of consecration in the new Congregation.

– The *Oblatio* is the oldest document directly related to the new Congregation dedicated to the Virgin Mary conceived without original stain. The second document, in chronological order, would be *Norma vitae* composed by Fr. Founder probably during his stay in Lubocza (1671-73)<sup>7</sup>. The third one – the agreement made between Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński and Stanislaus Krajewski on October 7, 1673<sup>8</sup>. The fourth – the protocol of the visitation of the Korabiew Forest hermitage performed by Bishop

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Positio*, pp. 216s.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336ss.

J. Swiecicki on October 24, 1673<sup>9</sup>, which is commonly considered a document indicating the beginning of the Congregation (but if rightfully so?).

Why is this date considered as the beginning of the new Congregation? What actually happened on that day?

### **The accepted date: the visitation of the hermitage on October 24, 1673**

On October 24, 1673, Bishop Stanislaw Jacek Swiecicki arrived at the hermitage in the Korabiew Forest to conduct a canonical visitation. At that time, three brother-hermits stayed in the hermitage along with Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński, who moved there a little less than a month before with the intention of founding the first Marian station. Two hermits did not belong to any religious institute and intended to join Fr. Papczyński's Congregation. The then Superior of the hermits, cleric Stanislaus Krajewski, was accepted to the Marians by Fr. St. Papczyński on July 4, 1673, in Lubocza, where he made his religious promises (*Oblatio*) and received his white Marian habit.

The Bishop's visitation was very important for the future of the hermitage. The hermits had already resided in the Forest for more than ten years<sup>10</sup>. Their life, however, was far from exemplary: they did not take much time for prayer and work, but mainly were busy with collecting money among the residents of the neighboring villages. Complaints against the hermits had reached the Bishop who intended to suppress the hermitage altogether, or to radically reform it at least. Fr. St. Papczyński's presence in the hermitage prompted the Bishop to choose the second option and it also made attaining of the visitation's goal easy. The Bishop appointed Fr. St. Papczyński Superior of the hermits, forbade them to roam in the neighborhood and bound them with the observance of strict fasts, mortification, silence, prayer, and obedience to the prescripts of the Norm of Life and to the orders of the Superior.

In this way the first Marian community was established. The protocol of the Bishop's visitation is an official act of the Church authority, which attests to the existence of "the hermitage of the B.V.M. conceived without stain" and concedes an approval for the "institute of the above-mentioned

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 339ss.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

religious priest, Father Stanislaus.”<sup>11</sup> The protocol of the visitation also foresees an influx of candidates to the Congregation, an election of the Superior, when there are already at least 12 members with an active and passive voice, and threatens with severe punishments those who would lawlessly abandon “this Congregation of Marian Clerics.” Thus, this was, in a way, the first approval of the Congregation on the diocesan level.

## Episcopal and papal approval

However, the visitation of the Korabiew Forest hermitage was not a formal approval of the new Congregation in the Church performed according to the requirements of the standing law of the time. It is eloquently supported by the fact that Fr. St. Papczyński was constantly seeking to obtain such an approval and received it in the form of a Bishop’s decree issued on April 21, 1679<sup>12</sup>. At that time the Marians already had two stations, both located within the Poznan diocese. To the Korabiew Forest hermitage they added another station – the Cenacle of the Lord in Gora Kalwaria, which Bp. St. Wierzbowski gave to them in 1677. However, the canonical installation of the Congregation of Marian Fathers under diocesan law did not provide sufficient security for this new religious community, because it made it very much subordinated to the local Ordinary. During the lifetime of Bishop St. Wierzbowski, who was benevolent to the Marians, the Congregation enjoyed his assured protection. However, after the death of their patron, a bishop less benevolent toward Marians took over, and the Congregation faced a threat of suppression, because of accusations brought up by its enemies, to whom the bishop was lending his ear.<sup>13</sup> Therefore it had become vital to obtain papal approval. The story of how the approval was obtained is quite complicated and long; and the answer to the question, when the Marians finally became an Order of papal right is not at all easy. Therefore, I purposely omit here the matter of establishing a date, which can be recognized as the end of the Congregation’s founding process<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342ss.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392ss.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 504s.

<sup>14</sup> It would be difficult to recognize the Pope’s letter of November 24, 1699, directed to the Nuncio in Poland, as a papal approval of the new Order. As a matter of fact, the letter states only the fact of the aggregation of the Congregation of Marians into the Order of the Franciscans and the consequences that follow from this fact. The letter carefully avoids using any wording that



## The oldest tradition speaking of the Congregation's origin

There has never been a doubt about Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński being the Founder of the Congregation. It seems that, from the beginning, the Marians were convinced that, upon leaving the Piarists, Fr. St. Papczyński immediately became a Marian or, in other words, that the Marians' origin goes back to 1670. The following are certain facts speaking to this effect.

In the oldest biography of Fr. Founder, written around 1705 by Fr. Mansueto Leporini, OFMRef., we read that Fr. St. Papczyński "being obedient to the Divine voice and to its admirable ordinance changed his first vocation, with the consent of the supreme Vicar of Christ, Clement X, and that of the General Superior. On Wednesday within the octave of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – December 10 [*sic!*], 1670, – he was dispensed from simple vows and the oath of perseverance by Fr. Michael of the Visitation.

In the very same time Fr. Stanislaus made a new offering to God and His Mother – *oblatio*, appropriate for his Congregation. He received a blessing from the above-named Father: "May God strengthen what He has done in you."<sup>15</sup> Further in the text M. Leporini mentions the bishop's visitation of the Korabiew hermitage, during which the bishop "gave his approval to the new Institute."<sup>16</sup> In a similar way Fr. Casimir Wyszynski, presenting the Congregation's beginnings, was convinced that Fr. St. Papczyński changed the religious institute, i.e. became a Marian immediately after leaving the Piarists<sup>17</sup>.

The Brief *Ex debito Pastoralis Officii* of March 10, 1786, which ratified the Marian Order, gives the year 1670 as the date of the Marians' origination. The Breve sums up the report about the beginning of the Marians made by Fr. Norbert Golkowski, Procurator of the Congregation, as follows: "...in the year 1670, with the approval of the Apostolic Nuncio of that time, the above-said Order or Congregation was established in the King-

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could possibly suggest that the Pope give his approval to the new Order. Should the Marians actually the obtained papal approval in 1699, then it would be certainly impossible for Bishop A. Rostkowski to suppress the Order in 1715. It transpires from this fact that at the beginning of the 17th century the Marians were still an Institute of diocesan rights.

<sup>15</sup> Leporini M., *Vita Fundatoris*, n. 32, in: *Positio*, p. 639s.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 37, in: *Positio*, p. 641.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Wyszynski K., *Vita Ven. S.D. Stanislai a Iesu Maria Papczyński*, n. 30, in: *Pisma o Kazimierza od sw. Jozefa Wyszynskiego*, editors: W. Makos and Z. Proczek, Puszcza Marianska 2002, pp. 683s.



dom of Poland by the Servant of God, Stanislaus Papczyński, for assisting the pastors and instructing the youth in the first principles of Faith and education. Afterwards it was aggregated to the Order of Friars Minor of St. Francis.”<sup>18</sup> It seems that in 17th century the Marians generally believed that the Congregation originated in 1670.

### **Change in the Marians’ cognizance of their own beginnings.**

The change in the Marians’ cognizance of the beginnings of the Congregation supposedly took place after the renewal of the dying Order. In the Information for the Apostolic See about the Congregation of Marian Clerics of April 10, 1910, Fr. George Matulewicz wrote: “A Congregation of Marian Clerics under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was founded by the Venerable Servant of God, Stanislaus Papczyński. He laid the foundations of this Congregation in the Korabiew Forest in 1679, with the consent of the Bishop of Poznan, Stefan Wierzbowski.”<sup>19</sup> The year 1679 is the date of the decree by which Bishop S. Wierzbowski installed the Congregation as a diocesan Institute.

The commentators maintain that Father Renovator wrote the above information, among others, on the basis of the above-named papal Breve of March 10, 1786.<sup>20</sup> Strangely enough, Fr. G. Matulewicz did not repeat the date of the origin of the Congregation given in this Brief, but gave a completely different one. Fr. G. Matulewicz’s action will appear maybe more comprehensible, if we consider the fact that he had a solid juridical background and was for a certain time a lecturer of Canon Law at the seminary of Kielce. As an expert in Church law, he knew well that only acts of Church authority brought about legal effects in regards to the coming into existence of new religious congregations, while actions of private individuals remained only pious intentions, with no legal effects. Consequently, only the act of a lawful authority could bring about the initiation

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<sup>18</sup> Pius VI, Brief *Ex debito Pastoralis Officii*; in: *Constitutiones Congregationis CC. RR. Marianorum*, Romae, pag. 357n; “nempe Anno MDCLXX. a Servo Dei Stanislao PAPCZYŃSKI Ordo, seu congregatio praefata in adiutorium Parochorum, et ad instruendam in primis Fidei, ac Literarum principii Juventutem in Regno Poloniae approbante tunc existente Apostolico Nunzio fuerit instituta; subinde Ordini Fratrum Minorum S. Francisci fuit aggregata”.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted after: *Odrodzenie Zgromadzenia Księża Marianów w latach 1909-1910 (dokumenty)*, edited by J. Bukowicz and T. Górski, Warsaw, 1995, p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 103, footnote 2.

of the Marians, and such was the act of installation of the Congregation, issued by Bishop S. Wierzbowski. From the legal point of view, all actions, which preceded this act, were only expressions of Divine inspiration and intentions or simply a prudent preparation for the intended cause. On the other hand, ascribing real meaning to them could be easily recognized as usurpation, should the founder of the religious institute dare to act without obtaining prior permission and blessing from the Church authority. Consequently, only the Church authority's decisions had real meaning, whereas the actions of the founder himself had, on the whole, a secondary or minor meaning: they were an addition and implementation of the decisions taken by the authority.

The same juridical principle was probably at the basis of the affirmations made by Fr. Stefan Sydry, author of the biography of the Founder. In the act performed by Fr. S. Papczyński on December 11, 1670, and in all that happened immediately after it, Fr. S. Sydry sees: "calling of the Lord to the new undertaking" and "preparatory operations"<sup>21</sup>. In the *oblatio* of Fr. S. Papczyński Fr. Sydry does not perceive an act of self offering as it results clearly from its contents, but an act by which the Congregation is offered, the act in which Fr. Founder dedicated his Institute (the Congregation which he intended to found) to God and His Mother<sup>22</sup>. In my opinion, such an interpretation is very beautiful and sublime, but unfortunately not very faithful to the mind of Fr. Founder, who believed that by way of his *oblatio*, he became at once a Marian. Fr. S. Sydry did not follow however the opinion of Fr. Renovator in the question of determining the year 1679 as the date of the origin of the Congregation. He recognized October 24, 1673, as the date of the erection of the Congregation, which was the date of the Bishop's visitation that defined the character of the hermitage in the Korabiew Forest<sup>23</sup>. The Bishop's visitation, as well as the subsequent installation decree of Bishop S. Wierzbowski, was the first act of the Church authority regarding the nascent Congregation. The protocol written after the visitation was the first official Church document which speaks about the new Congregation.

The juridical principle affirming that only Church authority may found a new Congregation was kept also in this case, and the actions of Fr. S. Pap-

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<sup>21</sup> Sydry Stefan, *O. Stanisław Papczyński jego dzieło*, Warsaw 1937, pp. 68 and 72.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68s.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80s, where he writes about the foundation of the Congregation of the Marians in 1673; but the canonical erection of the Congregation took place according to Fr. S. Sydry in 1679; cf. *ibid.*, p. 157.

czyński remained as if in a shadow. And thus it has remained until now. We celebrated the 300 Anniversary of the Congregation in 1973, and not in 1970. The commemorative book published on this occasion, which remains until now the fullest presentation of the Congregation, has the title: *Marians 1673-1973*.<sup>24</sup> In my opinion, a more just title would be: *Marians 1670-1970* and the jubilee celebrations should rather have been celebrated three years earlier.

### Concluding remarks

Having considered the arguments or reasons known to me, I believe that we should return to the pristine and true date of the origin of the Marians, in accordance with the mind of the Founder and with the oldest tradition of the Congregation. The Marians take their beginning from the *Oblatio* of Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński made on December 11, 1670, in the Piarists' residence in Kazimierz near Cracow, and not from the Bishop's visitation in Puszcza Korabiewska (Korabiew Forest), which, however important for the nascent Congregation, was not the beginning, but only a stage on the way of its development.

I realize that I lack competence to approach the above problem in an expert way. Therefore, I refrained from giving footnotes and the original text of the quoted documents.<sup>25</sup> I think, however, that anyone willing to check the sources, upon which I based my statements, will be able to do so easily, because I always provide the name of the source. I am not a historian, nor a canonist, nor a theologian of religious order life. Thus, I see the considerations and opinions presented above, even though they may be expressed in a categorical form, only as a formulation of a problem. I ask my confreres, who are better acquainted with this subject, to examine the question in an expert way and to present the results of their research. I shall be grateful for any comments, including critical ones. I recognize a very real possibility of my making a mistake, but not that it has been made by authorities, which I dared to criticize. Therefore I will listen attentively to the opinion of others. I hope that through our common effort we will be able to come to the truth about the beginning of the Congregation.

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<sup>24</sup> *Marianie 1673-1973*, ed. J. Bukowicz and T. Gorski, Rome 1975.

<sup>25</sup> In the final edition of the article I completed the lacking footnotes, following the advice given me by Fr. M. Pisarszak, to make easier for the readers to find the quoted sources.

## **The Beginning of the Marian Congregation. The Birth of a New Tradition**

Traditionally, the *Oblatio* or the first Marian vows of the Founder, Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, made in Krakow on November 11, 1670, was regarded as the beginning of the Congregation of Marian Fathers. This conviction may be seen in many Marian source documents from before the Renewal of the Congregation.<sup>1</sup> However, the renovated Congregation accepted and spread the view that the origin of the Congregation occurred later, namely: with the formal approval of the first religious community – the hermitage at the Korabiew Forest (Puszcza Korabiewska). The first Church documents, confirming the existence of the said community and defining its nature and structure, were the post-visitation decrees issued by the Bishop of Poznan on Oct. 24, 1673. And this was the date accepted by the newest, 20<sup>th</sup>-Century tradition as the date of the Congregation's origin.<sup>2</sup> Certain questions come to mind: what changed the Marians' perception of their own community's beginnings? What were the reasons that brought about the departure from the old tradition and the acceptance of the new interpretation? When did the opinion that the year 1673 was the beginning of the community establish itself firmly in the Marians' perception?

### **Evidence of long indecision**

Few documents from the period before the Renovation of the Congregation relate directly to the beginning of the Marians. This happened for many reasons, also because the beginnings are usually humble and covert and as such, they do not have many witnesses, relators, and eulogists. Furthermore, in subsequent years, the Marians found themselves infre-

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<sup>1</sup> Zob. F. Smagorowicz, *Data powstania Zgromadzenia Księży Marianów*, *MIC Information*, (4/2003) No 41, 18-22, also available at <http://www.padrimaryani.org/pl/curia>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Marianie 1673-1973*, Ed. J. Bukowicz, T. Gorski, Rzym 1975.

quently in situations that required their clear account of the community's beginnings. The history of the Marian Order, closely united with the history of Poland, was overflowing with turbulent events, due to which many documents from before the Tsarist's suppressive action did not survive to our times, being lost or destroyed. On the other hand, the documentation created after the Renewal of the Congregation was in much better shape. What is more, the subject of the Congregation's date of origin was coming up directly or indirectly far more often than before. Therefore, there are many historical research papers and other 20<sup>th</sup>-Century materials that confirm the instability of the Marians' historical perception of their own beginnings.

**The beginning of the Marians according to the *Krótki przegląd historii Zgromadzenia* [Brief review of the Congregation's history] of 1934**

This brief history of the Congregation of 1934 was one of the first comprehensive works on Marian history, written after the Renovation.<sup>3</sup> It is possible, that its editor was Fr. C. Reklaitis, MIC, the Procurator General of the Congregation, since he also prepared and published the Elenchus for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Congregation's renewal, which also included the aforesaid brief history. Therefore, this was – to an extent – an official document since it was prepared by members of the General Council and intended to be promoted community-wide or at least among the superiors (as far as I know, before World War II, the Elenchus was not mailed to every community member, but only to the superiors and some key persons). The history of the Marians was provided in three brief chapters of several pages in the book. The titles of the chapters are very significant: I. From the beginning [*origo*] to the Renovation (1670-1919); II. Renovation (1909-1910); III. From the Renovation to modern times or the 25 years of a new life (1909-1934). The title of the first chapter clearly states that the year 1670 marks the beginning (*origo*) of the Marians' existence. Next, that same date appears in the title of the first subsection: *Origo (1670) et erectio canonica (1679)*. However, it would be pointless to search the contents of this document for an explanation or elaboration on the view stated in the titles. The brief first section thus provided with telegraphic terseness the most important facts from the beginnings of the Congregation: "The

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<sup>3</sup> *Brevis Conspectus Historicus Congregationis CC. RR. Marianorum*, in: *Elenchus sodalium et domorum operumque totius Congregationis Clericorum Regularium Marianorum [ ... ] pro anno Domini 1934*, Romae 1934, 3-16.

Congregation of Clerics Regular Marianus under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was initiated in Poland by the Venerable Servant of God Stanislaus Papczyński (born in 1631, died in 1701). By the power of the indult issued by Pope Clement X, he [Fr. Stanislaus] left the ranks of the Congregation of the Piarists and started the creation of a new Congregation upon the consent of the Bishop of Poznan, Stefan Wierzbowski, who – with the permission of the Holy See and upon fulfilling all of the requirements of the law – founded the Congregation of Marianus in 1679, as a community of simple vows.<sup>4</sup>

From today's perspective, the strong emphasis on – even the exaggeration of – the Bishop's role in the founding of our Congregation is quite astonishing. In the author's opinion, the Bishop participated in every effort made by Fr. Papczyński, who acted from the beginning in agreement and in accord with the Bishop. The Bishop expressed his consent (*episcopo annuente*) for S. Papczyński's dedicating himself to this new task, while he [the Bishop] ensured the observance of the proper procedure and the regulations of Church law, as well as making efforts to obtain the Holy See's permissions (*licentia*), and ultimately, on the strength of the obtained permissions, personally founded (*fundavit*) the new Congregation and defined its nature as an Institute of simple vows. These claims have little in common with historical facts. Rather, they seem to be an attempt to tweak the facts to fit the concepts and requirements of the Church law of the day. The terminology itself is a reflection of Church law from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the existing ideas, shaped by this law, about the process of establishing a new congregation.

The year 1670 appears twice in the title of the discussed work as the historical date of the Congregation's origin (*origo*). However, the substance of the work was edited in such a way to make its reader think that everything that had happened in the years between 1670 and 1679 was just a preparation for the moment of the formal installation of the Congregation by Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski, who actually founded (*fundavit*) the new Congregation, which happened only in 1679. To paint a complete picture, we

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 3: „Congregatio Clericorum Regularium Marianorum sub titulo Immaculatae Conceptionis Beatissimae Virginis Mariae initium habuit in Polonia a Venerabili Servo Dei Stanislaŏ Papczyński (natus 1631, mortuus 1701), qui ex indulto Clementis Papae X anno 1670 ex castris Clericorum Regularium Scholarum Piarum discessit atque novae Congregationi fundandae operam dedit, annuente Stephana Wierzbowski, episcopo Posnanensi) qui ex licentia Sanctae Sedis Congregationem Marianorum servatis de iure servandis in votis simplicibus fundavit anna 1679”.



should add that Fr. C. Reklaitis was aware of the fact that the first Marian house had been established in Puszcza Korabiewska in 1673. This is supported, for one thing, by the comparative table of Superior Generals, which was published for the first time in this Jubilee Elenchus of 1934 and was undoubtedly the work of the same author. The title of this comparative table indicated that it covered the years 1673-1933, and not 1670-1933. Naturally, Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński was listed in the first place there as the Founder and first Superior General (1673-1701).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the year 1673 was a well-known and important date for the author of this brief history of the Marians. That was the year when Stanislaus Papczyński became the Superior of the first Marian Fathers' community, and also – due to the fact of being the only Superior – the Superior General of the entire Congregation, although it was formally established only in 1679, after the issuance of the installation decree by the Bishop. Therefore, Fr. C. Reklaitis distinguished three dates: 1670, 1673, and 1679. He mentioned the first date without any comment; he admitted knowing the second, but omitted it in his document; while the third date he regarded, as befits a lawyer, as the decisive one – the starting point of the whole founding process.

### **The founding and approvals of the Congregation according to the *Annuario Pontificio***

For the first time, the Marians were mentioned in the Papal Almanac of 1927<sup>6</sup>. The author of this note cannot be anyone else but Fr. C. Reklaitis, then the only General Council member residing in Rome (at 284 Corso Vittorio Emanuele). The *Annuario Pontificio* communicated brief information about the individual religious orders each year. This information included two dates, typical for every religious community: the year of the origin and the year of Papal approval. The note of 1927 concerning the Marian Fathers contained two dates, namely: “founded in 1673, reformed in 1910.” The following year’s edition provided an amended, more precise second date: “the Congregation *was reformed and approved* on Nov. 28, 1910.”<sup>7</sup> Characteristically, the date of the Renovation was not given as Aug. 29, 1909, or the day of Fr. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz’s first vows (as the Marians do it today), but the date of the Papal approval of the performed reforms, issued more than a year later. Furthermore, the change of the Procurator

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Annuario Pontificio*, 1927, 435 nn.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 1928, 455.

General's street address (to 38 Via dei Rammi) was carefully noted, which confirms the fact that all information was scrupulously brought up to day annually. Not a single word was said about the earlier Papal approvals. The information containing the aforesaid dates (and only these dates) was published up to and including 1935. This would suggest that Fr. C. Reklaitis, while editing his *Krótki przegląd historii Zgromadzenia Marianów* in 1934, deliberately changed the date of the Congregation's origin from the previously given 1673 to 1670. It is difficult to uncover the reasons for why he did it, since he never explained the change of his views. However, he was consistent in his views because, starting from 1935, he always gave the year 1670 as the date of the founding of the Congregation.<sup>8</sup> In the following years – up until his leaving from Rome for America in 1941 – he persisted in his conviction. For an uninterrupted period of six years (1936-1941), the *Annuario pontificio* provided the year 1670 as the date of origin of the Congregation of Marian Fathers. However, this changed in 1942, as the date of 1673 returned and remained for the subsequent years. From the *Annuario pontificio*'s point of view, the tradition of giving 1673 as the date of the Marian Congregation's origin has continued uninterrupted since 1942.

### **The Marians' perception of the community's origin in the 1960s**

In 1961, Fr. E. Makulski, MIC, then a student of Church History at the Catholic University of Lublin, came up with an important initiative to restore the dilapidating Church of Our Lord's Cenacle in Góra Kalwaria. At first, the idea was discussed by priest students in Lublin, but consequently a fervent appeal was sent to religious houses with several residents.<sup>9</sup> This extensive document substantiated the need for a speedy beginning of the Cenacle's restoration. Some of the arguments used at the time are interesting. They show the author's ideas about the beginning of the Congregation (or rather, the authors, i.e. the student priests). They also indirectly show the level of collective awareness of the Marians, the recipients of this appeal. The archives of the house in Góra Kalwaria contain a copy of the type-set appeal with corrections on some pages, hand-written either by Fr. E. Makulski personally or one of his co-operators. Here is what the author (or authors) of this appeal wrote about the origin and rise of the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 1936, 649.

<sup>9</sup> E. Makulski, *Grobowiec założyciela marianów*, Góra Kalwaria 1961, pp. 19, mps (parish archives in Góra Kalwaria).



Marians in the first subsection, entitled *Góra Kalwaria – the cradle of the Marians*:

*The birth of the Order of Marian Fathers took place in Góra Kalwaria. For Fr. Stanislaus with his companions came there in 1677, at the invitation of Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski. The previous, four-year-long stay in Puszcza may be regarded as a preparation period. For the following 24 years, here at Our Lord's Cenacle in Góra, Fr. Stanislaus worked on and fought for his creation, conducted apostolic works, delivered fervent sermons, heard confessions, and spent his days and nights in prayer. It was here that he performed miracles during his life and after his death.<sup>10</sup> Let us also be mindful of the approaching 300<sup>th</sup> Jubilee of the origin of our Order [in 1971 or in 10-years].<sup>11</sup>*

It seems that it would be impossible to proffer such arguments a dozen years later. For after the 300<sup>th</sup> Jubilee celebrations which took place in 1973, no one from among the Marians would dare to suggest, even in an oratorical euphoria, that the community had existed since 1671 or that the Marian Order came to life only in Góra Kalwaria. It transpires quite clearly from the above excerpts that in the 1960s, the understanding of the Congregation's origin among the Marians was shaky and unspecified and that it became firmly established under the influence of the aforesaid Jubilee celebrations. One of the effects produced by the celebrations was the popularization of the belief that the Marians had been founded in 1673 in Puszcza Mariańska [formerly Korabiewska].

Father F. Bartecki gave the year 1670 as the origin of the Order in the title of his Master's thesis in 1967: *Rozwój prawa partykularnego Zakonu oo. Marianów w latach 1670-1910* [The Development of the particular law of the Marian Fathers Order from 1670-1910]<sup>12</sup>. If he had written his thesis a few years later, he would probably have given a different timeframe for the Order's existence.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 18, words in brackets were added to the type-set by hand.

<sup>12</sup> F. Bartecki, *Rozwój prawa partykularnego Zakonu oo. Marianów w latach 1670-1910*, Warszawa 1967, mps (book collection of the Marians religious house in Licheń).

### The Opinion of a historian of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century religious orders

Małgorzata Borkowska, a Benedictine Sister, is the author of many historical works, based on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-Centuries source documents concerning religious orders, monasteries, and religious sisters. In response to the request from the Góra Kalwaria city government, she prepared a book about that city.<sup>13</sup> The book contains a short, (only 5-page-long) chapter about the Marians who were associated with that town from nearly the beginning. This is how this historian briefly relates the early years of the community's existence: *Chronologically, the Marians were the last religious Order settled in Góra. Besides, those were the early years of their existence, since the origin of the Order should be recognized as 1671, when Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński, having previously received a dispensation from his vows made in 1656 in the Piarists, donned the white habit of the new Order under the invocation of the Immaculately Conceived Mother of God and started working on establishing the spirituality and the rule of this Order. In 1673, Fr. Stanislaus settled in Puszcza Korabiewska, where a small community of hermits existed at the time. Bishop Wierzbowski wished to curtail their [improper] lifestyle. Although this very place, known today as Puszcza Mariańska, has become the cradle of the Marian Order, none of the original hermits had persevered long in it, and for several years the future of the new Order was uncertain. However, in 1674 its Founder obtained permission to build a chapel and a retreat house there, and in 1677, the Korabiew community was granted the Diet's approval and was capable of dispatching a few of its members to New Jerusalem, where – on Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup> – they were solemnly introduced into the ownership of the Cenacle and the adjacent grounds. There was still a long road ahead before the ultimate approval of the text of the Order's by-laws and its papal ratification, but it was in fact a living and functioning community. From the moment that Fr. Papczyński settled there, the Monastery in Góra became the headquarters of the Order's Superior General, while the Novitiate was in Korabiew.*<sup>14</sup>

Although M. Borkowska was well acquainted with the source documents and the works on the Congregation's history, yet she expressed a view contrary to the views of many of the community's historical scholars, that *the origin of the Order should be recognized as 1671, when Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński, [...] donned the white habit of the new Order.* It is possible, that she, as a historian and expert on that time period, deemed the views stat-

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<sup>13</sup> M. Borkowska OSB, *Dzieje Góry Kalwarii*, Krakow 2002.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 271.

ed by the Marians as slightly unconvincing. Therefore, she presented her own opinion, saying that in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the change of habit meant the emergence of a new religious order. To an extent, this is a natural outlook, supported by common sense and the sensitivity of an average person who, upon seeing a new and unknown habit, was bound to wonder what was this new religious and what Order did he belong to.

Therefore, the change of the Piarist habit for the Marian can and should be recognized as the origin of the Marians, if not for the fact that the Founder himself considered the donning of the white habit only as an outward addition to the earlier and more significant event, i.e. his *Oblatio*. According to Fr. Papczyński's intentions, the entire rite of the *Oblatio* was to have had a solemn character and to be held at the Wawel Cathedral on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM.<sup>15</sup> The strong objections of the Piarist Superiors caused both his dispensation from vows and the *Oblatio* to be a very modest *in camera* event with only a few people in attendance, held at the Piarist House chapel a few days after the originally planned date and without the changing of the habit to the white one. The change of the habit had to be postponed several months until the Bishop's permission and the Nuncio's consent were obtained. Yet, the act of the *Oblatio* and the change of the habit are closely linked internally and are a unity. Therefore, the manner of interpreting the events proposed by M. Borkowska consequently leads to the *Oblatio* as the beginning of the Congregation of Marian Fathers.

### **The factors that prepared the birth of a new tradition**

Many factors impacted the shaping of the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Marians' outlook on the beginning of their Congregation. It seems that the most important ones among them were: the interpretation of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century events in the light of the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century legal norms and Church practices; the relatively late discovery – only in 1962 – of the text of St. Papczyński's *Oblatio*; little interest in history and meager efforts made to this extent; and the administrative appointment of the year 1973 to hold the celebrations of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Congregation. These factors differ in nature and their impact on the shaping of the new tradition. Perhaps, if they had

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<sup>15</sup> *Posnaniensis Beatificationis et Canonisationis Servi Dei Stanislai a Jesu Maria Papczyński Positio*, Romae 1977, 191 nn.

occurred separately, they might not have led to the birth of a new tradition, but their combined impact produced a new outlook on the origin of the Congregation.

### **The first and basic factor or the a-historical legal structures**

While reading various papers of the Marians about the Congregation's beginning, one cannot shake off the impression that the authors apply their contemporary legal norms to the 300-years-old events, silently assuming that Church law and practices have not changed since. As a particular manifestation of such an a-historical approach comes the belief that only an ecclesial authority could raise a congregation to life, while the same authority had to issue a written document confirming the fact of the establishment of the new institute. No doubt, this view is correct when applied to congregations emerging in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. However, it seems that this rule was not always observed in the past. According to today's practice and standing law, only a diocesan bishop is entitled to establish religious institutes. The Code of 1983 clearly states: *Diocesan bishops, each in his own territory, can erect institutes of consecrated life by formal decree, provided that the Apostolic See has been consulted* (can. 579). It clearly transpires from that canon that a diocesan bishop may raise a congregation into existence, but he must previously have obtained the positive opinion of the Holy See and also issue a formal written installation decree. A similar norm in the 1917 Code was formulated even more strictly: *A religious congregation may be founded [only] by a [diocesan] bishop, but not by a chapter vicar or a vicar general; however, the bishop should not found nor allow the founding without consulting the Holy See.*<sup>16</sup> However, should anyone inquire about the sources of this legal norm and the time of its creation, it would transpire that its only source are 19<sup>th</sup>-Century papal decrees. Prior to that, the practice of founding congregations was not legally regulated and the Church knew a wide diversity in this aspect.<sup>17</sup>

A certain image of the richness of the Church's life in the aspect of raising new congregations to life is reflected in the following event from the life of the Congregation for Religious Orders, related by J. Torres: *The following year (1922) the Congregation issued a general decree regarding religious*

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<sup>16</sup> *Episcopi, non autem Vicarius Capitularis vel Vicarius Generalis, condere possunt Congregationes religiosas; sed eas ne condant neve condi sinant, inconsulta Sede Apostolica*; beginning of can. 492, 1, CCL of 1917.

<sup>17</sup> Por. G. Lesage, *L'accésion des Congregations à l'état religieux canonique*, Ottawa 1952.

congregations and associations of diocesan law and precisely defined the practices to follow both in the founding of a congregation by the strength of a formal decree, and at the issuance of the approval (*ricoscimento*) for long-established congregations that did not have a formal decree. As a result, information from around the world started coming to the Congregation about old institutes, physically existing in many dioceses without the formal approval by the bishop, let alone by the Holy See.<sup>18</sup> The fact of many worldwide institutes quietly existing for many years without any installation decree and formal ratification by Church authorities is very meaningful and puzzling. This fact glaringly undermines the above assumption that only Church authorities could found new institutes of consecrated life. As it turns out, life proved to be much deeper than legal regulations. It should be probably accepted that at least in the pre-Code era, i.e. 1917, certain religious institutes were raised to life without the bishops' participation but through the cooperation of their founders with their first companions and other faithful people. It may be assumed that bishops knew such communities and possibly supported them either silently or openly, but not formally, as good works; their formal approval by Church authorities came after many years, during which they were functioning *de facto*. This practice was sustained, to an extent, by the then terminology: strictly speaking, only communities with solemn vows were defined as religious orders, while religious congregations were not separated from the associations of the faithful by any strict and clear-cut boundaries, therefore, they could be established through a less formal procedure.<sup>19</sup>

The belief in the necessity of the involvement of the Church authorities' in the emergence of a religious institute was generally accepted by the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century authors of the Marian community, starting with Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz,<sup>20</sup> as well as our contemporaries. This conviction greatly influenced the timing of the date of the Congregation's origin because – for its supporters – the question about the date of origin habitually meant, as it were, a question of the time of the issuance of the appropriate decree by the Church authorities calling the Marians

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<sup>18</sup> J. Torres, *Norme comuni a tutti gli istituti di vita consacrata*, Roma 2002, 39-40, footnote 119.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Odrodzenie Zgromadzenia Księża Marianów w latach 1909-1910 (Dokumenty)*, Ed. Bukowicz, T. Gorski, Warszawa 1995, 101. Cf. F. Smagorowicz, *Data powstania Zgromadzenia Księża Marianów ...*, 21 nn.

into existence. They were looking for an installation decree rather than for pivotal events in the Congregation's history, which – in such researchers' opinion – could not have any essential meaning because those belonged to the private sphere, rather than to the sphere of public ecclesial acts. This kind of reasoning led the first Marians after the Renovation (e.g., G. Matulaitis-Matulewicz and C. Reklaitis) to believe that the Marians formally appeared in the Church in 1679, when Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski issued the first decree, establishing the Congregation. In later times, the authors attempted to push the date of origin back to some earlier years; however, they tried not to challenge the rule stating that only a formal ecclesial decree can produce specific causal effects within the Church. The first formal Church document regarding the Congregation of Marians was Bishop Stanislaus Jacek Świącicki's post-visitation ordinances given to the Puszcza Korabiewska hermitage in 1673,<sup>21</sup> which ordinance started being considered as the beginning of the Marians.

Attentive examination of the document of Bishop S. J. Świącicki's leads to the conclusion that its purpose and intention were far from raising the Congregation of Marians into existence, rather, it was intended to regulate and order the life of the Puszcza Korabiewska hermits who had been residing there for nearly 10 years. The contents of the document have no statements, directly or indirectly expressing the will to found the Congregation. On the contrary, some wording of the Bishop's post-visitation decree indicates that he knew of the existence of the Congregation of Marians and he treated it as an existing reality. Counting the people residing at the hermitage at the beginning of his document, the Bishop makes a strict distinction between the lay and religious persons, among whom he mentions only two by name: Fr. Stanislaus and Br. John, i.e. Krajewski, while among the lay people he mentions only one: Szymon Werbicki, noting that the latter was a Third Order Franciscan and adding that there were other lay people beside him. This proves the oblation made by the two religious was not seen by Bishop Świącicki as an act of private devotion, but that it changed their status within the Church, making them the religious. Thus, the Bishop acknowledged their becoming Marian religious through the oblation profession of the evangelical counsels, which they had made prior to the Bishop's arrival on the visitation. The fact of the Congregation of Marians' existence prior to the Bishop's visitation in Puszcza Korabiew-

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<sup>21</sup> *Posnaniensis...*, 339-345.



ska also comes from the first post-visitation resolutions, which reads: *[the Bishop] approved [approbavit] the institute of the aforesaid religious Fr. Stanislaus and the oblation of Br. Krajewski.*<sup>22</sup> In the mind of the document's author, this was not the initiation of the Marians, but their first approval by the Diocese. Also puzzling is the fact that the Bishop approved Br. Krajewski's oblation which he had made four months previously-and other changes in the life of the hermits that had come to pass recently, but not Fr. Stanislaus's oblation made three years earlier. Perhaps, in the Bishop's understanding, Fr. Stanislaus's oblation was a fact, largely-known and accepted by the Church authorities, and therefore not requiring any further approval. It seems that the proper interpretation of the document of 1673 also leads us – just like other source documents – to recognizing Fr. Stanislaus's *Oblatio* as the true beginning of the Congregation, a historic moment where the first Marian emerged in the Church.

**Second factor:**

**the coincidence or the late discovery of the text of the *Oblatio***

The 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Marians discovered the text of Fr. Stanislaus's *Oblatio* quite late, only in 1962.<sup>23</sup> While doing research in preparation for Stanislaus Papczyński's Beatification, in the private archives of J. Muniak, a follower of the so-called Stanislavits, the Marians found by chance a copy of the manuscript of the *Protocollum Ordinis* or a collection of various documents regarding the Congregation of Marians. Although, from the Founder's biographies, the Marians knew that Fr. S. Papczyński had offered himself to God and the Blessed Mother, i.e. made an act of oblation, yet, not knowing the text and the contents of the document, they were unable to form a proper opinion about it. To illustrate: S. Sydry erroneously interpreted the importance of this act, believing it to be only the expression of Father Founder's private devotion, who, standing on the threshold of a great endeavor, he decided to offer (=entrust) to God this future Congregation.<sup>24</sup> However, the newly-discovered text of the *Oblatio* clearly proved that it was the religious vows, not an offering of the Congregation. We should

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<sup>22</sup> *[episcopus] approbavit Institutum dicli Religiosi Patris Stanislai et Fratris Krajewski oblationem, cf. Posnaniensis .., 342.*

<sup>23</sup> C. Krzyzanowski, *Scripta nuper reperta historiam nostrae Congregationis respicientia*, "Marianus. Comentarium Curiae Generalis Congr. Marianorum" (Romae), 6(1964) n. 25, 58-60.

<sup>24</sup> S. Sydry, *O. Stanisław Papczyński i jego dzieło ...*, 68 nn.

not be surprised by such views, seeing that the basis for forming a proper outlook on the matter before 1962 was inadequate.

For the first time, the *Oblatio* text was published in its original Latin by the General Curia, in 1964.<sup>25</sup> Nothing indicates that either the discovery of the text of the *Oblatio* or its subsequent publication two years later aroused any lively interest among the members of the Congregation. Both events passed by without any significant reverberations and did not basically change the Marians' views about their own beginnings. The *Oblatio* was interpreted in the light of existing beliefs and findings as another element of Fr. Founder's inner preparations for the founding of the Congregation. It was chronologically first and thus a very important element, demonstrating moreover the divine inspiration of the idea to found a new religious order; however, its discoverers were convinced that it could not be a decisive and important step since it was believed at the time that the act of founding a congregation could be performed only as the outcome of a formal decision by the Church authorities. In this perspective, S. Papczyński's *Oblatio* could be interpreted only as an act of someone's private devotion, prompted by this person's initiative and without the formal consent of the Church authorities, thus unimportant to other people and inconsequential in the external forum. In the commentators' opinion, the *Oblatio* belonged to the domain of Fr. Founder's inner life and gave witness to his profound piety and spirituality, marked by his predilection for living according to the evangelical counsels.

This is exactly how the *Oblatio* was interpreted by Fr. Casimir Krzyżanowski. In his illustrated Story of Stanislaus Papczyński, he emphasized, on the one hand, he "began a new phase of his life by making [...] the following solemn oblation."<sup>26</sup> Then he provided the full *Oblatio* text, accompanied by additions. On the other hand, he stipulated that this act had a purely internal meaning, that it was a manifestation of a personal devotion, and as such had no external significance or legal consequences: "Fr. Papczynski remained interiorly and spiritually faithful to his religious vows, although legally he had passed into the ranks of the diocesan clergy."<sup>27</sup> This interpretation of the *Oblatio* allowed it to be placed within the early-accepted scheme of events without making any alterations because

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<sup>25</sup> See footnote No. 23.

<sup>26</sup> [K. Krzyżanowski], *Pod sztandarem Niepokalanej*, Londyn 1966, 73 [recent English-language edition: *The Illustrated Story of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2016, p. 56

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.



it reduced the importance of the act to a mere manifestation of personal desires, intentions, and convictions.

From the Founder's writings, it follows that he regarded the *Oblatio* as the profession of religious vows in a new institute, and that it was just as important to him as his profession made in the Piarists.<sup>28</sup> Father Papczyński knew that he was changing the Congregation, but not his religious status. The outward sign of his perseverance in the religious vocation, while changing the Congregation, had to be to exchange his black habit for a white one, but of the same design. Father Papczyński argued this matter versus the Piarists in court, where various ecclesial authorities gave their opinion.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately the matter was settled in favor of Fr. Stanislaus by the Nuncio and the Bishop of Poznan who expressed the consent for him to wear the white habit.<sup>30</sup> This consent was, in fact, the recognition of Fr. Stanislaus as a religious with full rights since he was allowed to wear the habit of a new Congregation. This was also at least some indirect acceptance of his *Oblatio* as the profession of religious vows. Through an attentive reading of the Founder's reminiscences –our Congregation's first history – one cannot help but realize that Fr. Stanislaus did not see his *Oblatio* as an exclusively internal act, but as a true entrance on a new path of life with all of the possible consequences, even of an external nature. Father Founder succeeded in convincing the Nuncio and winning over the Bishop of Poznan. He did not suspect that members of the Congregation that he had founded would endeavor to undermine his efforts and convictions and to claim, contradicting him, that he was a diocesan priest at that time.<sup>31</sup>

### **Third factor:**

#### **the background or the narrow circle of interested people and students**

The Marianists have always been a small and humble community, even threatened by extinction at times. They never produced any figure of such prominence as to enter into the history of the Church or the world. Nor has the Congregation as a whole ever grown to such greatness of significance

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<sup>28</sup> In his *Foundation of the House of Recollections*, No. 3, Fr. Stanislaus wrote: "Divine Majesty suggested to me, that while I was going to be released from these, in the same act I would bind myself freely to God by other vows, which I did by offering myself taken out of my heart, and made publicly, although in a rather quiet voice," in *Historical Writing of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, MA 2007, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> *Posnaniensis*, 216-233.

<sup>30</sup> See S. Papczyński, *Foundation of the House of Recollections*, No. 7, p. 65,

<sup>31</sup> See voices in the discussion published in *MIC Information* (1/20040, No. 42, 17-22.

as to see researchers or eulogists of their history. Also, the community was infrequently the point of interest of professional historians studying the history of Poland. Thus, the Marians themselves faced the need to study and write about their own history, if for no other purpose than to introduce their novices into it. For want of any other works, the main source of information about Fr. Founder and the beginnings of the Congregation for the Marians after the Renovation (and for Poles in general) was initially the books and devotional articles produced by J. Pietrzak. Right before World War II, these materials were replaced by the Founder's biography composed by Fr. S. Sydry. This was the first critical study of Fr. Stanislaus's life, based on surviving source documents. After the reopening of the beatification process, two Doctoral theses dedicated to him appeared outside of Poland, in Rome: first, in 1960, Navikewicius's historical work, and then, in 1963, the theological one by C. Krzyżanowski. Later, Fr. Krzyżanowski started amassing documents and preparing the so-called *Positio* for the needs of the beatification process. As a scholastic session was organized at the Catholic University of Lublin on the occasion of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Marians, the *Positio* was not yet released. Historians from outside the Congregation who participated in this session pointed out the lack of available source materials on the history of the Marians and suggested their publication. The release of the *Positio* in Rome in 1977 came as a partial fulfillment of this request. Out of necessity, individual topics during the above-said session were presented by the Marians, among whom historians were rather scant. The Congregation felt the need for competent people from their own midst, able to undertake the task of preparing and presenting papers for the aforesaid session. At the time, the matter of the Congregation's beginnings was studied practically exclusively by Fr. Krzyżanowski in relation to Fr. Papczyński's beatification process.<sup>32</sup>

Just as there were only a few specialists on the history of the Marians, so the potential group of recipients of their research was also numerically small and diversified. Naturally, the Marians themselves were the primary recipients. However, in reality, not many Marians displayed a lively interest in these results, which reached only a narrow circle of people. Broader dissemination of these results was impeded by the following: the language barrier (a decreasing proficiency in Latin among the younger Marians and the

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<sup>32</sup> S. Papczyński's extensive biography is provided in T. Rogalewski's the book *Stanislaus Papczyński (1631-1701). Founder of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, Inspirer of the Marian School of Spirituality*, Stockbridge, 2001.

unfamiliarity with the Polish language among non-Poles); the great time, and sometimes geographical, distance that caused a sense of alienation and a lack of understanding; the lack of a deeper interest in the Congregation's past and an unsympathetic view toward the need for historical research in general. The main stream of the community's life in 1960's focused on other events: the work and the resolutions of Vatican II, the post-Vatican liturgical reforms which were of vital importance to all, the renewal of religious life initiated by the Council and the ensuing necessity for editing the Constitutions, debates about the Congregation's character, and lastly, the making of a difficult decision about site the of the new General House (whether in or outside Rome). Such were the topics of the Marian Fathers' periodicals of the time as well as what the spiritual sons of Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński were then living.<sup>33</sup>

Against a multitude of significant and interesting matters, such a small and humble event as the discovery of the text of the *Oblatio* paled completely. Perusing the Marian's magazines of the day, one gets the impression that probably nobody realized what the *Oblatio* exactly represented for the Marian community. However, Marians involved in research on the Congregation's history and heritage were aware of the lack of a wider interest in these matters. Characteristic of this is Fr. Krzyżanowski's statement of 1968: "Ten years went by since the day when I started studying the person of the Servant of God Stanislaus Papczyński and the history of our community's beginnings. An archival quest completed during these years uncovered an array of documents and written works that enrich our knowledge about our Founder and shed light on the character, guiding idea and original spirit that enlivened our Congregation. Some research results and conclusions had been already prepared and presented in 1963 [...]. The fact that they did not have any greater reverberation among us could probably be explained by the widespread lack of time and opportunity to get acquainted with them."<sup>34</sup>

The narrow circle of interested people and the even more narrow circle of researchers of the history of the Marians, who were incidentally assigned to other tasks as a rule and only occupied themselves with the Congregation's history on the side, must have naturally had an impact on the methodology and results of this research. Naturally, this pioneer and

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<sup>33</sup> See *Marianus* and *Immaculata* from 1963-1969.

<sup>34</sup> K. Krzyżanowski, *Opowrót do idei przewodniej Zgromadzenia Marianów*, "Immaculata" 6(1969) No 1, 26.

frequently enormous effort by the researchers, deserves high praise and respect. However, questions still remain about the methods used, the critical approach to the source materials, and their ability to properly interpret them in the context of their time. One of the professional historians stated: "Let us be clear: thus far we have no written work about the Marians that was prepared according to the above-said methods [applied to historical research]."<sup>35</sup> This opinion was expressed in a discussion after the presentation of the papers on the Marian history on the occasion of the Congregation's 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. To some extent, it remains still true with regard to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. It would be hard to indicate some later solid historical studies.

#### **Fourth factor:**

##### **The publicity or the celebrations of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1973**

The announcement of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations first appeared in the circular letter of the recently elected Superior General Fr. Joseph Sielski, MIC. Already in its opening lines, that letter stated: "The current year, 1969, is particularly important because of the 60-Anniversary of the Renovation of our Congregation by the Servant of God George [Matulaitis-]Matulewicz. However, in 1973, we will be celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our Congregation's founding by the Servant of God Stanislaus Papczyński."<sup>36</sup> It seems that the decision to celebrate was made administratively, not as a result of academic research, that is without properly considering nor justifying the choice of the date.

It looks as if Br. Kazimierz Michaluk<sup>37</sup> was the first to react to that announcement. His proposal to hold the main celebrations at the tomb of Fr. St. Papczyński in Marianki was published in March of the following year. In addition, he suggested beginning at once to fulfill a program of "three-year preparations for the event," by doing, among other things, the individual voluntary work of "embellishing and organizing our patrimony." His proposal of a three-year preparation program was later further spec-

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<sup>35</sup> Part of Jerzy Kłoczowski's statement made in the discussion during the scholastic session dedicated to the history of the Congregation on occasion of its 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, in "Summariusz. Sprawozdania Towarzystwa Naukowego Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego," 22/1 (1973), No 2, 168.

<sup>36</sup> J. Sielski, *List okólny przełożonego generalnego z 21 XI 1969 r.*, "Immaculata" 6(1969) No 12, 1.

<sup>37</sup> K. Michaluk, *Uroczystości 300-lecia Zgromadzenia Manianów*, in: "Immaculata" 7(1970) No 3, 33-34.

ified and announced on colorful bulletin boards to the faithful who participated in the annual events at Marianki in May of 1970. The first, main board proclaimed: "1973 – the Jubilee Year of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Congregation of Marian Fathers. The Program of preparations: 1970 – the year of thanksgiving for the gift of the priesthood and the religious live; 1971 – The Congregation of Marians in the Service of the Church; 1972 – Immaculate Mary our Model and our Way; 1973 – Te Deum for the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Congregation (1673-1973)."<sup>38</sup>

In December 1970, around the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the *Oblatio*, a meeting of all of the [Polish] Province local superiors and the Superior General took place, who had just completed the Provincial Visitation.<sup>39</sup> The organization of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events in the Provincial Houses and the entire Congregation was discussed during this meeting, plans were made and tasks assigned. Plans were made for celebrations on a large scale in every parish and religious house, involving the participation of bishops and other guests of honor. This was a great initiative promoting the Marians, in which all of the confreres had to participate along with the lay coworkers and the friends of the Congregation. Information was prepared for the faithful, appropriate sermons about the Congregation were delivered, invitations were issued, and presentations of the history and the work of the worldwide Marians were organized in the form of photo expositions or musical/narration programs. Perhaps, the manner of the celebrations was reminiscent of the solemn events on the 1000<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Baptism of Poland, naturally, with the preservation of proportions. The aim was also similar: the events of the 1000<sup>th</sup> Anniversary were planned as a national recollection meant to strengthen in the faithful the idea of their being heirs and continuators of a great and honorable tradition; the Congregation's Jubilee was to unite the Marians and fortify the entire community through acts of atonement, devotion, and thanksgiving. Active participation in the preparations and the celebrations naturally shaped the Marians' awareness of being part of an old and meritorious religious family, which had inscribed many praiseworthy pages in the history of the Church. In the 1960's, discussions and disputes about the identity of the Marians were still lively, which resulted in the opinion that the Marians allegedly had

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<sup>38</sup> Celebrations at Marianki (May 24, 1970 –report of a participant), in: "Immaculata" 7(1970) No 7-8, 9 nn.

<sup>39</sup> W. Nieciecki, *List przełożonego prowincji do przełożonych domów zakonnych i duszpas-terzy z 18 XI 1970 r.*, in: "Immaculata" 7(1970), No 12, pp. II-III.

two founders (S. Papczyński and G. Matulewicz). These were naturally resolved through the festive events since the jubilee carried a vision of the Congregation as one family, marching forth through the centuries, while experiencing various transformations and reforms.

The Superior General's Circular Letter for the celebrations included the explanation for holding the event precisely in 1973. Firstly, the General stated that we did not know the exact time when the idea of founding the Congregation of Marians had formed in Fr. Papczyński's heart, and clarified the meaning of the *Oblatio*, without using the word itself. "One thing is certain: on December 11, 1670, or the day on which he [Fr. Papczyński] obtained the previously requested permission to leave the Piarists, he also clearly and solemnly affirmed his intent to found the 'Society of the Immaculate Conception' in which he pledged to persevere until death and to make his religious vows there."<sup>40</sup> Thus, in the General's opinion, the Oblation was not religious vows, but a pledge to make them in the future, and a clear and solemn declaration of the intent to found the Congregation. Unfortunately, he did not say when the Founder had fulfilled his pledge and made the vows. On the other hand, the General provided quite a detailed explanation for the date of holding the celebrations: In his visitation decree of Oct. 24, 1673, Bishop Świącicki gave approval to Fr. Stanislaus's Institute, appointed him the Hermitage Superior with full right to govern the arriving pilgrims according to the *Norma vitae* and the Statutes, which the Bishop himself imposed on the Hermitage. These Statutes or ordinances issued by Bishop Świącicki represent the first official document thanks to which the Society of the Immaculate Conception founded by Father Stanislaus obtained Church approval. This decree recognized as the cradle of the Congregation "the oratory of the BVM Immaculate Conception in Puszcza Korabiewska and the Retreat House under the same invocation," inhabited by the first Marians, who remained under the jurisdiction of the local Ordinary. For this reason, the day of Oct. 24, 1673, is accepted as the date of origin of our Congregation, and on this very day, we shall celebrate our 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the author of that letter upholds the precise legal opinion that the most essential element for the origin of the Congregation was the issuance of the first official document by a competent Church authority. And the post-visitation decree of Bishop Świącicki of Oct. 24, 1673, was

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<sup>40</sup> J. Sielski, *List okólny przełożonego generalnego na 8 XII 1972 r.*, in "Immaculata" 9(1972) No 12, p. XXIX.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. XXIX nn.



exactly this first formal document given to the Marians. For this reason, its date was accepted as the date of the Congregation's origin. A certain cognitive dissonance is caused by the use of the terminology: on the one hand, it is stated that the decree was the Church's approval of the Congregation, which means that it was already in existence; and on the other hand, it is asserted that the decree meant the initiation of the Congregation. Taking the legal concepts and the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Church practices as the starting point, it would be necessary to thus interpret the facts presented in the documents. This view, disseminated throughout the Congregation and introduced into practice thanks to the Jubilee celebrations, was accepted by the community almost unanimously.

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Among the above-mentioned four factors, the first factor had the greatest impact on the emergence of the new tradition, i.e. the adoption of the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century legal patterns as the interpretative key of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century events. This approach was of pivotal importance for discerning the origins of the Congregation in the episcopal decree. Also of great importance for the emergence of the new tradition was the second factor, that is, the lack of awareness of the text of the *Oblatio*, because in the period before the discovery of the text, its absence made it impossible to properly interpret the *Oblatio* as the Founder's first Marian vows; however, the discovery of the text did not affect the previously adopted legal and a-historical interpretation of the events which took place at the beginning of the Congregation. The third factor, i.e. the narrow circle of people involved in the research, had an impact on the adopted method. These people were mostly not historians while they concentrated on amassing materials scattered around various archives and arranging them according to the assigned task. Finally, the fourth factor, the solemn celebration of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Congregation, explains why the new tradition has been universally accepted in the Congregation and has become deeply rooted in the minds of the Marians.

## Oblative Spirituality in the teachings of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński

In Church language, the Latin word *oblatio* has the following meanings: firstly, it is a “sacrifice, offering,” but also a “eucharistic sacrifice.” Then, it is “a sacrificial gift, a liturgical tribute” or even “people’s contribution to the priest and the church established in some dioceses.”<sup>1</sup> The verb corresponding to *oblatio* is *offero* (*offerre – offero, obtuli, oblatum*), which also includes, among other meanings, “to offer, to present, to bring before, to show, etc.,” a direct reference to *oblatio*, in the sense of “to offer, to sacrifice.”<sup>2</sup> In the context of spiritual theology, the word *oblatio* has two primary and basic references: biblical and liturgical. Uncovering the significance of these two dimensions of spirituality and examining the life of the Church before St. Stanislaus and his contemporaries will allow us to better understand his concept of *oblative spirituality*. We accept that our Father, St. Stanislaus not only knew both contextual meanings of the word, but they were even dear to him. There is no doubt as to the Marian Founder’s deep and spiritual attentiveness to the Holy Scriptures, which can be seen in the vast number of quotes from the Old and New Testaments in his works. Similarly, being a priest, he celebrated Holy Mass and recited the prayer *Super oblata* many times, and undoubtedly meditated on the mysteries of the Eucharist and the Word of God. The proof of this is found primarily in his two extensive works: *Inspectio cordis* and *Templum Dei mysticum*, but also in his other writings, such as *Orator crucifixus* and *Christus patiens*, which stand out due to his profound meditation on the Word of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Joungan, *Słownik kościelny łacińsko-polski*, Poznań-Warszawa-Lublin, 1958, p. 455.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463.



## Biblical liturgical contexts of *Oblatio*

In the Bible, the word *oblatio* or *oblatum* (*a*) is used primarily in relation to sacrifices made in accordance with the provisions of the Old Testament; this word either specifies what may or should be the subject of the offering or it defines the principles of making the sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it therefore most often appears in the books governing this matter.<sup>4</sup> To illustrate: out of 137 occurrences of this word, as many as 39 are found in the Book of Leviticus and 33 – in the Book of Numbers (their combined number is slightly more than half of all occurrences). Also, aside from the meaning of the word *oblatio* as used in relation to worship, its spiritual meaning is also present, usually in the books of the prophets and the Psalms. Sometimes *oblatio*, understood as an offering to God, is compared to the inner attitude of the faithful, which takes on the form of offering oneself: *oblatio* is the act of making a sacrifice of oneself instead of a material sacrifice. Psalm 50 (18-19) may be given here as a classic example: “For if thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would indeed have given it: with burnt offerings thou wilt not be delighted. A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” Although the word *oblatio* is not used here and the sacrifice is expressed through the words *sacrificium* and *holocaustum* (meaning *burnt offering*), the Psalmist is basically expressing his experience of faith here, saying that God takes no pleasure in the sacrifice as such, but rather in the attitude of the giver. This aspect of the word *oblatio* / *oblatum* (*a*) is also often indicated by the Prophets who fought against the cult of formalism, i.e., making sacrifices while lacking a proper moral attitude.<sup>5</sup> The pivotal passage in the Old Testament, depicting the

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<sup>3</sup> In accordance with the then state of the Church, the Latin translation of the Vulgate was the point of reference for St. Stanislaus. Therefore, this article also uses the same version of the Holy Scriptures (in Polish). For the English text, the Douay-Rheims online Bible translation was used (note of the translator).

<sup>4</sup> A classic example is the excerpt from the Book of Leviticus (2, 4-6): “But when thou offerest a sacrifice (*offerre sacrificium*) baked in the oven of flour, to wit, loaves without leaven, tempered with oil, and unleavened wafers, anointed with oil: If thy oblation (*oblatio*) be from the frying pan, of flour tempered with oil, and without leaven, thou shalt divide it into little pieces, and shalt pour oil upon it.”

<sup>5</sup> To illustrate, let's take the excerpt from Is 1, 11-17: “To what purpose do you offer me the multitude of your victims, saith the Lord? I am full, I desire not holocausts of rams, and fat of fatlings, and blood of calves, and lambs, and buck goats. [...] Offer sacrifice no more in vain: incense is an abomination to me. [...] Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from my eyes: cease to do perversely, learn to do well: seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge for the fatherless, defend the widow.

relationship between a believer – the one making the sacrifice – and the sacrifice offered to God is Psalm 39, the full meaning of which is revealed in Christ: “Sacrifice (*sacrificium*) and oblation (*oblatio*) thou didst not desire; but thou hast pierced ears for me. Burnt offering and sin offering thou didst not require: Then said I, behold I come. In the head of the book it is written of me that I should do thy will: O my God, I have desired it, and thy law in the midst of my heart” (Ps 39: 7-9). This is exactly the part of the Psalm quoted by the author of *the Letter to the Hebrews*<sup>6</sup>, where the grammatical subject not only refers to the Person of Christ, but also identifies Him with both the Sacrifice and the Sacrifice-maker. Consequently, we have the following text: “Wherefore when he [Christ] cometh into the world, he saith: Sacrifice (*hostia*) and oblation (*oblatio*) thou wouldest not: but a body thou hast fitted to me: Holocausts for sin did not please thee. Then said I: Behold I come: in the head of the book it is written of me: that I should do thy will, O God. In saying before, Sacrifices and oblations for sin thou wouldest not, neither are they pleasing to thee, which are offered according to the law. Then said I: Behold, I come to do thy will, O God: he taketh away the first, that he may establish that which followeth. In the which will, we are sanctified by the oblation of the body of Jesus Christ once” (Heb 10:5-10). By fulfilling the proclamations of the Old Law, Christ becomes the one who makes the sacrifice (*offerre*) and Himself becomes the sacrifice (*oblatio oblata*). Consequently, *oblatio* acquires a Christological mark, and the one who makes the sacrifice (*oblatio*) in union with Christ becomes His sign and makes Him present; he repeats his act of offering himself in obedience as a sacrifice to the heavenly Father.

In the liturgy, the word *oblatio* or *oblata* refers primarily to the Eucharistic part of the Holy Mass that includes the prayer called today *Super oblata* (Prayer over the gifts), which was – at the time of St. Stanislaus – called *Secreta* according to the Tridentine Missal.<sup>7</sup> *Oblatio* / *oblata* is the practically constant expression used in this prayer and signifies the gifts placed on the altar over which the priest recites the appropriate prayer of offering. Consequently, the word *oblatio* is frequently present in the prayer of the

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<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* uses the word *oblatio* wherever it was used in the Psalm, but he employs different words such as *hostia* and *holocaustomata* in order to define the offerings.

<sup>7</sup> If the *Vulgate* was the proper version of the Bible at the time of St. Stanislaus Papczyński, then the proper liturgical texts for the Holy Mass were supplied by the Tridentine Missal; the quotes for this article are taken from *Missale Romanum, reimpressio editionis XXVIII. Juxta Typicam Vaticanam, Bonnæ ad Rhenum — Ædibus Palmarum MMIV* (after: MRT).

*Secreta* and becomes like a technical term indicating these specific sacrificial gifts currently placed on the altar and offered to God during a specific Holy Mass<sup>8</sup>. The word is used in the same sense by the rubrics describing the priest's actions during the celebration of the Holy Mass, e.g. in *Ritus servandus in celebratione Missæ*, there is the instruction: "Cum dicit: *Hanc igitur oblationem, expandit manus simul super oblata*"<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, in the part before the consecration in the Canon of the Holy Mass [*Canon Missæ*] there are words indicating these sacrificial gifts (*haec oblatio*) made to God, that they may become the Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>10</sup> Essentially, the theology of the Tridentine Missal identifies the Eucharistic Sacrifice with the *oblatio*. This clearly transpires from the very content of the prayer recited by the priest at the beginning of the Eucharist: "Súscipe, sancta Trínitas, hanc oblationem, quam tibi offérimus ob memóriam passiónis, resurrectionis, et ascensionis Iesu Christi Dómini nostprein et in honor beáti Ioánnis Baptistæ, et sanctórum Apostolórum Petri et Pauli, et istórum, et ómnium Sanctórum."<sup>11</sup> Although the *oblatio* offered to God by the celebrant in this prayer is still the bread and wine before the consecration, at the same time, it is also "in memory of the passion, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ." In a strict sense, the *oblata* as bread and wine will later become, after the transubstantiation, the Body and Blood of Christ thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit and the consecration prayer recited by the priest, in which the words of Christ are repeated. In a certain sense, the above prayer preceding the *Secreta* is complemented by that part of the Canon of the Holy Mass, which comes right after the words of consecration and in which the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord are spoken of in nearly the same words: "Unde et mémoires, Dómine, nos servi tui, sed et plebs tua sancta, ejusdem Christi Fílii tui, Dómini nostri, tam beátæ passiónis, nec non et ab íferis resurrectionis, et in cœlos gloriósæ ascensionis: offérimus præcláræ majestáti tuæ de tuis donis acamamis, Panem

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<sup>8</sup> As an example, let us examine the prayer over the gifts from the Octave of the Nativity: *Pro Octava Nativitatis, Secreta*: "Oblata, Dómine, múnera, nova Unigéniti tui Nativitáte sanctifica: nosque a peccatórum nostrorum máculis emúnda. Per eúndem Dóminum nostrum"; *MRT* p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *MRT* p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> The entire formula from this part of the Mass is worth quoting here: "Quam oblationem tu, Deus, in ómnibus, quæsumus, Signat ter super Oblata, bene ✠ dictam, adscrip ✠ tam, ra ✠ tam, rationábilem, acceptabilémque fácere dignéris: Signat semel super Hostiam, ut nobis Corpus, et semel super Calicem, et Sanguis fiat dilectíssimi Fílii tui, Jungit manus, Dómini nostri Jesu Christi"; *MRT*, p. 337.

<sup>11</sup> *MRT*, p. 277.

sanctum vitæ æternæ, et Calicem salutis perpétuæ.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, in the liturgy of the Holy Mass, the *oblatio*, or sacrificial gift of bread and wine, becomes the sacrifice of Christ – the Host, “the Holy Bread of eternal life and the Chalice of eternal salvation;” what is material takes on a spiritual dimension; what is the fruit of the work of man’s hands becomes spiritual food and drink; that which is human becomes divine by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the institution of Christ and with human cooperation.

### ***Oblatio* as the paradigm of Christian spirituality according to St. Stanislaus**

In the teaching of our Father, St. Stanislaus, the oblativ character of Christian spirituality stands out most prominently in his treatise dedicated “to people in all walks of life” in the Church entitled, *Mystical Temple of God (Templum Dei mysticum)*. The very title of the book evokes a temple understood as a place of Christian worship, in which offertory gifts (*oblationes*) are made. The opening chapters of this treatise, which reminds us of the liturgical actions of the Eucharistic part of the Holy Mass, clearly refer to oblativ spirituality. Particularly important are the following: Chapter III, entitled *The Altar of the mystical temple*; Chapter IV, entitled *The Sacrifice (sacrificum) of the Mystical Temple* that includes a proposal of *Practice I of a Daily Offering (Praxis I Oblationis quotidianæ)*; Chapter V, *The Priest of the Mystical Temple*, and Chapter VI, entitled *The Victim (victima) of the Mystical Temple*. Other chapters invoke the church’s furnishings (e.g., *The Windows of the Mystical Temple*), selected liturgical functions (e.g., *The Dedication of the Mystical Temple*), or characteristics of the church, such as the material (e.g., *The Cleanliness of the Mystical Temple*) and – primarily – the spiritual (e.g., *The Immortality of the Mystical Temple*).

The central role in the structure of the treatise in question is played by the chapters that directly depict the entire Christian life as a liturgy of sacrifice, i.e. the offering of spiritual sacrifices to God by the faithful. There is a clear reference, including the use of identical words, to that part of the Holy Mass when the priest makes the offering (*oblata*). The basis for St. Stanislaus’s concept of oblativ spirituality is a conviction that man is a mystical temple of God, and “[...] the Heart of man, especially of a devout one, is the Altar of God the Most High. For, just as God veiled in the most

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<sup>12</sup> *MRT*, pp. 338-339.

Holy Eucharist is never absent on the altar of a material temple, so He is never absent in a heart that is devoted to Him.”<sup>13</sup> The altar of the human heart is the symbolic place of God’s permanent residence and therefore, every Christian should care “with the greatest zeal” that the altar is always clean and devoted only to Him<sup>14</sup>. It is a place to make spiritual sacrifices. In this context, St. Stanislaus explains what sacrifice made on the altar of the heart is pleasing to God and he proposes a formula for a daily offering (*oblatio quotidiana*): “Pleasing is the offering of the afflicted, when he particularly blesses God in it, whether his affliction is imposed upon him for his sins or for the merit of his eternal glory. [...] Pleasing is the contrition of the repentant sinner, [...] Pleasing is the prayer of a humble creature, [...] Pleasing is the praise on the lips of priests, [...] Pleasing finally, yes, indeed most pleasing, are the poverty, chastity and obedience of Religious men and women, because it rests on the counsel of Christ.”<sup>15</sup> Above all, however, the value of the Christian sacrifice depends on whether it is offered in unity with “all the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the most Blessed Virgin and of all those in heaven, and of the righteous who dwell on earth,”<sup>16</sup> and whether it results from a pure intention and from love. According to St. Stanislaus, true love has its own characteristics. “This Love is pure, holy, fiery, heavenly; it flows from the fountain of eternal Love.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in the image of the Eucharist, where consecrated bread and wine become the Body and Blood of our Lord, the sacrifice made by a Christian as his daily *oblatio* becomes a spiritual sacrifice – supernatural, pleasing to God, and accepted by Him as a share in the merits of Christ, for the salvation of the world. In the symbolism of *Templum Dei Mysticum*, love plays the role of the priest authorized to celebrate the Eucharist. “Unless the sacrifices of the Mystical Temple are offered by the Love-Priest, they are displeasing to God, and he completely rejects them.”<sup>18</sup> The sacrifice may be any human act, any good intent, a suffering, longing or renunciation; basically, everything that a man consists of and lives by. The proposed *Practice of Daily Sacrifice* shows an attempt to itemize all spheres of human exist-

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<sup>13</sup> S. Papczyński, *Templum Dei Mysticum (TDM)*, p. 28, Stockbridge, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Cf. pp. 30-31.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> *TDM*, pp. 37-38.

ence, activities, and experiences<sup>19</sup>. A similar approach to the sacrifice is also present in other Chapters of this treatise and in various writings of our Father Founder, St. Stanislaus.<sup>20</sup> However, in his *Inspectio cordis* and his writings on the Passion, he focuses on encouraging the reader to offer a variety of gifts to God and he convincingly justifies this spiritual attitude, inspiring the faithful to make offerings; as examples, he usually provides various biblical figures, but above all the attitude of Christ Himself. Yet, these writings do not provide a comprehensive presentation of the concept of an oblativ spirituality, as is the case in *Templum Dei Mysticum*. The

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<sup>19</sup> For the sake of both the spiritual beauty of this practice of a daily *oblatio* and a presentation of the way of seeing Christian spirituality in an oblativ way, it is worth quoting the entire text of the offering: “My Lord God, I offer to your Majesty my morning (or evening) tribute of all the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the most Blessed Virgin and of all those in heaven, and of the righteous who dwell on earth, and the good and indifferent works of all men; and this in recompense for all and every one of the benefits conferred on myself and the whole human race, at all times and in all ways, especially this night (or day) in satisfaction and the washing away of my sins, and all my faults and imperfections, and those of the whole human race, especially those committed this night (or day); to avert those punishments and calamities which we have deserved for the same, and the dangers to our soul and body; in order to acknowledge and fulfill your will in all things, loving you above all things and our neighbors with peaceful charity and to avert impediments to all these; for the spiritual and corporal needs of your Holy Church, of the Pope, of the Christian Emperor, of our King and Kingdom, and of all Kings and Christian Kingdoms, neighbors of my own and of my parents, relatives, benefactors, friends, enemies etc., especially N.N. and all those for whom I have ever either resolved, promised or ought to pray, and whom your Majesty wishes to be prayed for, whether alive or dead, but not yet enjoying Your glory; for the conversion of sinners and heretics and the enlightening of unbelievers and schismatics; and lastly for that intention, for which Your Majesty wishes these to be offered to Himself and for which I am bound to offer. And with all these aforesaid merits and works I offer to Your Majesty my heart, that it may love only you, and nothing but you, except on your account; my soul, that it may serve you; my intellect, memory and will, that they may be subject to you, my lips, that they may speak of you; my tongue, that it may bless you; my sight, touch, taste, hearing, smell, imagination, that they may admit no evil, and may seek or retain nothing disorderly; all my interior and exterior senses; all parts of my body and soul, and all their motions; all the works of my whole life, and especially of this day, my thoughts, steps, sights, conversations, desires, proposals, suffering, consolation, fear, security, anxiety, joy, falling, rising up again, temptation and victory over it, persecutions, wrongs, honor, contempt, dishonor, and good repute, abundance, misery, toil, rest, health, and sickness etc. life and death; myself, namely my entire being, and all I have. Grant, Lord, that I may be wholly yours, and not at all mine, for all time, at every moment, for the whole of eternity. May all these things accrue to your glory, to the honor of the most Holy Virgin Mary, and all who dwell in Heaven, to my salvation and that of my neighbors, and the increase of virtue, and the growth of grace and merit. Amen”; *TDM*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>20</sup> This concern for embracing all human activity and giving it – through love – a deserving character can also be seen in the chapter entitled *The Priest of the Mystical Temple*: “Therefore, whether you are praying, or reading, or writing, or saying good things, meditating, working, eating, drinking, worthily refreshing your spirit, or whatever you do that is virtuous, devout, holy, useful or praiseworthy, do it all out of the love of God, to the glory of God”; *TDM*, p. 38.



oblative spirituality in St. Stanislaus's theological system, comprised of his work *Templum Dei Mysticum*, clearly has a liturgical prototype, while the oblative references in his other writings are Christological, as is his concept of the formula of the religious vows.

### Religious Profession as an *oblatio*

All of the extant writings of St. Stanislaus demonstrate that he defines the formula of the religious vows and the act of religious profession as an *oblatio*. The most characteristic is his autobiographical work, entitled *Fundatio domus recollectionis* [Founding of the House of Recollection – *FDR*]. It is in this work that the Author uses the word *oblatio* when referring to the making of religious vows. First, he recalls his own profession in the Congregation of Marians, by which act he initiates its founding: this takes place in the Piarist residence, in Krakow, at the time of Fr. Stanislaus's receiving the indult of departure, he writes: "Although just before the time of the release [from simple vows] Divine Majesty suggested to me, that while I was going to be released from these, in the same act, I would bind myself freely to God by other vows, which I did by offering myself taken out of my heart (*quod feci oblatione sinu deprompta*), and made publicly, although in a rather quiet voice"<sup>21</sup>. Two fundamental conclusions follow from the above statement: the first is that Fr. Stanislaus considers his *oblatio* to be religious vows ("while I was going to be released from these, in the same act I would bind myself freely to God by other vows"); and the second – that he calls the *oblatio* his act of religious profession ("which I did by offering myself taken out of my heart")<sup>22</sup>. Our Father Founder, St. Stanislaus uses

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<sup>21</sup> *Founding of the House of Recollection* (afterwards: *FDR*), in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> The opinion of Franciszek Smagorowicz, MIC, is interesting which he shared with me in a conversation about Casimir Krzyżanowski, MIC's translation of this sentence, "Although just before the time of the release [from simple vows] Divine Majesty suggested to me, that while I was going to be released from these, in the same act I would bind myself freely to God by other vows, which I did by offering myself taken out of my heart (*quod feci oblatione sinu deprompta*), and made publicly, although in a rather quiet voice." Franciszek Smagorowicz, MIC, correctly observed that the Latin expression used by St. Stanislaus may also have a different meaning: *quod feci oblatione sinu deprompta* can also mean: "what I have done by pulling the text of the offering out of my bosom (pocket)." The key word here is *oblatione sinu deprompta*, where *sinu* come from *sinus*, which may mean in this context "fold, lap, pocket, purse" as well as "womb, breast, hug, interior", while the word *deprompta* is the passive participle of the verb *depromere*,

the exact same terminology when he speaks about the vows of his first companion, John of the Immaculate Conception (Stanislaus Krajewski in the world): “Now the oblation of that Hermit was as follows: I, John of the Immaculate Conception [...]”<sup>23</sup> We know that John of the Immaculate Conception used the exact same formula as was used by St. Stanislaus. What is more: the formula of the vows contains words which make it sound as “the offering of oneself”, further emphasized particularly by the word “offer”: “I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczyński, according to the flesh, son of Thomas from Podegrodzie of the Diocese of Cracow, being 40 years of age, offer (*offero*) and consecrate to God the Father Almighty, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and also to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary, Conceived without original sin, my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, my whole mind, my whole spirit, my interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself, so that in this way I may be henceforth the whole-hearted servant-slave of the same Almighty [God] and of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary.”<sup>24</sup> Just how important this “offering of oneself” was to our Father Founder, St. Stanislaus is shown by the text of another formula of vows, included in the *Norma vitae*, where he also uses the same word “*offero*”, although clearly the text of this formula is different. “I, N., son of N., of the Diocese of N., of N. years of age, freely and of my own will, out of a pure love of God, for his greater glory, and the honor of the Virgin, for the assistance of the dead who lack suffrages, especially soldiers and those who died from pestilence, I offer myself to the Divine Majesty, and the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary [...]”<sup>25</sup>

There is no doubt that both formulas belong to the Marian Founder’s original concept of the vows. This is also supported – along with other

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which means “to extract, remove, take out.” Casimir Krzyżanowski adopted a poetic version, as it were, saying that St. Stanislaus has “spoken from the heart” his *oblatio*. If my understanding of Franciszek Smagorowicz’s remark is correct, St. Stanislaus’s action would be reflected more accurately by this translation: “he recited his *oblatio*, [having] taken it out of his sleeve,” which would mean that he had a pre-written text. I admit that Franciszek Smagorowicz’s version of this event seems to better reflect the situation in which the Author [of the *oblatio*] found himself and is also more logical. Consequently, the above sentence would read: “Although just before the time of my release [from simple vows] Divine Majesty suggested to me that I would voluntarily commit myself to God in the same act, which I did, taking the offering from my bosom, in public, although I have made [it, i.e., the offering – note of the translator] in a rather quiet voice, and its content is: “ See also, *Latin-Polish dictionary*, edited by M. Plezia, PWN Scientific Publishing House, Warsaw 2007, vol. II, p. 101, t. V, p. 159.

<sup>23</sup> FDR, p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> S. Papczyński, *Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> S. Papczyński, *Norma vitae*, at: [www.padrimaryresources.com](http://www.padrimaryresources.com), p. 13.



oblative references found in his writings, which explain this concept and deepen it theologically – by two other formulas of religious vows, which St. Stanislaus used during his lifetime but which were not of his authorship. These two formulas present a slightly different understanding of religious consecration and – consequently – place an emphasis on other words. The first formula of religious vows used by our Father Founder, St. Stanislaus is his profession of simple vows in the Piarists which took place on July 22, 1656, in Warsaw. The formula contains no such wording as *oblatio* or *offero*, while it expresses the act of consecration by the phrases “I make my profession” (*faccio meam professionem*) and “I vow” (*voveo*)<sup>26</sup>. The second formula of religious vows is associated with the acceptance of the *Rule of the Ten Virtues* imposed on the Congregation of Marians. This formula was imposed by outside factors, and for this reason, Saint Stanislaus adds a stipulation while making his vows on June 6, 1701, at the Nunciature in Warsaw: “[I ... promise and vow] ... to observe through the whole time of my life the Rule of the Imitation of the Ten Virtues of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in what is not contrary to our religious institute.”<sup>27</sup> This phrase, included by the Marian Founder in the text of his profession, is an integral part of the formula. *Oblative* references are also absent from here. Consecration is signified by the words “I promise and vow” (*promitto et voveo*). In the documents – signed by both the Marian Founder as well as Archbishop Francis, the Apostolic Nuncio in Poland, and other witnesses – the act of making religious vows is called “profession” (*professio*).<sup>28</sup>

The offering [of oneself] expressed in the formula of the religious vows has the character of a total dedication. One’s total and complete devotion to God transpires in the logic of the chosen words, meant to fully define a human person (“my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, my whole mind, my whole spirit, my interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself”). The goal of the *oblatio* is to achieve such a transformation, that the religious becomes exclusively and completely the servant (*totus servus*) of Almighty God and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Additional features of this transformation, enumerated further in the

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<sup>26</sup> In the Polish translation, both aforesaid terms were rendered by the same word “to make” (*faccio meam professionem* as “I make my profession” and *voveo* as “I make three simple vows”) cf. S. Papczyński, *Profesja ślubów prostych*, in: *Pisma zebrane*, op. cit., pp. 1409-1410.

<sup>27</sup> S. Papczyński, *Profession of Solemn Vows*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>28</sup> S. Papczyński, *Professio votum solemnium*, in: S. Papczyński, *Scripta historica*, Varsaviae, 1999, pp. 143-144.

formula of the vows are only a consequence of the religious's new stance. They are: serving in the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception in chastity and with zeal until the end of one's life; adopting a new way of life associated with it; observing the Congregation's by-laws, decrees and regulations, being obedient to the Vicar of Jesus Christ and his delegated authority, including other superiors; faithfully observing the vow of poverty and the communal life; and remaining faithful to the teachings of the Church and the vow of blood in defense of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord<sup>29</sup>.

In his reflections, addressed to the religious and in his writings on the Passion of Christ, Saint Stanislaus indicates the source which gave birth to the act of self-offering (*oblatio*): it is a special relationship with Christ and the ensuing desire to be like Him in His offering of Himself to the Father. This main cause – inspired by faith and love – also takes on other forms, such as love of Christ and care for the salvation of others; a desire to return Jesus' love and friendship; repentance for sins and a spirit of penance; imitation of the saints in their relationship to Christ<sup>30</sup>. The act of the *oblatio* understood as a profession of the religious vows not only expresses the already existing relationship with God, but at the same time, forms and deepens it, gives it a lasting character, and places it within the community of the Church.

## Summation

It seems that, until now, no research has been done on the oblation concept of Christian spirituality in the thought of St. Stanislaus. It is possible that no one has yet noticed this very attribute of the spirituality. This concept is not only theologically and spiritually profound, but it is also original in the context of Christian spirituality. Usually, the concept of oblation, known in the Judeo-Christian world, as well as throughout the history of the Church, was either associated with making offerings to God (the Old Testament), or had a Christological significance in the aspect of Jesus' obedience, as presented in the *Letter to the Hebrews*. Or, it expressed two types

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Oblatio*, op.cit., p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> See S. Papczyński, *Inspectio cordis*, Third Sunday After Epiphany, after the Most Holy Communion (a. M.H.C.), 1; Monday After Pentecost, before the Most Holy Communion (b.M.H.C.) 2; Ninth Sunday After Pentecost, b.M.H.C., 2-3; Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, (b.M.H.C.) 3; Feast of the Assumption of the B.V.M, (b.M.H.C) 3; Meditation XIX, 2-3; *Christus patiens* [*The Suffering Christ*] pp. 20-21, 28-29; *Orator crucifixus* [*The Crucified Orator*] pp. 40-41.

of relations of people towards monasteries or religious institutes: first, it signified their offering of children or adults to monasteries, where those who had been offered then lived; and secondly, *oblatio* was a sign of an association with institutes of religious life, which was not equivalent to religious vows (men and women oblates)<sup>31</sup>. In all of these cases, however, *oblatio* had a specific meaning and was not associated with the creation of a concept of Christian spirituality based on the specific meaning of the word, as we see in the case of our Father Founder, St. Stanislaus. Essentially, even if some authors present certain concepts of *oblative* spirituality, they did not come until later. Such concepts appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in France in relation to the French School of Spirituality which was contemporary to Saint Stanislaus. Besides, it seems that these concepts do not hold any direct liturgical references<sup>32</sup>. The word *oblatio* which is used in the sense of “profession” appears in the composition of the vows of the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer (the Redemptorists) authored by Saint Alphonse Liguori<sup>33</sup>; however, this religious community did not emerge until later, in 1732. Undoubtedly, the discussed issue requires further in-depth and contextual research.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. G. Rocca, *Oblazione*, in *Dizionario degli istituti de perfezione*, t. VI, Paoline, Milano 1980, col. 676-678. Also cf. A. de Bovis, W. van Dijk, *Offrande*, in: *Dictionaire de Spiritualité*, t. XI, Beanchesne, Paris 1982, col. 720-733.

<sup>32</sup> As an example, let's consider the spirituality of two religious congregations: the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (founded in 1816) and the Priests of the Sacred Heart (founded in 1877). A clear reference to oblative spirituality in regard to the *Letter to the Hebrews* (Heb 10,7) is present in the spirituality of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. Leszek Poleszak, SCJ, thus describes it: “In the understanding of the Founder, this *Ecce venio*, later undertaken in the spiritual tradition of the Institute he founded, includes in its content the entirety of God's love revealed in the Son; a readiness to offer oneself; the beginning of the work of redemption, and a model of an oblative attitude. Jesus' attitude of *Ecce venio* is for the Founder a synonym for the free attitude of love which God expects from man. Its value lies precisely in man's availability to the Creator. Therefore, worship here is not about additional sacrifices, but about devotion to the Father, which – in the example of the Son of God – also takes the form of substitution, which is contained in love, praise, pure love, obliteration, and remuneration, as well as the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus”, see L. Poleszak SCJ, *Główne rysy duchowości Zgromadzenia Księży Najświętszego Serca Jezusowego w zamysle założyciela – o. Leona Jana Dehona*, in: *Droga rad ewangelicznych. Program formacji ciągłej na 2011 rok*, Kraków 2011, p. 121. S. Hałas, SCJ, treats this matter similarly in his article: *Pismo św. w duchowości Sługi Bożego o. Leona Dehona*, in: “Symposium” 2 (13) 2004, pp. 57-70. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate regard their spirituality in a different manner. Although they refer to the word *oblatio* in their title – yet, they define themselves primarily in relation to the Mother of God: “In other words, Oblates are people offered to the Blessed Virgin Mary”; see <https://oblaci.pl/maryja-niepokalana/>.

<sup>33</sup> Information from: H. Charbonneau, *Oblacja*, in: *Słownik wartości oblackich*, Ed. F. Ciardi OMI, Poznań 2004, pp. 542-550.

## **Religious consecration: its specificity and the newest theological approaches**

For a long time, Catholic theology has attempted to grasp this form of life which was initiated by Jesus Christ through His incarnation, and which, influenced by the Holy Spirit, gradually developed over the centuries into various forms of “consecrated life” (cf. VC 29) as we call it today. Amidst various categories, such as a more faithful following of Christ, a more radical evangelical life, a life and mission in accordance with the received charism, a life according to the evangelical counsels, a prophetic life, the way and state of perfection, it is the **“consecrated life” that has been recognized by the Magisterium of the Church as the most adequate.** However, consecration is an extremely broad issue in theology. It concerns things and persons, and may have a sacramental or a non-sacramental dimension. In regard to the religious, its essence has sometimes aroused a lot of ambiguity and it has demanded a clear, precise interpretation.

Moreover, while attempting to present religious consecration in the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church and in the latest theological approaches, it is necessary to appreciate the methodological problems faced by the theology of the consecrated life. Religious life as such is a historical and theological reality. As a phenomenon that originated in the Church, it requires a theological interpretation, in addition to grasping all its diversity. Therefore, it is worthwhile focusing on the path presently being taken by the teaching of the Church. For a broader understanding of the matter of religious consecration, it would be good to conclude with a look at some new theological approaches and suggested supplements.

### **The Bible as the basis for understating religious consecration**

Our topic is based on a proper understanding of the essence of consecration, developed on a solid biblical foundation. The Old Testament context of the topic of consecration already drew attention to the existence of

a sacred reality in relation to man, earth or things. This sacredness is related to the presence of God, being destined for Him, or to the rituals that glorify Him. Due to the holiness of God, the *sacrum* understood in this way requires separation from the *profanum* which threatens it.

In searching for the biblical source of consecration, one should pay attention to the group of words appearing in the Old Testament which have the Hebrew root “qdš” that relates to holiness. For the first time, such terms appear in the Book of Exodus relating the theophany of God in the desert (Ex 3:5), in the clear context of the history of salvation. It is significant, that the sanctity-sacredness of man will be related to the need for purification, the preservation of ritual purity, and special rites and legislation. It is motivated by meeting with the living, One and Holy God and the reception of His gifts (Cf. Ex 19: 10-14; Numbers 11:18). God is the first to take the initiative and to choose a people to whom he reveals Himself, whom He guides and invites to make a covenant with Himself. This People of God is called to entrust and offer themselves to this One God in a complete manner, abandoning even the appearance of idolatry and obeying God’s Will expressed in the commandments and prophetic instructions.

The root “qdš” also appears in the context of the calling of the prophets. They are the ones on whom God bestows a special calling in a completely undeserved way, whom He purifies (Isaiah), and draws to Himself with His love (Jeremiah). As “God’s holy ones”, the prophets are committed to be totally open to God; they receive special gifts for the unique mission that He entrusts to them in the context of the history of salvation.

The New Testament brings the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s vision: it is Jesus Christ, who institutes baptismal consecration for all those who are called, while inviting some of them to follow Him more closely. As the Church teaches on the basis of the Gospel:

**Jesus himself is the one whom the Father consecrated** and sent in a supreme way (cf. Jn 10:36). He sums up all the consecrations of the old law, which foreshadowed his own, and in him **is consecrated the new People of God**, henceforth mysteriously united to him. By baptism, Jesus shares his life with each Christian. Each is sanctified in the Son. Each is called to holiness. Each is sent to share the mission of Christ and is given the capacity to grow in the love and service of the Lord. **This baptismal gift is the fundamental Christian consecration and is the root of all others.** [...] To some, however, for the sake of all, God gives the gift of a closer following of Christ in his poverty,

chastity, and obedience through a public profession of these counsels mediated by the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The documents of the Church, attempting to indicate the biblical sources of the identity of consecrated persons, next list texts on the consecration of Mary:

**In fact, Mary is a sublime example of perfect consecration**, which is expressed in her total affiliation and dedication to God. Chosen by the Lord, who decided to accomplish in her the mystery of the Incarnation, she reminds consecrated persons of the **priority of God's initiative**. At the same time, Mary, who gave her consent to God's Word Incarnate in her womb, appears as a *model of the human acceptance* of grace.

During the hidden years in Nazareth, the Virgin Mary – together with Joseph – remained near Christ and was present at her Son's side in the decisive moments of His public life. Therefore, she is the teacher of unconditional fidelity and tireless service. In her – this “tabernacle of the Holy Spirit” (LG, 53) – the new creation shines forth with full splendor. **The consecrated life finds in her a wonderful model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and docility to the Holy Spirit**; and is aware that adherence to Christ, to His “life in poverty and virginity” (LG, 46), also means imitating the life of Mary, (VC, 28).

John the Evangelist is another person whom God granted the gift of a consecrated life and who responded to this gift with love:

From this contemplation, together with the primordial gift of the Spirit, all gifts, and in particular the gift of the consecrated life, take their origin. After Mary, the Mother of Jesus, it is John who receives this gift. John is the disciple whom Jesus loved, the witness who together with Mary stood at the foot of the Cross (cf. Jn 19:26-27). His decision to consecrate himself totally is the fruit of the divine love which envelops him, sustains him and fills his heart. John, together

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<sup>1</sup> Instruction of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, May 31, 1983, Nos. 6-7.

with Mary, is among the first in a long line of men and women who, from the beginning of the Church until the end, are touched by God's love and feel called to follow the Lamb, once sacrificed and now alive, wherever he goes (cf. Rev 14:1-5), (VC, 23).

As per the documents of the Magisterium, after Mary and John the Evangelist, all of the prophets, and especially Elijah (cf. VC, 84), deserve a privileged place.

The contemporary theology of the consecrated life, examining the biblical foundations of related issues, draws attention to the need for a correct hermeneutics and to avoid fairly common methodological errors.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes certain texts of the Holy Scripture are treated as if they were to refer solely to the consecrated life. When using texts from the Gospels, ideas arise to complement what these texts do not say, for example with parallel passages from other evangelists, with no regard to the theological peculiarity of the works of individual biblical authors. It also happens that the essence of religious identity or the theology of the vows is explained based on the texts of the Holy Scriptures taken out of a wider context. A selective compilation of passages fitting a predetermined interpretation and leaving out what does not fit may also become a serious abuse. Therefore, the appropriate methodology will consist in examining the biblical sources, a proper exegesis, looking for broader biblical contexts and inspirations that help to understand the identity of the consecrated person.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Magisterium's contemporary teaching on religious consecration**

The need for a precise, renewed presentation of the identity of the religious person was established during the work of the Second Vatican

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. Perego, *Nowy Testament a życie konsekrowane*, transl. K. Stopa, Częstochowa 2010, pp. 12-14.

<sup>3</sup> One of the examples of such an approach is the application of typological theology. Cf. S.M. Sessa, *Profeti per le nazioni. Antico Testamento e vita consacrata*, Edizioni San Paolo, Ciniello Balsamo 2015; S.M. Sessa, *La "consacrazione" nella Sacra Scrittura. Approssimazioni metodologiche e focalizzazioni tematiche: tracce per un dibattito*, in: Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica, *Consecratio et consecratio per evangelica consilia. Atti del Seminario Internazionale. Roma 1-3 marzo 2018*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2019, pp. 43-58.



Council. The Conciliar Fathers first noted the need to abandon the practice of describing the religious state as *status perfectionis* – “a state of perfection.” This treatment of religious life as an exclusive, and the easiest path to achieve Christian perfection and holiness met with many reservations. Sometimes it led to some peculiar discussions – from today’s point of view – about the superiority of the religious state over the secular one, or the superiority of the ministerial priesthood over the religious state.

In its teaching, the Second Vatican Council strongly departs from such a risky concept and avoids statements favoring something over the other. For this is contrary to the universal calling to holiness according to the vocation granted to each person by God. The starting point for defining the identity of every Christian is Baptism. The equality of all in the Church is rooted in it, and baptismal consecration enables man to be holy. In Vatican II’s teaching that attempts to capture the specificity of the religious order members’ identity, we come across statements about the need for a singular post-baptismal “special consecration” (PC 5). A religious accepts it so “that he may be capable of deriving more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace” (LG, 44); this consecration “is deeply rooted in that of baptism and expresses it more fully,” (PC, 5), and enables him to fulfill the entrusted mission in a spirit of service to God (LG, 44).

The Conciliar teaching did not resolve all of the theological questions with regard to religious consecration. For this reason, a series of requests for clarification were sent to the Vatican’s dicastery dealing with the religious. The most important of them concerned **the precise definition of the action of God and man in the mystery of the vocation to the religious life**. The Congregation thus explains it in one of its replies:

Consecration is the basis of religious life. By insisting on this, the Church places the first emphasis on the initiative of God and on the transforming relation to him which religious life involves. Consecration is a divine action. God calls a person whom he sets apart for a particular dedication to himself. At the same time, he offers the grace to respond so that consecration is expressed on the human side by a profound and free self-surrender. The resulting relationship is pure gift. It is a covenant of mutual love and fidelity, of communion and mission, established for God’s glory, the joy of the person consecrated, and the salvation of the world (EE, 5).

In his exhortation *Vita consecrata*, St. John Paul II further broadened the principle “God’s initiative – man’s response,” by demonstrating the reasons and motives for man’s radical response:

This is the meaning of the call to the consecrated life: it is an initiative coming wholly from the Father (cf. Jn 15:16), who asks those whom he has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive devotion (cf. EE, 5). **The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and so powerful that the person called senses the need to respond by unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God, consecrating to him all things present and future, and placing them in his hands.** This is why, with Saint Thomas, we come to understand the identity of the consecrated person, beginning with his or her complete self-offering, as being comparable to **a genuine holocaust**, (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 186), (VC, 17).

In the course of the 1994 Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops devoted to the “Consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world,” questions arose about the relationship of this **non-sacramental consecration to the Sacramental Baptismal consecration, as well as to consecration in the Sacrament of Holy Orders.** The Synod Fathers asked St. John Paul II to explain this point in a clear manner in an ordinary post-synodal exhortation.

The Pope very clearly described the relationship between religious consecration and other sacramental consecrations. It is worthwhile quoting here extensive excerpts from his teaching. In his exhortation *Redemptionis donum* (No. 7) of 1984, he wrote:

Religious profession “is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it” (PC 5). In this way religious profession, in its constitutive content, becomes a new consecration: the consecration and giving of the human person to God, loved above all else. The commitment undertaken by means of the vows to practice the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, according to the determinations proper to each religious family as laid down in the constitutions, is the expression of a total consecration to God and, at the same time, the means that leads to its achievement. This is also the source of the manner proper to consecrated persons of bearing witness and of exercising the apostolate. And yet it is necessary

to seek the roots of that conscious and free consecration and of the subsequent giving of self to God as His possession in Baptism, the sacrament that leads us to the Paschal Mystery as the apex and center of the Redemption accomplished by Christ.

In this way, simultaneously with the profession of the evangelical counsels, in a much more mature and conscious manner, “the old nature is put off” and likewise “the new nature is put on, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness,” to use once more the words of the letter to the Ephesians, (cf. 4:22-24).

In his apostolic letter of 1988 on the occasion of the Marian Year, St. John Paul II characterized those relations and the novelty of consecration somewhat differently:

A person’s vocation to consecrate his or her whole life has a special relationship to Christ’s own consecration for the sake of mankind. It stems from the sacramental root of Baptism, which embraces the first and fundamental consecration of the person to God. Consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels – through vows or promises - **is an organic development of the beginning made at Baptism.** Consecration **includes the mature choice that one makes for God himself**, *the spousal response to Christ’s love.* When we give ourselves to him in a total and undivided way, we wish ‘to follow him,’ making a decision to observe chastity, poverty and obedience in the spirit of the evangelical counsels. We want to be like Christ in the closest possible way, shaping our lives according to the spirit of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. But above all we wish to have charity, which permeates all the elements of the consecrated life and unites them as a true ‘bond of perfection’(cf. Col 3:14). All of this is included in the Pauline meaning of that ‘dying’ which begins sacramentally at Baptism.

In his Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita consecrata* (No. 30) St. John Paul II provided the most precise explanation of the necessity of this new and particular consecration bestowed on the religious, **which is inseparable from the profession of the evangelical counsels:**

In the Church’s tradition religious profession is considered to be *a special and fruitful deepening of the consecration received in Bap-*

*tism*, inasmuch as it is the means by which the close union with Christ already begun in Baptism develops in the gift of a fuller, more explicit and authentic configuration to him through the profession of the evangelical counsels. This further consecration, however, differs in a special way from baptismal consecration, of which it is not a necessary consequence. In fact, all those reborn in Christ are called to live out, with the strength which is the Spirit's gift, the chastity appropriate to their state of life, obedience to God and to the Church, and a reasonable detachment from material possessions: for all are called to holiness, which consists in the perfection of love. But Baptism in itself does not include the call to celibacy or virginity, the renunciation of possessions or obedience to a superior, in the form proper to the evangelical counsels. The profession of the evangelical counsels thus presupposes a particular gift of God not given to everyone, as Jesus himself emphasizes with respect to voluntary celibacy (cf. *Mt 19:10-12*).

Further in the same paragraph, the pope remarked that a particular gift of the Holy Spirit is needed for the fulfillment of this vocation. Moreover, he provided a reflection, extremely important for the members of religious institutes, about the reciprocal relation between religious and sacramental consecrations in the Sacrament of Holy Orders:

As for priests who profess the evangelical counsels, experience itself shows that *the Sacrament of Holy Orders finds a particular fruitfulness in this consecration*, inasmuch as it requires and fosters a closer union with the Lord. The priest who professes the evangelical counsels is **especially favored in that he reproduces in his life the fullness of the mystery of Christ**, thanks also to the specific spirituality of his Institute and the apostolic dimension of its proper charism. In the priest, in fact, **the vocation to the priesthood and the vocation to the consecrated life converge in a profound and dynamic unity** (VC, 30).

To ensure even greater clarity as to the specificity of religious consecration and the interrelationships between different states of Christian life, John Paul II teaches:

For the mission of the *lay faithful*, whose proper task is to ‘seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God’, the consecration of Baptism and Confirmation common to all members of the People of God is a sufficient foundation. In addition to this basic consecration, *ordained ministers* receive the consecration of ordination in order to carry on the apostolic ministry in time. *Consecrated persons*, who embrace the evangelical counsels, receive a new and special consecration which, without being sacramental, commits them to making their own – in chastity, poverty and obedience – the way of life practiced personally by Jesus and proposed by him to his disciples. Although these different categories are a manifestation of the one mystery of Christ, the lay faithful have as their specific but not exclusive characteristic, activity in the world; the clergy, ministry; consecrated men and women, special conformity to Christ, chaste, poor and obedient (VC, 31).

A distinguishing feature of the latest magisterial approach presented by St. John Paul II in the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* is the constant **emphasis on the Trinitarian dimension** of the vocation to the consecrated life. Man is called at the initiative of the Father, so that, anointed with the Holy Spirit like the Son, he may consecrate himself, offer himself to the Father and, by the power of the Spirit, carry out the mission of salvation towards humanity (cf. VC, 22). Moreover, the consecration is placed by St. John Paul II in the classic post-conciliar theological key: mystery (*Confessio Trinitatis*) – communion (*Signum fraternitatis*) – mission (*Servitium caritatis*).

### Terminological and linguistic issues

One of the significant problems that emerged in the course of developing the theology of religious consecration is the issue of terminology.<sup>4</sup> The Latin verb “consecrare” is sometimes translated in many languages as a reflexive verb, expressing the act of a person offering and sacrificing himself, which indicates the sacrificial nature of consecration. The same active

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<sup>4</sup> See T. Paszkowska, *Mysterium konsekracji osób w perspektywie duchowości Soboru Watykańskiego II*, Lublin 2005, pp. 49-67.

verb translated as the action of God who consecrates will express that God chooses man and sanctifies him.

Furthermore, what may seem extremely surprising is the correct translation of the Magisterium's texts into the various languages. It turns out that the use of different words can cause confusion and ambiguity in the understanding of consecration. A classic example of this is the conciliar sentence in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* from the main paragraph regarding the theology of the religious state. In Latin, this fragment reads as follows:

Per baptismum quidem mortuus est peccato, et Deo sacratus; ut autem gratiae baptismalis uberiores fructus percipere queat, consiliorum evangelicorum professione in Ecclesia liberari intendit ab impedimentis, quae ipsum a caritatis fervore et divini cultus perfectione retrahere possent, et divino obsequio intimius consecratur. (LG, 44)

Controversies arose from translations of the phrase "divino obsequio intimius consecrator." The majority of translations into national languages used a reflective verb which indicates that a person consecrates himself to God and that his consecration is a human action in regard to God.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in Polish we have: "poświęca się służbie Bożej;" in Italian it says: "*si consacra più intimamente al servizio di Dio*;" in French it reads: "*se consacrer plus intimement au service divin*;" in Spanish: "*se consagra más íntimamente al servicio de Dios*;" and in Belarusian: "яшчэ больш прысвячае сябе Божаму служэнню." On the other hand, translators of the same excerpt into some other languages used a passive verb which emphasized that the consecration is an act of God working in man. Thus, in English we have: "*he is more intimately consecrated to divine service*;" in Portuguese: "*é consagrado mais intimamente ao serviço divino*," and in German: "*wird dem göttlichen Dienst inniger geweiht*."

After the release of the Conciliar document, *Lumen gentium*, several commentaries appeared, clarifying the doubts in regard to the proper interpretation of par. 44 of that Constitution.<sup>6</sup> They clearly indicated that

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<sup>5</sup> Official translations into national languages may be viewed on [w2.vatican.va](http://w2.vatican.va).

<sup>6</sup> See G. Ghirlanda, *I significati del termine "consacrazione" nel CIC 1983*, in: Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica, *Consecratio et consecratio per evangelica consilia. Atti del Seminario Internazionale. Roma 1-3 marzo 2018*, op. cit., pp. 9-44; Z. Pałys, *Rozwój teologii konsekracji zakonnej. Studium historyczno-teologiczne od Vaticanum II do "Vita consecrata" Jana Pawła II*, Wydawnictwo La Salette, Krakow 2008, pp. 73-77.

the verb “*consecrare*” was meant to exclusively express the acts of God, while human acts were to be rendered by such verbs as “*devovere*,” “*mancipare*” and “*dedicare*.” Furthermore, the Post-Conciliar Theological Committee explained: “Textus novus est: «*per eadem vincula divino obsequio intimius consecratur*» *sub forma passiva*, subintelligendum «*a Deo*».”<sup>7</sup> In other words, it is clear that the verb “*consecrare*” used here in its passive voice underlines the primacy of God’s action, the act of His taking a man into His possession, for exclusive service. The verbs “*devovere*,” “*mancipare*” and “*dedicare*” express in this context the act of consecration of man, understood as dedication, entrustment of himself into the hands of God, free surrender of oneself to the service of God as a response to God’s calling. Therefore, a correct translation of *Lumen Gentium* No. 44, including the above remarks and reflecting the meaning of the Conciliar teaching on consecration, should read in Polish in the following or similar manner: “chrześcijanin [...] jest jeszcze *ściślej* przez Boga konsekrowany służbie Bożej” [a Christian [...] is even more closely consecrated by God to God’s service].”

It is easy to see that the very translations of the Magisterium’s fundamental teaching on the religious state can cause a lot of confusion. It requires caution in quoting them and rather suggests using texts in the original language.<sup>8</sup>

### Propositions of a new theological approach

Today, the Magisterium of the Church clearly states that the theology of religious consecration is rooted in the theology of the sacrament of Baptism. Contemporary reflection on the identity of consecrated persons, the religious in particular, endeavors to express the complexity of the issue in various ways and in different terms and emphasizes the difficulties in formulating a comprehensive and exhaustive approach.<sup>9</sup> It presents an abun-

<sup>7</sup> *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, tom III, cz. VIII: Congregationes generales CXXIII-CXXVII, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Città del Vaticano 1976, s. 131.

<sup>8</sup> We find a similar situation with the translation of No. 5 of the Instruction *Essential elements*, published as editio typica in English. The sentence: “Consecration is the basis of religious life” is translated in Polish as: “Poświęcenie się Bogu, konsekracja jest podstawą życia zakonnego.”

<sup>9</sup> See M. Bevilacqua, *La consacrazione religiosa. Prospettive di interpretazione nel Magistero e nella riflessione teologica*, in: Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di



dance of interpretative keys or suggestions emphasizing some important element that gives consecration a special character. Voices were also heard commenting on the danger of various types of reductionism. It is worthwhile therefore, to look at the most important proposals for new theological approaches, without engaging in a discussion.

To start, it is necessary to recall some voices expressing **some sort of distancing from the discussion on religious consecration**. In the work of certain authors who represent the world of monasticism (especially its Eastern kind), this issue is even absent. These authors often proffer the view that the identity of a religious can be expressed in an uncomplicated way: he is a Christian simply living by the radicalism and integrity of the Gospel. It is too much for the theology of consecrated persons to emphasize their uniqueness.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, it should be emphasized that religious consecration is **an act that touches the essence of the person's identity**. The consecration of man is a participation in the consecration of Christ. It is not some external accessory or assignment of a function in the Church and the world.<sup>11</sup> It is related in the first place to the depth of the person's "being" and not to his actions. It is noteworthy that the religious themselves, when asked about who they are, often begin their explanations by itemizing their works and their occupations. It is also worth mentioning that discussions on the essence of the consecration of religious persons (especially women), contain an emphasis on the **nuptial nature** of this act. This clearly shows that a vocation is a union of persons born out of love and for love, that it is a kind of nuptials. For indeed, God's love for man and man's for God is at the heart of consecration.

One of the most extensive systems of understanding religious consecration is the **ecclesiological-sacramental perspective seen in three interrelated aspects: the theology of covenant, the theology of the sacramental system, and pneumatology**.<sup>12</sup> The covenant aspect emphasizes a kind of association between the Consecrator and the consecrated person,

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Vita Apostolica, *Consecratio et consecratio per evangelica consilia. Atti del Seminario Internazionale. Roma 1-3 marzo 2018*, op. cit., pp. 137-161.

<sup>10</sup> See E. Bianchi, *Non siamo migliori. La vita religiosa nella Chiesa, tra gli uomini*, Edizioni Qiqajon, Magnano 2002.

<sup>11</sup> See G. Ghirlanda, *I significati del termine "consacrazione" nel CIC 1983*, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

<sup>12</sup> See J.C.R. García Paredes, *La "consacrazione carismatica"*, in: Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica, *Consecratio et consecratio per evangelica consilia. Atti del Seminario Internazionale. Roma 1-3 marzo 2018*, op. cit., pp. 169-185.

the blessing bestowed by God, and the matter of fidelity. Further, although not sacramental in its essence, religious consecration is based on Baptism and is deeply rooted in the Eucharistic consecration. Indeed, the Eucharist, where the consecration of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is accomplished, is the center of the Church's sacramental system, and all of the Church's sacraments are oriented towards it. It is in the theology of the Eucharist that we can most fully discover what the gift, sacrifice and power of God's transforming grace are. Lastly, an epiclesis is needed – a solemn invocation of the Holy Spirit: His consecrating and unifying power.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the Trinitarian approach to the essence of consecrated life proposed by John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata* insists on a clear emphasis on the **pneumatological dimension**. “Jesus is the One whom ‘God anointed ... with the Holy Spirit and with power’ (Acts 10:38), the One ‘whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world’ (Jn 10:36),” (VC 22). The consecration of Christ through the anointing with the Holy Spirit is inseparable from the mission, it is the anointing for mission. As Jesus Himself solemnly emphasized in the temple in Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Lk 4:18-19). According to many authors, the **understanding of consecration as anointing** shows the charismatic dynamism of the consecrated life and its missionary orientation very well.<sup>13</sup>

Man's participation in the mystery of consecration is expressed in a total dedication to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels. This free commitment to Him in all areas of life, as expressed in the vows, implies an extremely radical act of faith. In this way, by emphasizing this extraordinary trust in a loving God, **consecration is understood as a living profession of faith**, as if it is the embodiment of faith and the Decalogue's first commandment.<sup>14</sup> This vocation is related to the calling of the prophets who were chosen by God to guard faithfulness to the One and Only God. Moreover, this emphasis takes on an important meaning in the

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<sup>13</sup> See J.C.R. García Paredes, *Teologia della vita religiosa*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2004, pp. 325-354; B. Maggioni, *Alle radici della sequela*, Ancora, Milano 2010, pp. 9-19. This approach is very significantly emphasized in the theology of the consecrated life in Latin America, see Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos, *Hacia una vida religiosa latinoamericana. Selección de textos teológicos*, Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, Lima 1984.

<sup>14</sup> See G. Uríbarri Bilbao, *Portar las marcas de Jesús. Teología y espiritualidad de la vida consagrada*, Desclée De Brouwer, Bilbao 2001, p. 325.

context of ongoing formation as a formation of faith and in the context of many departures from the religious state caused by problems with faith or the loss of it.

A strong **ecclesiological accent** is necessary to see consecration in its fullness: God consecrates through the Church, in the Church and for the Church and her mission. In recent years, there have been many remarks from consecrated persons who feel that they are being marginalized in the Church or deem that their vocation is not understood. On the other hand, voices were heard claiming that some consecrated persons seem to be alienated from the life of the universal and local Church, as if they constituted some parallel reality. The vocation to accept a new and special consecration is not only a reality in the Church, but an organic reality of the Church herself. As *Vita Consecrata* emphasizes:

The consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very nature. [...] The idea of a Church made up only of sacred ministers and lay people does not therefore conform to the intentions of her divine Founder, as revealed to us by the Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament (VC, 29).<sup>15</sup>

Recent documents of the Church, as well as other publications, draw special attention to the **eschatological nature of religious consecration**.<sup>16</sup> In this context, St. John Paul II taught in *Vita Consecrata* (26):

In fact it has constantly been taught that the consecrated life is a foreshadowing of the future Kingdom. The Second Vatican Council proposes this teaching anew when it states that consecration better “foretells the resurrected state and the glory of the heavenly Kingdom,” (LG, 44). It does this above all by means of *the vow of virginity*, which tradition has always understood as *an anticipation of the world to come*, already at work for the total transformation of man.

This reminder is even more significant in the religious life, “since the demands of the apostolate today are increasingly urgent, and since involve-

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<sup>15</sup> See X. Larrañaga (ed.), *La vita consacrata nel mistero della Chiesa*, Ancora, Milano 2017.

<sup>16</sup> See A. Cencini, “*Guardate al futuro*.” *Perché ha ancora senso consacrarsi a Dio*. Paoline Editoriale Libri, Milano 2010; E. Bianchi, *Non siamo migliori*, op. cit.

ment in temporal affairs risks becoming ever more absorbing,” (VC 26). This approach refers to one of the most important evangelical inspirations and motivations present from the very beginning of monastic life. This is the embodiment in the earthly life of the longing for Christ’s second coming and also the reality in which “they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Mk 12:25). Religious consecration is to remind and show how Baptism transfers man into the reality of the *eschaton*, to a life of eschatological tension, where the Christian is “in the world but not of the world” (cf. Jn 17: 6-19), where “he does not have a lasting city, but is seeking the city which is to come” (cf. Heb 13:14) and where he keeps constant vigil, “for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come” (Mt 24:44).

To close, it is worth recalling the opinion claiming that – from the point of view of **the charismatic dimension** – the search for a category which would contain the entire reality of consecrated life in a uniform and closed system, is being pressed too much today. Indeed, on the one hand, there is a need for a theological and canonical order, but on the other hand, it is easy to force a uniformity, to re-emphasize the meaning of the category of “consecration” in the understanding of this phenomenon which presents an incredible richness in charismatic terms.<sup>17</sup> This problem transpires, for example, in the handling of societies of apostolic life and new forms of evangelical life, which do not belong, strictly speaking, to institutes of consecrated life, but which – in their charismatic dynamics – are not generally inferior to any of them.

Summarizing this study, we shall say that for a proper understanding of the specificity of religious consecration, it is important to emphasize the primacy of God’s consecrating action and man’s free response to it as a total dedication of his life to the service of God. Furthermore, any attempts to interpret the identity of a religious outside of the clear baptismal context should be regarded as questionable, at the very least.

Theological reflection on the identity of consecrated persons is constantly developing. Recent events on this topic include the International Seminar *Consecratio et consecratio per evangelica consilia* organized in Rome in 2018 by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the subsequent supplementary convention and

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<sup>17</sup> See F. Ciardi, *Una molteplicità di esperienze di vita*, in: Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica, *Consecratio et consecratio per evangelica consilia. Atti del Seminario Internazionale. Roma 1-3 marzo 2018*, op. cit., pp. 117-129.

the multitude of theological publications in the field of the theology of the consecrated life.<sup>18</sup> The most frequently submitted proposals point out the difficulty of defining consecrated life due to the richness and diversity of its forms; they manifest doubts as to the use of comparative and graduating vocabulary (e.g. use of “more” or “special” in regard to religious consecration), in favor of more well-adjusted phrases (e.g. “specific” consecration); the need for a better presentation of the role of the Gospel and the Word of God in the theology of consecration; a more careful use of phrases alluding to its being complementary to baptism, the fullness of a religious consecration as if something was missing in the baptismal consecration; and an insufficient deliberation on the issue of consecration from a liturgical point of view (consecration formulas). Open questions in need of more in-depth studies are: deepening the theology of charism and reflecting on consecration starting with the profession of the evangelical counsels; a broader elaboration on the theology of consecrated life based on history and its interpretation; a clearer presence of the Trinitarian, nuptial, pneumatological and anthropological dimensions, an intensification of the dialogue between theology and canon law, and a reconsideration of the concept of consecration.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to the above-quoted publications, other important ones are: S. Tassotti, *La consacrazione religiosa. Dal Concilio Vaticano II all'Esortazione Apostolica "Vita consecrata"*, Edizioni OCD, Roma-Morena 2003; F. Puig, *La consacrazione religiosa. Virtualità e limiti della nozione teologica*, Giuffrè Editore, Milano 2010; Pontificia Università Lateranense, Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata “Claretianum”, *Teologia e teologie della vita consacrata. Simposio. Roma 13-14 maggio 2015*, Supplemento a Claretianum ITVC, Roma 2016. These works present various approaches to the issue of religious consecration proposed by several theologians.

<sup>19</sup> See the summary of the proceedings of the Roman Seminary and Convention: J.R. Carballo, *È tempo di camminare*, in: Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica, *Consecratio et consecratio per evangelica consilia. Atti del Seminario Internazionale. Roma 1-3 marzo 2018*, op. cit., pp. 231-240; *Questioni aperte e cammini possibili*, “Sequela Christi”, 2018/1, pp. 88-97.

MICHAŁ KOZAK MIC

**Sanctified in Christ Crucified (cf. 1 Cor 1:2).  
The Dimensions of Consecration Related to Christology  
and the Passion**

The past decades can certainly not be called a period which saw the stable and peaceful existence of religious communities. Rather, they were turbulent years, full of questions and problems, as well as deep reflections which brought a lot of light. Religious orders experienced crises, many of their members left the monasteries; there were shames and scandals. A state of bewilderment was palpable; difficulties arose in defining one's identity and place in the dynamically changing human community, and even in the community of the Church. At the same time, new and diverse communities arose. Some of them drew on the old traditional forms of the religious life, others took the risk of looking for previously untrodden paths with varying degrees of success. As befits a loving mother, the Church responded to this situation. First, by calling for a thorough renewal linked to a return to the roots, and then a deep reflection on the theology of the religious life. This conference is an attempt to present the Christological and Passion dimensions of religious consecration in the teaching of the Church after the Second Vatican Council. Although my topic does not imply it, at the close, I shall add a brief reference to the written works and experiences of our Father Founder.

**Christological and Passion dimensions of consecration  
in the teachings of the Church**

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church in her teachings has devoted a great deal of attention to the consecrated life. Many documents of different rank have been published explaining the related issues, specifying the terminology and developing the theological understanding of this ecclesiastical reality. Their detailed analysis should begin from the sixth chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* and

the Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, including the entire process of shaping these documents, and conclude with declarations related to the Year of the Consecrated Life (2015). Many documents of a theological, pastoral and legal nature may be included in this framework, but the entire edifice rests on three columns: the aforesaid documents of Vatican II (1967), the Apostolic Exhortation on religious consecration in the light of the Redemption *Redemptionis Donum* (1984) and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world *Vita consecrata* (1996). These documents are of fundamental importance to the subject of this study, and are the main focus of the following analysis.

## Vatican II

The teaching of the Church before *Vaticanum Secundum* assessed problems of the religious life, but it was done mostly from a legal and practical perspective. The last Council took up theological reflection and showed this reality in the context of the mystery of Christ and the Church. In a way, it marked the beginning of a new path. It was necessary to build a good foundation, define associations with various elements of the mystery of the Church, and specify the vocabularies. The job was not easy. During deliberations, the very structure of the Decree, *Perfectae caritatis* was changed five times. “Consecration” was not yet a generally accepted and recognized category in the theology of the religious life. In the sixth chapter of the dogmatic constitution concerning the religious, this term is not used, and in the *Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life* it is used only four times. If we omit the very word “consecration” and look for the presence of Christological and Passion references in these texts, we should admit that there are few.

The sixth chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church obviously has a decidedly ecclesiological perspective. The evangelical counsels are a gift from God to the Church, and the state based on their profession belongs inseparably to her life and holiness (LG 43, 45). Religious orders serve the good and of the whole Church and benefit it. They build up the Body of Christ, and they are an image of Christ’s love for his Bride (LG 43, 44, 45). The Christological dimension of the religious life is most clearly shown by relating the evangelical counsels to the form of life that the Son of God chose for Himself when He came into this world (LG 43, 44, 46).

The decree, *Perfectae Caritatis* is dominated by a theological approach in the sense that the mystery of the religious life is most often referred to God and not to Christ. The Son of God is portrayed rather as the One



whom the religious are to follow, obey and imitate (PC 1, 2, 5, 8, 13, 25), but their goal is to live a life completely devoted to God Himself, in seeking, loving and uniting with Him (PC 2, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14). A fragment of No. 5 of this document is very important for this paper's topic:

Members of each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels they responded to a divine call so that by being not only dead to sin (cf. Rom. 6:11) but also renouncing the world they may live for God alone. They have dedicated their entire lives to His service. This constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that [i.e. consecration<sup>1</sup>] of baptism and expresses it more fully. Since the Church has accepted their surrender of self they should realize they are also dedicated to its service. This service of God ought to inspire and foster in them the exercise of the virtues, especially humility, obedience, fortitude and chastity. In such a way they share in Christ's emptying of Himself (cf. Phil. 2:7) and His life in the spirit (cf. Rom. 8:1-13). Faithful to their profession then, and leaving all things for the sake of Christ (cf. Mark 10:28), religious are to follow Him (cf. Matt. 19:21) as the one thing necessary (cf. Luke 10:42) listening to His words (cf. Luke 10:39) and solicitous for the things that are His (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32).

This excerpt is typical of the entire decree. God calls and man responds, choosing the path of life totally dedicated to Him. This choice guides the consecrated person to Christ; it is the path of following and imitating Him. Participation in Christ's life involves participation in His emptying through death. The word "consecration," twice appearing in this excerpt, while it was used only four times throughout the whole decree (in addition to this quote, it appears once in PC No. 11 and once in No. 17). The Passion dimension of consecration is strongly emphasized. Less obvious references to this dimension are found in paragraphs concerning the vows of chastity and obedience, where the Council speaks of mortification (cf. PC 12) and the total dedication of one's will (cf. PC 14). The link between religious and baptismal consecration is also important.

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<sup>1</sup> Note of the translator: this excerpt from the English text of the decree, taken from w2.vatican.va, uses the word "consecration" only once; for this reason the word was added in brackets to conform to the Polish text and to follow the reasoning.

## **The Apostolic Exhortation of St. John Paul II, “Redemptionis donum”**

The Exhortation, *Redemptionis donum* appeared in the year of the Jubilee of the Redemption or 17 years after the release of the Vatican II documents. These were not years in which the Magisterium of the Church lost interest in the religious life. A year before the release of this exhortation, the Code of Canon Law saw the light of day, which regulates the legal order of the institutes of consecrated life, along with the Instruction, *Essential Elements*, which assembled the Council’s teaching and the regulations of the Code concerning the institutes devoted to apostolic work. Earlier, St. Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio*, St. John Paul II in his speeches, and the Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes in its documents, among which we should mention *Mutuae relationes*, *Optiones evangelicae* and *Dimensio contemplative*, addressed issues of the consecrated life. A detailed analysis of these documents would greatly inflate the scope of this study, without adding any content relevant to its topic. However, we cannot omit a passage from *Evangelica Testificatio*, related directly to the issue under examination. Saint Paul VI sums up the paragraphs concerning the various evangelical counsels by presenting the Cross as the sign of greater love. His beautiful words deserve to be quoted; they do not require any additional comment:

What has been said indicates what degree of renunciation is demanded by the practice of the religious life. You must feel something of the force with which Christ was drawn to His Cross – that baptism He had still to receive, by which that fire would be lighted which sets you too ablaze – (cf. Lk 12:49-59) something of that ‘foolishness’ which St. Paul wishes we all had, because it alone makes us wise (cf. 1 Cor 3:18-19). Let the Cross be for you, as it was for Christ, proof of the greatest love. Is there not a mysterious relationship between renunciation and joy, between sacrifice and magnanimity, between discipline and spiritual freedom?<sup>2</sup>

The exhortation, *Redemptionis donum* can be regarded as a key document for understanding the Christological-Passion dimension of conse-

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<sup>2</sup> The Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness St. Paul VI, *Evangelica testificatio*, on the Renewal of the Religious Life According to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council, June 29, 1971, 29.

cration. This is due to two factors: First, because it was composed at a time when the concept of “consecration” became one of the basic categories in theological reflection on the religious life. Let the numbers speak for themselves. In the sixth chapter of the conciliar constitution, *Lumen gentium*, this term does not appear at all. It was used four times in *Perfectae caritatis*, while in *Redemptionis donum*, the Pope used it 38 times, placing it also in the title of the whole document and of its third chapter. It is true, that this number goes up to 498 in the four-times-longer exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, but it seems that *Perfectae caritatis* can be considered a ground-breaking document in the field. The second factor is the theological context of the mystery of the redemption in which St. John Paul II conducted his reflection and which made the person of our Savior and His Pascal mystery its main premise of reference.

This exhortation is definitely Christocentric. It would be an exaggeration to say that the Pope changed the theological structure of consecration, according to which the initiative belongs to God who chooses and calls man, while man responds by making the profession of the evangelical counsels through which the human person is dedicated entirely to God. God is always the first to act and to receive, but in this God’s action, St. John Paul II consistently incorporates Jesus Christ the Redeemer. In the very act of calling, which the Pope contemplates in the context of Christ’s dialogue with the rich young man, the consecrating love of the Father reaches man through the Redeemer. The Pope puts it beautifully:

Even though we know that those words, addressed to the rich young man, were not accepted by the one being called, their content deserves to be carefully reflected upon, for they present the interior structure of a vocation. ‘And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him.’ This is the love of the Redeemer: a love that flows from all the human and divine depths of the Redemption. This love reflects the *eternal love* of the Father, who ‘so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.’ The Son, invested with that love, accepted the mission from the Father in the Holy Spirit and became the Redeemer of the world. The Father’s love was revealed in the Son as *redeeming love*. It is precisely this love that constitutes the true price of the Redemption of man and the world. Christ’s Apostles speak of the price of the Redemption with profound emotion: ‘You were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that

of a lamb without blemish or spot,' (1 P 1:18) writes St. Peter and St. Paul states: 'You were bought with a price, (1 Cor 6:20).'" The call to the way of the evangelical counsels springs from the interior encounter with the love of Christ, which is a redeeming love. Christ calls precisely through this love of His.<sup>3</sup>

Allow me to quote three more excerpts from this exhortation:

Your vocation, dear brothers and sisters, has led you to religious profession, whereby you have been consecrated to God through the ministry of the Church, and have been at the same time incorporated into your religious family. Hence, the Church thinks of you, above all, as persons who are 'consecrated': consecrated to God in Jesus Christ as His exclusive possession. [...] Religious profession creates a new bond between the person and the One and Triune God, in Jesus Christ. This bond develops on the foundation of the original bond that is contained in the Sacrament of Baptism (7).

May the knowledge of belonging to God Himself in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world and Spouse of the Church, seal your hearts, (39) all your thoughts, words and deeds, with the sign of the biblical spouse (8).

Religious profession places in the heart of each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, the love of the Father: that love which is in the heart of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world. It is love which embraces the world and everything in it that comes from the Father, and which at the same time tends to overcome in the world everything that 'does not come from the Father' (9).

We may say that at the center of the mystery of consecration, *Redemptionis donum* shows the God-Man and the person whom the Father consecrates and whom this divine call reaches through Jesus' gaze, full of redemptive love, standing before each other face to face. It is the simultaneous fulfillment of Christ's two statements from Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day" (Jn 6:44, NAB) or "no one can come to me

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<sup>3</sup> Apostolic Exhortation, *Redemptionis Donum* of His Holiness Pope St. John Paul II to Men and Women Religious on Their Consecration in the Light of the Mystery of the Redemption, March 25, 1984, 3.

unless it is granted him by my Father” (Jn 6:65, NAB), and from Chapter 14: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (Jn 14:6, NAB). This approach to religious consecration has two implications, very clearly noticeable throughout the document. The first is the emphasis placed on its deeply personal, nuptial dimension, and the second is the integral bond between the profession of the evangelical counsels with the economy of the redemption. Saint John Paul II perfectly expressed this perspective in the third paragraph of his exhortation:

When Christ ‘looked upon you and loved you,’ calling each one of you, dear religious, that redeeming love of His was directed towards a particular person, and at the same time it took on a spousal character: it became a love of choice. This love embraces the whole person, soul and body, whether man or woman, in that person’s unique and unrepeatable personal ‘I.’ The One who, given eternally to the Father, ‘gives’ Himself in the mystery of the Redemption, has now called man in order that he in his turn should give himself entirely to the work of the Redemption through membership in a community of brothers or sisters, recognized and approved by the Church (3).

By his freely-given response, man ceases to belong to himself and surrenders himself exclusively into God’s possession. This is a response of devoted love expressed in the form of the profession of the evangelical counsels and it shapes a special covenant of nuptial love between man and God (cf. RD 8). Saint John Paul II calls it a “mystical marriage with the Divine Spouse in the Church” (RD 4). Jesus of Nazareth, the Redeemer of the world, was chosen by choosing the way that He has shown,” (cf. RD 3). In this way, the religious’ whole life – and especially the practice of the evangelical counsels – become inseparably linked to the economy of the redemption.

The sacrament of Baptism is the basis for this bond. The Pope recalls a statement from the Decree, *Perfectae caritatis* that “religious profession ‘is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it,<sup>4</sup>”

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 5; cf. also Document of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* (May 31, 1983), nos. 5ff.

(RD, 7), and then develops it, referring mainly to the epistles of Paul. This part of the exhortation is very important for the subject of this study; however, since the full presentation of St. John Paul II's thought would require quoting very extensive excerpts of this document, we will only recall just a few, important for the Passion dimension of consecration:

Upon the sacramental basis of Baptism in which it is rooted, religious profession is a new 'burial in the death of Christ': new, because it is made with awareness and by choice; new, because of love and vocation; new, by reason of unceasing 'conversion.' This 'burial in death' causes the person 'buried together with Christ' to 'walk like Christ in newness of life.' In Christ crucified is to be found the ultimate foundation both of baptismal consecration and of the profession of the evangelical counsels, which-in the words of the Second Vatican Council – 'constitutes a special consecration.' It is at one and the same time both death and liberation (7).

While it is true that not even the greatest saint can repeat the words of Christ: 'For their sake I consecrate myself'(Jn 17:19) in the full force of these words, nevertheless, through self-giving love, through the offering of oneself to God as His exclusive possession, each one can through faith stand within the radius of these words. [...]By immersing yourselves in the Paschal Mystery of the Redeemer through the consecration of the religious vows, you desire, through the love of total giving, to fill your souls and your bodies with the spirit of sacrifice, even as St. Paul invites you to do in the words of the letter to the Romans, just quoted: 'to offer your bodies as a sacrifice' (Rom 12:10) (8).

Of this Son St. Paul says that 'though he was in the form of God... He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men,' (Phil 2:6-7). The characteristic of self-emptying contained in the practice of the evangelical counsels is therefore a completely Christocentric characteristic. And for this reason also the Teacher from Nazareth explicitly indicates the cross as the condition for following in His footsteps. He who once said to each one of you 'Follow me' has also said: 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' (Mk 8:34; Mt 16:24) (that is to say, walk in my footsteps). And He said this to all His listeners, not just to the disciples. The *law of renunciation* belongs

therefore to the very essence of the Christian vocation. But it belongs in a particular way to the essence of the vocation linked to the profession of the evangelical counsels (10).

To show the Passion dimension of religious consecration and the practice of the evangelical counsels, the Pope uses powerful expressions as he writes about: sacrifice (RD 3, 8), total devotion (RD 3, 7, 8), dedication (RD 7, 8), immersion into death (RD 7), emptying through death (RD 10), renunciation (RD 10), participation in the Cross (RD 8), putting to death (RD 14), etc. It should be clearly emphasized, however, that the terms which are mentioned are always accompanied by references to the mystery of the Resurrection. The Pope speaks of: entering a new life (RD 7), liberation from the slavery of sin (RD 7), a life for God (RD 7), the beginning of a new creation (RD 8, 10), etc. Religious consecration and the practice of the evangelical counsels introduce us into the depth of the human person, to the roots of humanity, not only the mystery of Christ's Passion, but the whole of His paschal mystery. The Exhortation *Redemptionis donum* is a powerful message, the good news about how "the economy of the Redemption transfers the power of the Paschal Mystery to the level of humanity, docile to Christ's call to life in chastity, poverty and obedience, that is, to a life according to the evangelical counsels," (RD 10).

### **The Apostolic Exhortation "Vita consecrata" of Saint John Paul II**

The exhortation was published in 1996 as the fruit of the Ordinary General Session of the Synod of Bishops, dedicated to a reflection on "the Consecrated life and its mission in the Church and the world." The document describes the rich diversity of communities of consecrated life in the Church, analyzes the circumstances in which they find themselves in the modern world, and outlines the paths and tasks facing them. Aside from this assessing and practical aspect, a large part of the exhortation is devoted to a deep theological reflection on the mystery of religious consecration. In *Vita consecrata*, we see an important shift in perspective compared to *Redemptionis donum*. In the document related to the Jubilee of the Redemption, the Pope chose this mystery as a point of reference, mainly recalling the letters of St. Paul, especially the hymn to the kenosis and the exaltation of Jesus in the second chapter of his Letter to the Philippians. This approach communicated a Christocentric character with strong Passion and Paschal accents to the entire exhortation. *Vita consecrata* has an unmistakable Trinitarian perspective, with the transfiguration on Mount



Tabor playing the role of an icon of the mystery of consecration. The Pope devotes more space to the role of the Holy Spirit in the religious life. Its ecclesial, eschatological, and communal character are also more fully presented. Naturally, this does not mean that Christ is being pushed into the shadows. Instead, it aims rather at deepening and enriching. Just like His face shone at the moment of the Transfiguration, His role in religious consecration is illuminated by the interaction of the Father and the Holy Spirit. The title of the first chapter, *Confessio Trinitatis* can be considered representative of the theological perspective of the entire document. *The Origins of the Consecrated Life in the Mystery of Christ and of the Trinity* and a passage from paragraph 14 that opens this part of the exhortation:

Many of the baptized throughout history have been invited to live such a life ‘in the image of Christ.’ But this is possible only on the basis of a special vocation and in virtue of a particular gift of the Spirit. For in such a life baptismal consecration develops into a radical response in the following of Christ through acceptance of the evangelical counsels, the first and essential of which is the sacred bond of chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. This special way of ‘following Christ,’ at the origin of which is always the initiative of the Father, has an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning: it expresses in a particularly vivid way the *Trinitarian* nature of the Christian life and it anticipates in a certain way that *eschatological* fulfillment towards which the whole Church is tending (VC, 14).

We may say that *Vita consecrata* inscribed the mystery of the consecrated life into the fundamental structure of prayer and the Christian life: to the Father through Jesus in the Holy Spirit. In this case, the person of Jesus is placed in the center of the Holy Trinity’s actions. The Father entrusts to Him persons whom He calls to follow Him, which is only possible through the action of the Holy Spirit who awakens in people a longing for a total response to this calling and conforms them to Christ (cf. VC, 18-19).

The presentation of the mystery of consecration in this exhortation is very positive in a sense because it takes root in an admiration of God’s beauty shining in the face of Christ. As a result, the Passion dimension of religious consecration is not overly emphasized. Very few are such descriptions as “self-emptying,” “putting to death,” “participation in the Cross and the death” which saturated the exhortation *Redemptionis donum*. Instead, the post-synodal document emphasizes the quality of the human

response, which must encompass the whole of the human person in an absolute manner. The person who received the vocation is called to abandon everything and to faithfully follow Jesus' way of life and to center his entire existence on Jesus. This is a matter of making a total gift of self, of a faithful assimilation, and an unconditional sacrifice (the number of references is enormous and we could quote here practically every paragraph from 14 to 22 of this exhortation). The excerpt from paragraph 16 reflects well this "change" of perspective:

It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which, in the consecrated life, makes possible and even demands the total gift of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels. The counsels, more than a simple renunciation, are *a specific acceptance of the mystery of Christ, lived within the Church* (VC, 16).

Changes of emphasis do not mean absence. The Passion character of the religious consecration is clearly shown in the exhortation. The very Transfiguration scene, as accentuated by the Pope, is related to the mystery of Christ's departure and prepares for the experience of the Cross; it concludes with the "descent from the mountain" towards Calvary (VC, 14, 23, 40). The contemplation of the Cross that the disciples experience on Tabor has fundamental significance. The Holy Father says directly that "It is in the contemplation of the Crucified Christ that all vocations find their inspiration. From this contemplation, together with the primordial gift of the Spirit, all gifts, and in particular the gift of the consecrated life, take their origin," (VC, 23). The Paschal dimension of the religious life is inseparably linked to fidelity to the mystery of the Cross. The consecrated person shall experience the mystery of God who is Love more deeply and directly to the degree that he wishes to remain under the Cross of Christ. By fidelity to the mystery of the Cross, he professes his belief in the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and lives it out. In this way, he contributes to the revival of the awareness in the Church that the Cross is God's superabundant love, which is being poured out over this world (cf. VC, 24). Statements demonstrating the Passion dimension of specific aspects of the religious life are scattered throughout the document. They regard the practice of the three evangelical counsels, facing the troubles and annoyances of life, experiencing crises, self-sacrifice in the service of others, exposing oneself to dangers and the risk of martyrdom, as well as cloistering, asceticism,

prayer, formation, common life, evangelization, etc. (cf. VC 24, 35, 38, 41, 42, 59, 65, 70, 72, 75, 86, 93).

The above-analyzed documents do not cover the entirety of the Church's teaching on the consecrated life, but they can be regarded as basic and demonstrative. Rather than focusing on the theology of consecration and the religious life itself, other accounts focus on its situation in the modern world, on the challenges and problems it faces, and questions it must answer. These accounts are often characterized by a beautiful, pictorial language, a wealth of examples, comparisons and quotations, but their contents in terms of the Christological-Passion dimension of the consecration do not exceed the documents presented here (e.g. *Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor* 9, 21-24, 44; *Rejoice* 4-6; *Contemplate* 49-51; *Discern* 8).

### **An attempt at a summation**

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above analysis of the selected Church documents:

– The fundamental meaning for the Christological and Passion dimension of religious consecration has its being anchored in the sacrament of Baptism, that is, its being immersed in the mystery of Christ's Death and Resurrection. The documents use various wordings to define the relationship between baptism and religious consecration. There are terms such as: fuller, more faithful, with greater freedom, in a special way, to strengthen, to expand, to develop, to bind in an intimate way, having roots, and to express more fully. However, the reference to baptism is present in every document, regardless of the manner of expressing it. Religious consecration and baptismal consecration are separate consecrations, but they are very closely linked together.

– Referring to the liturgical formula, we can say that the consecration takes place "through Christ, with Christ and in Christ." His person is of central and crucial importance. We follow Him, we imitate His way of life, we are in a deep personal and spousal relationship with Him, we contemplate His Cross. Of course, the remainder of the formula "in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father" cannot be omitted. Christ does not act alone: the initiative comes from the Father, and the Holy Spirit pours into the human heart the longing for an unconditional response and gives strength and light to impart and persevere in it faithfully, but both the human heart and the action of the Father and the Holy Spirit are oriented toward Christ. The three evangelical counsels, the

profession of which is a constitutive element of religious consecration, are clearly Christocentric. Their practice certainly has a Passion character. It may be defined in various ways, ranging from radical phrases such as “emptying oneself” or “participating in the death,” to less dramatic ones such as “total surrender,” “sacrifice,” “offering” etc., but it is always present.

– The manner of approaching the Passion dimension of consecration flows from the basic viewpoint adopted in a specific document of the Church. If the starting point is the mystery of human redemption and the healing of human nature wounded by sin (*Redemptionis donum*), then its terminology would refer directly to the Passion and Death of Christ on the Cross. If contemplation and awe before the beauty of God are the initial premise (*Vita consecrata*), then the emphasis is shifted towards a total dedication to God, and the term *oblatio* may be more fitting than *passio*. The frequency of the appearance of some words is also noteworthy, e.g.: in *Perfectae caritatis* the word “sin” appears only once, 16 times in *Redemptionis donum*, and only seven times in the four-times-longer *Vita consecrata*.

– Religious consecration is focused on life, not on death and obliteration. The teaching of the Church goes beyond the Passion dimension. The paschal context is always present in it, yet the profession of the evangelical counsels does not instill the passion and death in the foundations of the person, but the paschal mystery of the Risen Lord.

– The Passion dimension is present in various aspects of the life and ministry of the religious. It is a consequence of practicing the evangelical counsels, leading the community life, and fulfilling a mission proper to the specific institute in the Church. This dimension is inscribed in the stages of life, in the difficulties, and in the adversities and crises that must be dealt with. However, it does not directly concern the mystery of consecration, but rather a broadly understood experience of the religious life.

### **The Christological and Passion dimensions in the writings and life of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński**

On the one hand, by looking for elements of contemporary theology of consecration in the writings and life of Father Stanislaus, we run the risk of being rightly accused of being ahistorical. On the other hand, deepening a reflection on the religious life does not alter the mystery of consecration itself. Three hundred and fifty years ago, God chose people and called them to Himself the same way He does today. The renewal of the religious life is

related to a return to the roots, thus an analysis of the religious experience of our Founder, made from the perspective of today's understanding, may be considered as fully acceptable. However, it must be treated as a dialogue with our Father Founder rather than some kind of critical assessment. The choice of the topic dictates taking the founding writings of St. Stanislaus as the essential source, while his works of an ascetic and pastoral character should be placed in the background.

### *Oblatio*

Father Stanislaus's *offering of himself* or the act of religious consecration is addressed to God the Almighty Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as well as to the Mother of God, the ever-Virgin Mary Immaculately Conceived. However, it opens with a Christological and Passion preamble: "In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified. Amen."<sup>5</sup> This preamble cannot be viewed as some sort of a "heading," generally accepted and added to this kind of formula. The text of the *Oblatio* was born out of a "Divine inspiration," and it was thoroughly thought through and prayed over. Therefore, we must recognize that the first sentence of his *Oblatio* expresses a feature of religious consecration which was very important to our holy Father Founder. This statement becomes even more legitimate if we consider the entirety of St. Stanislaus Papczyński's written works, the majority of which constitute Christological and Passion works. However, we must note that the formula of the religious profession proposed for the Marianians in the Rule of Life does not start with the above "preamble."<sup>6</sup>

### *Norma vitae*

The *Norma vitae* (*The Rule of Life*) is essentially a legal document that sets out for the Order the basic principles of its functioning. In its theological perspective, the document is often addressed to God, and references to Christ are few. The Christological and Passion aspect is most clearly visible in the chapter concerning the evangelical counsels. An excerpt speaking about obedience is worth recalling here: "You should assume the motive and example of obedience of our Redeemer Himself, who 'humbled Himself, being made obedient unto death, even death on the Cross' (Phil 2: 8),"<sup>7</sup> and also about poverty:

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<sup>5</sup> *Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> *The Rule of Life*, I, 6, p. 13 ([padrimariani.org/Resources/MIC\\_Library](http://padrimariani.org/Resources/MIC_Library)).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 1, p. 16.

It is fitting for each one to be mindful that he is rather the imitator of the heavenly King in need, who, it is said, had neither His own home (cf. Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58), nor when He was thirsty, was ashamed to have asked for water (cf. Jn 4:7).<sup>8</sup>

The Passion dimension of religious consecration can also be related to numerous calls to asceticism, mortification, and struggle with the old self included in *The Rule of Life*. (cf. NV I, 5; III, 1; the entire Chapter IV; V, 9; and VII, 7).

### **Religious consecration versus baptismal consecration**

The Christological and Passion dimension of religious consecration flows out of its being rooted in baptismal consecration. This association does not appear often in the writings of Father Papczyński, but it is present nonetheless. Our holy Father Founder uses the phrase “double calling,” thus meaning a calling to faith and to the religious life. This interrelation can be found in the reflections in *Inspectio cordis* intended for the fifth Sunday of Easter and for the weekly retreat (cf. *IC*, Fifth Sunday after Easter, and Meditations for the weekly retreat).

### ***Sequela Christi***

The aspect of *sequela Christi*, inscribed into religious spirituality, is very close to St. Stanislaus Papczyński. He looks at the practice of the evangelical counsels and other aspects of the religious life from this fundamental perspective. Christ is his central point of reference. His longing to “follow Christ” explains the choice of the consecrated life, and the goal of his path is to conform as completely as possible to the divine Master. In Father Papczyński’s writings, the image of Christ most often has features of the Passion. The subject of *sequela Christi* in the religious spirituality of our holy Father Founder was researched in detail by our present Superior General, Fr. Andrzej Pakuła in his book *Duchowość zakonna według Stanisława Papczyńskiego i wczesnej tradycji Zgromadzenia Księża Marianów [Spirituality of the Order according to Stanislaus Papczyński and the early tradition of the Congregation of Marian Fathers]*<sup>9</sup>. It is not necessary to re-examine this topic again in the present paper.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., III, 2, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> A. Pakuła MIC, *Duchowość zakonna według Stanisława Papczyńskiego i wczesnej tradycji Zgromadzenia Księża Marianów*, “*Studia Marianorum*”, t. 12, PROMIC – Wydawnictwo Księża Marianów, Warszawa – Lublin 2010, pp. 119-143.



### ***Religious radicalism***

The call to “follow Christ” sets the point of reference and the direction of the path, but it leaves open the question of how much effort a consecrated person actually makes to follow that path. In the first chapter of *The Rule of Life*, our holy Father Founder defines the purpose of the Order as follows:

First, consider diligently and assiduously what the aim of your Congregation is. [It is] the one that all the Orders have in common with you: the greater increase of God’s glory, and care for your own salvation combined with serious striving for perfection. What does it profit a man, teaches the Savior, ‘if he gains the whole world, but suffers the detriment of his own soul?’ (cf. Mt 16:26).

To St. Stanislaus Papczyński, this “serious striving for perfection” means the uncompromising radicalism in conversion, asceticism, penance, observance of the vows and the religious rules. In this field, our holy Father Founder uses only great quantifiers: completely, to the end, without holding back, fully. The wording he uses resembles the terminology found in the passages of the Church’s documents describing the relation of religious consecration to the sacrament of Baptism, that is, more fully, more faithfully, more freely, in a special way, etc. The number of quotes that could be provided here is vast. If anyone would be looking for them, all he needs to do is to open St. Stanislaus Papczyński’s *Collected Works* on any page. Needless to say, for sin-tainted human nature, every great religious quantifier has a Passion character. In this respect, Father Papczyński’s stance can be summed up briefly in the biblical verse from the Song of Songs: “Were one to offer all he owns to purchase love, he would be roundly mocked.” (Song 8: 7).

### **The Life experience of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński**

To close, I would like to add two comments, which may not be directly related to the mystery of religious consecration, but which show the Passion dimension of its realization in Father Stanislaus’s life.

#### **“Consecration of the Founder”**

This expression can hardly be found in the theology of the religious life. However, we can look at the *Oblatio* in this way by way of analogy. We have all the basic elements of consecration here: the initiative of and calling by God, a special mission and gift coming from the Holy Spirit,



and a human response that embraces the whole person. Perhaps, seeking the Christological dimension in Father Stanislaus's vocation by comparing the founding of the community of the Church with the founding of a religious community might be too much, but for him this experience undoubtedly had a dimension deeply rooted in the Passion. There is no need to now evoke the story of the establishment of the first communities and the Founder's lifelong worries and endeavors in obtaining the approval for the Order, since these are well-known matters. However, it is worth deliberating whether we should include in Father Stanislaus's founding *passio* his ordeals of the Piarist period. For this is the way God guided our Father and, in a sense, also shaped the Marian Order. Although the adversities that Fr. Stanislaus faced there (such as slander, a lack of charity, [the members'] contempt for the religious rule and a slackened religious observance, various cliques, the injustice of the superiors, etc.), were very painful, they were also providential. Perhaps, we should look there for reasons due to which such a great emphasis was placed in the *Norma vitae* on love, uncompromising fidelity to the religious rules and observance, and the role of the superiors. Is it not possible to see that an echo of Fr. Stanislaus's past experiences in the crisis-stricken Piarist Order found a reflection in his instructions? e.g.:

If anyone among you has been found stubbornly disobedient, or a firebrand, or a wicked agitator of others, let him be restrained by the common action of all those who favor interior peace and good government (first, however, having given the possibility for a just defense and apology and due process of law having been kept). If necessary, even the force of civil authorities may be employed. Truly it is right that a servant of God be a peaceful man (NV III, 1).

And also:

If someone is falsely accused at that time [by another], he will not respond; afterwards, meeting with the Superior he will testify to his innocence (unless he would prefer to innocently suffer with Christ). A liar will be punished, without being pardoned, with the penalty that would have been given to the one he accused (NV IX, 3).

Certainly, Father Founder's "Piarist" experience was not the only and the most important factor that shaped the growing Marian Order, but per-

haps, we should analyze his founding writings in the light of his *Apology for the Departure from the Institute of the Piarist Schools*.

**“I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me”**

**(2 Tim 4:7-8, NAB).**

The above short “dialogue” with our Father must conclude with the recollection of the two testaments of our holy Father Founder. They are a moving testimony of the person in whom religious consecration has reached the aim which God intended. The words of these documents paint an image of a man who devoted himself completely to God, emptied himself, stripped of everything worldly; a man full of humility, love and concern for his brethren. All things considered, these testaments may be compared to the last sentences written by the Apostle Paul, and even to the high-priestly prayer of Jesus Christ recorded in the Gospel of John.

## Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper is by no means exhaustive. It lacks references to the extensive theological works on religious consecration. It could include such topics as: “consecration in creation,” “Christ – the first consecrated,” its stand in regard to original sin or the struggle with the “old self” in us, etc. Also, a more detailed reflection from the viewpoint of our topic is due to the spiritual-ascetic writings of Saint Stanislaus. However, I hope that my paper succeeded in presenting – at least in some basic aspect – the Christological-Passion dimension of consecration in the teaching of the Church and in the life experience of St. Stanislaus Papczyński. This type of “dialogue” with our holy Father Founder must be continued. We also need to constantly evaluate ourselves in the mirror of his radical and uncompromising fidelity to his vocation, so that it would not turn out one day that he had a consecrated life while we have a theology of consecration.

**The Oblatio as a complete self-offering (VC, 17).  
("I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczyński  
[...] offer and consecrate ...")**

In its article 17, *Vita Consecrata* states that God, "the Father, the Creator and Giver of every good thing, who draws His creatures to himself [...] with a special love and for a special mission" of heeding and following the Son of God. "In response to this call and the interior attraction which accompanies it, those who are called entrust themselves to the love of God who wishes them to be exclusively at his service, and they consecrate themselves totally to him and to his plan of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34)." The answer to God's gratuitous love and the calling to the consecrated life, which "is an initiative coming wholly from the Father (cf. Jn 15:16)" can only consist in "unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God," offering and devoting to Him one's entire life, one's past, present, and future. The consecrated person's offering ought to have a complete character "comparable to a genuine holocaust."<sup>1</sup>

The act of the *Oblatio*, made by Saint Stanislaus Papczyński on December 11, 1670, was without a doubt a part of his holocaust offering, a turning point in his life, and also the act of founding the future Congregation of Marians of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. Our holy Father Founder recited this Offering in the presence of the same witnesses, before whom he had accepted a moment earlier, the indult of departure from the Piarist Order. In this manner, Fr. Stanislaus publicly entered the path of life, which God Himself had indicated to him. This path led the former Piarist to making solemn vows in an order of clerics regular, which he founded and the Church approved, and ultimately, to the community of Saints in heaven and the glory of the altars in the Pilgrim Church. In the light of the *Oblatio*, we can read Father Stanislaus's entire

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<sup>1</sup> Saint John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, March 25, 1996, No. 17.

life story; on the other hand, – which I shall demonstrate later on – it is possible to better understand his act of Self-Offering made in 1670, in the light of the Saint's later life and writings (especially, in the ultimate offering described in the *Norma vitae* in the form of [religious] profession.

In order to better comprehend the totality of Father Stanislaus's offering, I shall briefly outline the person making this offering, what and to whom it was offered, as well as the reason and manner, so that each one of us can obtain the proper fruits.

## WHO?

In his *Oblatio*, our holy Father Founder only briefly speaks about himself: "I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczyński, according to the flesh, son of Thomas from Podegrodzie of the Diocese of Cracow, being forty years of age, offer and consecrate..." Fourteen year prior, he started in a similar manner his profession of simple vows in the Piarists.<sup>2</sup> He would use the name of Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary until the end of his life. Apparently, this name reflected well the identity of our holy Father Founder as a person and as a religious. Father Papczyński would often underline in his written works the primacy of the Crucified Jesus and His Mother's continuous unity with Him, doing so until his final days.<sup>3</sup>

According to Fr. Stanislaus, the fundamental identity of every person is found in their originating from the Triune God and their likeness to Him. The author opens the proper text of his spirituality textbook, *Templum Dei Mysticum* (written shortly after the *Oblatio* and released in 1675) with: "It is so certain that Man, created by God, and consecrated to Him through the sacrament of baptism, is His Mystical Temple, that it ought not to stand in need of proof"<sup>4</sup> The origin of men, their formation and in-dwelling by the entire Trinity, their redemption and pre-destination for immortality – all these gifts and favors gratuitously offered to men are to awaken in

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<sup>2</sup> "I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary, having the secular name of John Papczyński, being 25 years old..." *Profession of Simple Vows*, in *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, MA 2007, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> "Consider that God wants you to be a zealous servant not only of his Son, but also of the Mother of God. He respects the Mother so much that he does not want her to be without the Son, nor the Son without the Mother," S. Papczyński, *Inspectio cordis*, Feast of the Holy Innocents, Before Most Holy Communion.

<sup>4</sup> S. Papczyński, *Mystical Temple of God*, Stockbridge, MA 2005, p. 17.

every human person, and therefore in the Saint himself, a sense of dignity and glory, joy and thanksgiving, the certainty of being loved and a loving response.<sup>5</sup>

As we may infer from Fr. Stanislaus's notes, on the moment of his ultimate departure from the Piarists, thanks to his previous mystical experiences, he was already convinced as to his new vocation and its vision.<sup>6</sup> The very act of the *Oblatio* was a result of God's direct intervention, and not the first idea for the new way of life.<sup>7</sup> While residing at the Karksi's Manor (1671-1673), Father Stanislaus endeavored to fulfill the vocation that was shaped in him earlier.<sup>8</sup> In his *Apology* (ca. 1671) he gave four reasons for his departure from the Piarists,<sup>9</sup> but did not mention his desire to found a new religious order, because this particular work – composed in response to accusations brought forth against him – was of a polemical nature.

Facing various adversities in the course of his life, Fr. Papczyński questioned himself in regard to the origin of his new vocation, being convinced all the same, that God alone was able to bring to a conclusion what He had planned, even if having recourse to such miserable instruments, as this

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<sup>5</sup> "You Christians, as the Teacher of the nations teaches, 'are the Temple of the living God' (2 Cor 6:15). What a glory is yours! What a dignity! [...] You, Man, are the invention of the Divine deliberation. The most August Trinity itself raised you up as a Temple for itself, and the Creator of all things called you into being," *Mystical Temple of God*, p. 18; [...] "Nor is it sufficient to apprehend the mere presence of God; we must also show in our actions and exterior deeds that we truly bear within us the living and unsullied image of God," *ibid.*, p. 24. Quoting St. Ambrose, Fr. Stanislaus adds: "Let everyone pay more careful attention to the excellence of his first condition and acknowledge the venerable likeness to the Holy Trinity in himself, and strive, by the nobility of his conduct, the exercise of the virtues and the dignity of merits to possess the honor of the divine likeness," *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> In 1675, Fr. Stanislaus would write that "God Himself" called him to "founding the lowest and the smallest Congregation of the Fathers of the Blessed Virgin Mary Conceived without sin," doing it "admirably, that is lovingly, mercifully, wisely, wonderfully," FHR, p. 61. Later on, he added: "... the Divine vision, which was imprinted upon my soul in respect to the founding of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the B. V. M. [...] was compelling me to the goal of that vision," *ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> "Divine Majesty suggested to me, that while I was going to be released from these, in the same act I would bind myself freely to God by other vows, which I did by offering myself taken out of my heart, and made publicly," *ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> "I lived at the house of the Lord Nobleman Karski for nearly two years as I was searching for the ways to begin the Society of the Immaculate Conception already formed in my mind by the Divine Spirit," *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> Those were: The Piarist Superiors' hostility; the slack observance of the religious rules; love for the Congregation of the Pious Schools and a desire for peace in the Province; the impossibility of using his innate talents (cf. *Apology*, in: *Historical Writings*, pp. 31-60).

former Piarist.<sup>10</sup> In time, Fr. Stanislaus's conviction about the Divine origin of the Congregation had grown so great that he regarded Jesus Christ and His Mother as his only legal Founders and Protectors, calling himself only its unworthy superior.<sup>11</sup>

Realizing that his origin was from the Holy Trinity and his earthly parents and sure of his vocation and the immensity of the gifts granted by God, Fr. Stanislaus was totally immersed in Him, convinced at the same time of his own sinfulness, weakness, misery, and ineptitude. He placed great trust in Divine Mercy and placed his sins in the wounds of Our Savior, while offering himself entirely to the God of Mercy.<sup>12</sup>

## TO WHOM?

Stanislaus Papczyński opened his act of the *Oblatio* with: "In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified. Amen." If we were to look for the im-

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<sup>10</sup> "For nothing is impossible for the Almighty. [...] But God himself, God (to whom be everlasting and endless glory, and thanksgiving), as he inspired me for this work of his admirably, that is lovingly, mercifully, wisely, wonderfully, so he himself accomplished it and is accomplishing it for ever and ever," FHR, p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Fr. Papczyński thus signed his 1669 letter to Fr. John Foci: "Stanislaus of Jesus Mary of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception not Founder, but unworthy servant," (see *Historical Writings*, p. 104). In his *Another Testament* (1701), Fr. Stanislaus wrote: "I entrust this Tiny-Congregation, as its unworthy Superior, to my Lord Jesus Christ, and to the most Nobel Virgin Mary His Mother, in so far as they are the true and only Founders, Directors, Protectors, Patrons of this Tiny-Congregation of the Immaculate Conception Helper of the Deceased, most devoutly for ever," *Historical Writings*, p. 108. In his *First Testament* (1692), Fr. Stanislaus promised: "Indeed to all, who have supported and protected this Tiny-Congregation of the Immaculate Conception called forth by God for helping the Faithful Departed, I promise a double portion from the hand of God, while to the persecutors, as they already learned by experience, a prepared punishment: for it is dangerous to touch the "Clients" [i.e. those who are under the protection] of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary," *Historical Writings*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>12</sup> As he wrote about the founding of the new Institute, Fr. Stanislaus called himself "the most wretched, most despicable sinner, most inadequate, most unfit instrument" (FHR, p. 61), and "I, unworthy Priest and greatest sinner," *First Testament*, p. 93. "I give thanks to the Divine Majesty for the graces, favors, gifts and benefits lavished upon me most abundantly, but I indeed grieve deep within my heart, and I want to grieve most perfectly, out of the love of Him, for my sins, all of which I plunge into the salutary wounds of my Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ," *ibid.*, p. 94. "O God, O Goodness, O infinite Power, as you know, as you want, have mercy upon me Stanislaus of Jesus Mary the most unworthy Priest, a worthless Servant, the greatest sinner," *ibid.*, p. 97. Compare also the beginnings and signatures in: *Letter to the Marians in the Korabiew Hermitage*, 1.11; *Letter to the Marians in both Houses*, 1; *Letter to Fr. John Foci*, 3; *Another Testament*, 16; and *Ordinances for the Korabiew Hermitage*, 9.

age of our Savior that was particularly dear to our holy Father Founder, we would discover with certainty that it was the Crucified Christ. To Him Fr. Stanislaus dedicated two collections of meditations: *The Crucified Orator* and *The Suffering Christ*. He frequently invoked the image of the Crucified One in his meditations called *Inspectio cordis* and recommended Him as a model for imitation to his confreres and to the faithful. The entire spirituality of our holy Father Founder has a dimension which is eminently Christo-centric, Christo-typical, and related to the Passion.

In his *Oblatio*, the former Piarist offered and consecrated himself to “God the Father Almighty, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.” During his lifetime, this Podegrodian undertook all of his important deeds in the name of the Holy Trinity.<sup>13</sup> There is no doubt that the Trinitarian dimension is fundamental to Fr. Stanislaus’s spirituality. Our holy Father Founder began calling Mary “the Daughter of God the Father,” “the Mother of the Son,” “the Bride of the Holy Spirit,” “guided entirely by the Holy Spirit,” and “the Tabernacle of the entire Holy Trinity” as early as 1661.<sup>14</sup> Saint Stanislaus Papczyński claimed that – just like Mary – every person was the creation and dwelling of the Holy Trinity, which made him, consecrated through Holy Baptism [*dedicatio, consecratio*], and was leading him to his ultimate destination.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, he concluded his Mystical Temple of God with the following Inscription, dedication, offering (of himself and every man): “To You, Eternal Father, my Creator, to You Eternal Son my Redeemer, to You Eternal Spirit my Sanctifier, this Temple described and living, which I am, I most humbly dedicate [*dedico*] for ever.”<sup>16</sup>

After offering himself to the Triune God, our holy Father Founder dedicated himself in his *Oblatio* to “the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary, Conceived without original sin.” We note here an extremely important change as compared to the vows he made in 1656 in the Piarists: Mary is described additionally as “Conceived without original sin.”<sup>17</sup> According to

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<sup>13</sup> *First Testament and Another Testament*; the blessing from *Another Testament*, and *Profession of solemn vows*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Prodromus Reginae Artium, Laus Deiparae Mariae Virginis*. In his meditation, Before the Most Holy Communion on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary from his *Inspectio cordis*, Fr. Papczyński repeated the invocation from the *Little Hours*: “Hail, Virgin Mother! Temple of the Trinity.”

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Mystical Temple of God*, Chapters I and XXIV.

<sup>16</sup> *Mystical Temple of God*, p. 137.

<sup>17</sup> “I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary, having the secular name of John Papczyński, being 25 years old, make my profession [*voveo tria Vota Simplicia*] in the Congregation of the Pious Schools of the Poor of the Mother to the Almighty God, the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,



the formula of profession provided in the *Norma vitae*, each Marian had to recite his offering [offerro] to “the Divine Majesty, and the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary.”<sup>18</sup>

According to Fr. Stanislaus, the first and most important privilege of Mary was her divine motherhood; it was the source of all other titles and gifts given to Mary by God; all for the sake of Christ, the only Savior of the world, who is to be born of her.<sup>19</sup> After departing from the Piarists, Father Papczyński continued to have devotion to Mary primarily as the Virgin Mother of God, but the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, accomplished in Mary by the Triune God for the Church and the whole world, became the focal point of his lifetime charism as well as the charism of the Congregation he founded.<sup>20</sup>

## WHAT?

Already in his act of the *Oblatio*, and many times after, Fr. Papczyński offered and consecrated to God and Mary all of himself, everything he was and had, leaving absolutely nothing to himself.<sup>21</sup>

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and also to the Mother of God, ever Virgin Mary, and to you, Most Reverend Father [...] three simple vows [...]” *Profession of Simple Vows*, p. 15-16. “I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary, having the secular name of John Papczyński, according to the flesh, Son of Thomas from Podegrodzie of the Diocese of Cracow, being forty years of age, offer and consecrate to God the Father Almighty, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and also to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary, Conceived without original sin, my heart...” *Oblatio*, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> *Norma vitae*, I, 6.

<sup>19</sup> “Consider the dignity of the Mother, which she received from the eminence of the Son. Due to the very fact that she became the Mother of the Son of God, the Lord of the angels and the King of the universe, she became not only the Bride of God, but at the same time the Mistress of the angels and the Queen of all creation. Therefore, all the Virgin’s honors, favors, prerogatives, privileges, and exemptions depend solely on her Maternity just as your whole salvation and the means of salvation depend solely on the redemption accomplished by her Son, whom you have received today,” *Inspectio cordis, On the Feast of the Birth of the Most Blessed Virgin, After Most Holy Communion*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> In September of 1671, before the image of the Immaculate Mother of God, Fr. Stanislaus donned the white habit: “All [...] will be white in color, in honor of the pure Conception of our Lady,” *Norma vitae*, IV.4. “...in the white colored [habit], I devoted myself as a new candidate of this Mother for everlasting service,” FHR, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> “my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, my whole mind, my whole spirit, my interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself,” *Oblatio*, p. 27.

It was hard to expand on the matter of offering in a short act. However, our Saint did so extensively in Chapters IV to VII of his *Mystical Temple of God*. First, one should offer to Almighty God “all the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the most Blessed Virgin and of all those in heaven, and of the righteous who dwell on earth, and the good and indifferent works of all men.”

One should offer to God one’s soul to serve God and one’s heart to love Him; one’s body and spirit; one’s lips and tongue to continually praise and bless God; one’s mind, memory and will; external and internal senses; prayers and works of love; chastity, poverty and obedience of the religious; the ministry of the priests; one’s repentance and penance; external and internal mortifications (of the will, judgment and imagination); all works, thoughts, words, images, desires and intentions; distress and consolation; one’s sorrows and joys; health and illness; life and death; one’s fallings and risings from them; in short – absolutely everything. Our holy Father Founder called everyone to offer to God their whole life, in all its moments and aspects: the tormented ones can offer their afflictions, sinners – their repentance, priests – their worship, religious – their vows, the humble – their prayers, etc., so that absolutely everything would be embraced by God’s action and blessing.<sup>22</sup>

## WHY?

What prompts Fr. Papczyński the most to dedicate his life to the service of God and Mary is his confidence in God’s love and mercy. Our holy Father Founder expressed many times in *Inspectio Cordis* his faith and trust in God’s mercy and affirmed that the same God comes to us each time in the Eucharist.<sup>23</sup> Jesus Christ, who gave his life for us on the Cross, was “ready, if need be, to pour forth His blood again for even just one soul.”<sup>24</sup>

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Later, the formula of profession made by the Marians would become shorter: “I offer myself [*offer me*]” and then: “I vow [*voveo*] poverty, chastity, and obedience;” *Norma vitae*, I, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Mystical Temple of God*, Chapters IV to VII.

<sup>23</sup> “You ask, what sort of man is the one whom you have received in the most Holy Eucharist? He is alive, immortal, strong, sweet, and invincible; He is good, merciful, very gracious and all-great; He is gentle and kind; He is wisdom, love, truth, the fullness of all life and goodness;” *Inspectio cordis, Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany, After Most Holy Communion*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Inspectio cordis, Fourth Sunday of Lent, After Most Holy Communion*, 3.

In his meditations, the author of *Inspectio Cordis* explained that God had created man and everything that exists out of love; He Himself became man to redeem the sinner; He was constantly at work in the world so that all may attain eternal life. Out of love, Jesus Christ suffered for us, was put to death and rose again; together with the Father, He sent the Holy Spirit and founded the Church; He accompanies the Church and acts within and through the sacraments.<sup>25</sup>

Father Papczyński goes on to say that God calls some persons to the religious life out of pure love, He daily grants them many graces and patiently waits for their conversion and works of love. All of us who are beloved by God – but especially the religious – as the author of *Inspectio Cordis* repeats frequently, are invited to give the right answer: firstly, to love God above all else, to endure all adversities and sufferings patiently, and to love our neighbor.<sup>26</sup>

The formula of profession given in *Norma vitae* states that the offering [*offero*] to “the Divine Majesty and to the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary,” as well as the three vows are made “out of pure love of God, for his greater glory, and the honor of the Virgin.”<sup>27</sup> Further on, our holy Father Founder instructed the Marians that everything among them had to be done through love. Out of love of God we must keep His commandments, the laws of the Church and human laws. Out of love of God we must do good and avoid evil; to fulfill in the best manner our works and obligations and everything pertaining to our state and vocation. Love is to be the soul of our Congregation.<sup>28</sup>

## WHAT FOR?

Father Papczyński suggested concluding in this way the daily offering of oneself (proper for people of all walks of life):

“Grant, Lord, that I may be wholly yours, and not at all mine, for all time, at every moment, for the whole of eternity. May all these

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Inspectio cordis*, Monday After Pentecost, Before Most Holy Communion; *ibid.*, Meditation IX, On Love [charity].

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Inspectio cordis*, On the Feast of the Apostles Outside of and in Pascal Time; *ibid.*, Sunday of Pentecost; *ibid.*, Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, and many, many others.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Norma vitae*, I,6.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Norma vitae*, II.

things accrue to your glory, to the honor of the most Holy Virgin Mary, and all who dwell in Heaven, to my salvation and that of my neighbors, and the increase of virtue, and the growth of grace and merit. Amen.”<sup>29</sup>

We can clearly see here (as well as in many other written works of our Founder) that sacrifices may be made for various reasons: for God and for people; for the saints, for those in purgatory, for pilgrims on earth and for oneself. Among the goals that correspond to a specific circumstance, Fr. Stanislaus lists: thanksgiving and recompense for benefits received; atonement for sins; pleading for help rising from sins, their rejection and cleansing from them; the retraction of punishments and plagues; love for God and neighbor; discernment and the fulfillment of God’s will; the conversion of sinners and the enlightenment of unbelievers or apostates; one’s own salvation and that of one’s neighbor; growth in grace and merit.<sup>30</sup>

Much more universal goals, appropriate in every place and time, directed more towards God than responding to specific needs or circumstances,<sup>31</sup> are repeated many times in the writings of Father Papczyński. Our holy Father Founder recommended doing everything for the greater glory of God, to know and to fulfill His will, and to honor the Mother of God and the Saints.<sup>32</sup>

Through the *Oblatio*, the former Piarist wanted to become “henceforth the whole-hearted servant-slave of the same Almighty [God] and of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary” and to “serve Them chastely and zealously in the Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (which by the grace of God I resolve to found).”<sup>33</sup> Over time, the general purpose of offering his life to God and Mary and founding the Congregation demonstrated in the *Norma vitae* reached its ultimate clarity and was expressed in three specific ideas: to “promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception

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<sup>29</sup> *Mystical Temple of God*, IV.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> “... whether you are praying, or reading, or writing, or saying good things, meditating, working, eating, drinking, worthily refreshing your spirit, or whatever you do that is virtuous, devout, holy, useful or praiseworthy, do it all out of the love of God, to the glory of God in such a way, that a particular intention always precedes what you do”, *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Even as a goal proper to all religious institutes Fr. Papczyński named: “the greater increase of God’s glory, and care for your own salvation combined with serious striving for perfection,” *Norma vitae*, I.2.

<sup>33</sup> *Oblatio*, 1.

of the Virgin Mother of God, and with utmost zeal, piety and fervor assist the souls of the faithful departed subjected to expiatory pains – especially the souls of soldiers and those who died of pestilence; [...] humbly helping pastors in their church work.”<sup>34</sup>

## HOW?

As our holy Father Founder taught, the first consecration [*dedicatio, consecratio*] of a person – the mystical temple of God – takes place in holy Baptism. Every year, we ought to give thanks to God and offer ourselves to Him and burn again as a holocaust offering [*immolo, sacrifico, holocaustifico*].<sup>35</sup>

The offering ought to be made daily and constantly. Our Podegrodian suggested to everyone two models of daily sacrifice, so that ultimately everything is devoted to God only and absolutely nothing to the devil.<sup>36</sup>

The religious make their sacrifice through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, each in his own institute, according to its charism and rule of life. In the case of Father Papczyński and the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception founded by him, the special way of offering was expressed initially in the *Oblatio*, and finally in the *Norma vitae*. The first Marians were to offer themselves to God, through: love of God and people; the three vows; prayers and mortifications; a constant inner recollection; the triple mission; the proper use of time; love and obedience to the Church and the *Rule*; reception of and caring for the sacraments.<sup>37</sup> This offering was “forever and irrevocable,” strengthened further by the oath of perseverance in the Congregation until death.<sup>38</sup> The Marians were instructed thus: “So that you will be mindful of your vocation, and avid for the rewards prepared for those who loyally struggle until death, each day renew your vows privately before the Blessed Sacrament.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Norma vitae*, I.2-3.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Mystical Temple of God*, XIX.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Mystical Temple of God*, IV.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Norma vitae*. Father Stanislaus’s first companion, Stanislaus Krajewski, received the name of John of the Immaculate Conception and made his act of “offering himself to the Society of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M.” in the form of the *Oblatio*, the same one made by Fr. Founder (cf. FHR, 14-16).

<sup>38</sup> *Norma vitae*, I.6.

<sup>39</sup> *Norma vitae*, V. 6.

Ultimately, everything is to be done out of love and through love.<sup>40</sup> This applies to all people, but also especially to the Marians.<sup>41</sup> Every sacrifice and every action is to take place in union with the Church (which Father Papczyński calls “the Bride of Christ” and “Mother,” “Vineyard,” “Flock” and “Body”) and in obedience to the Pope, the bishops and all superiors. This obedience is clearly seen in the life of the Marian Founder and in his written works.

The love and grace constantly received from God are to motivate us to offer ourselves to God and to serve other people. Among the most needy, Father Papczyński sees sinners and the dead. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy were extensively discussed by our Founder in the Chapter called *The Restoration of the Mystical Temple* in his spirituality handbook, *Mystical Temple of God*.<sup>42</sup>

After departing from the Piarists, Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary chose the mystery of the Immaculate Conception as his vital center and the reference point for his own life and for the new Institute. This mystery became the foundation and center of the founding charism of our holy Father Founder and our Congregation; it became a fire in which to sacrifice the life of Father Stanislaus and of each of his disciples.

The sacrifice of the consecrated life is not only for a religious, but for the mission, for the salvation of the world. A mission always flows from the charism and is a response to the signs of a specific time, therefore today it may take on different forms from those of the times of our Father Founder.

## Conclusion

The holocaust offering of our holy Father Founder, initiated in a special way by the act of the *Oblatio*, was fulfilled in his later life and death, in founding and guiding the Society of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception, in the ultimate offering and solemn vows according to the *Norma vitae*. This sacrifice was of a dimension which was Trinitarian, Christocentric and Christotypical, pneumatological, of the Passion, Mar-

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Mystical Temple of God*, V: “The sacrifices of the Mystical Temple, unless they are offered by a ‘love-priest,’ are displeasing to God, and he rejects them entirely.”

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Norma vitae*, II.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Inspectio cordis: Before Every Most Holy Communion*, 2-3; *ibid.*, *Sixth Sunday After the Epiphany, Before Most Holy Communion* 1-3; *On the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the Apostles, After Most Holy Communion*, 1; *On Love (charitas)*, 1.

ian, ecclesial, eschatological, biblical, and apostolic. All these elements or dimensions consistently build the immaculistic dimension and foundation of both the sacrifice of Father Stanislaus and his founding charism and the charism of the Congregation of Marian Fathers.

Today, each of us is invited to make our own *Oblatio* following the example of our holy Father Founder. Perhaps, it could be like this:

I, NN, created in the image and likeness of the Triune God, consecrated through Baptism as the mystical temple of God, redeemed in the Crucified and Risen Christ, sanctified by the Holy Spirit; I, a sinner, called by the grace of God to holiness and to communion with Him and with the Saints in Heaven, offer and consecrate everything I am and possess to the Triune God, the Eternal Father, my Creator; to the eternal Son, my Redeemer; to the eternal Spirit, my Sanctifier; and the Mother of God, Mary, ever Virgin, conceived without the stain of original sin, leaving everything to myself.

Conscious of God's love and mercy, and of the enormity of the graces that He constantly bestows upon me, desiring to love Him alone, I offer and consecrate myself for the greater glory of God and for the honor of Mary Immaculate, in order to spread devotion to the Immaculate Conception and the salvation of the living and the dead, in communion with the Church, in that which I love above my own life, the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. May God fulfill in me what He Himself has begun. Amen.



## ***Oblatio*: From Individualism to a Charismatic Community**

### **Introduction**

Our last General Chapter, celebrated in Rome in 2017, issued a Declaration, which resolved the matter as to which moment in our Congregation's history should be regarded as its origin.<sup>1</sup> Although in the times after the renewal, it was believed that the date of the Marian Congregation's foundation was October 24, 1673, i.e., when Bishop Stanislaus Jacek Świącicki (1615–1696) issued the act of visitation of the religious community living in the Korabiew Forest, yet, according to some confreres, this view was an interpolation of 20<sup>th</sup> century Church Law onto the 17<sup>th</sup> century situation. The debate on this topic also produced other opinions<sup>2</sup>. It should be noted that the White Marians' tradition regarded the day of December 11, 1670, as the initiation of our Congregation. On that day, our Father Founder, St. Stanislaus Papczyński declared his intent to found a new Congregation, which he did at the same time that he received his dispensation from the religious vows in the Piarist Order. Through the profession of the religious vows, he also spiritually united himself with new Congregation, "which by the grace of God I resolve to found)."<sup>3</sup> The text of his vows and his future plan are known as the *Oblatio*. For this reason, and following the logic of the earlier tradition, the General Chapter made its decision.

Being the expression of our holy Father Founder's original intentions, the *Oblatio* is an important document showing the shape of the future Congregation and setting its course of development. Although this document

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<sup>1</sup> *Declaration by the General Chapter recognizing the profession of the oblatio by St. Stanislaus Papczyński on December 11, 1670, as the beginning of the Congregation of Marian Fathers*, in *Documenta Capituli Generalis Congregationis CC. Marianorum A.D. 2017 Romae celebratum*, Roma 2017, pp. 26-28.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Franciszek Smagorowicz, *Początek Zgromadzenia Marianów. Narodzenie nowej tradycji*, in: "Ephemerides Marianorum" 1(2012), pp. 369-391.

<sup>3</sup> *Oblation*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 28.

is personal in nature, for it reveals St. Stanislaus Papczyński's decision as to the future manner of following the path of his own vocation in the Church, yet the attempt to read it from the point of view of modern community life is also valid. By expressing the Founder's wishes, the text of the *Oblatio* contributes to building the community. It is impossible to ignore the fact that the Founder intends to adjust his own life to the "laws, statutes and rites" of the Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception<sup>4</sup> and not to his personal, changing visions. Thus, the purpose of this article is to consider what characteristics of the individual religious who form and shape a community can we take today from the text of the *Oblatio*. We will also see how – shortly before dying – St. Stanislaus personally assessed the path that he had traveled on so that we may understand how his personal experience can help us in the realization of Marian communal life in the present times which are threatened by individualism and alienation more than ever before.

We shall base this article – which is not some grand scholarly dissertation and which must obey the limits imposed by common sense – on the examination of the text of the *Oblatio*. From that same perspective, we will also analyze two other important writings of our holy Father Founder, in which he sums up his life in the face of impending death, namely: the *First Testament* and *Another Testament*. We will try to answer the question regarding how he understood his experience of his community which he established, and then saw growing and legally approved by the Church. On the other hand, speaking of the modern day, we will present selected topics of our Congregation's standing legislation, which is the "heir" – as it were – of the *Oblatio* and the subsequent *Rule of Life*.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, in order to better illustrate some aspects of the modern understanding of religious life in a community, we will use a document – closely related to the matter at hand – which was issued in 1994 by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life *Fraternal Life in Community*. This document fully retains its relevance today.

It should be said that some proffered ideas and intuitions may seem to be an over-interpretation of the *Oblatio* and of both Testaments, but this article is not an *exegesis* of these texts, but only an attempt to read them afresh from the perspective of our times.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> St. Papczyński, *The Rule of Life*, at [padrimariani.www](http://padrimariani.www), Resources: Spirituality, Constitutions, Antique materials.

In order to answer the aforesaid questions, we must define the elements of Father Papczyński's personal choices that led to the development of the community and which he included in the text of his *Oblatio*.

## Offering Oneself to God

In the first place, our holy Father Founder did “offer and consecrate to God the Father Almighty, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and also to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary, Conceived without original sin, my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, my whole mind, my whole spirit, my interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself.”<sup>6</sup> In the context of the circumstances surrounding the creation of this document, this offering of himself may appear only as a personal act of dedication to God. However, reading this text from the perspective of the Church's teaching on the subject of consecrated life today, we will realize that one of the principle characteristics of a mature religious community is the ability of its members to offer themselves to God. After all, the very ability to carry out the mission of one's own Institute is impossible without a previous realization that one is completely dedicated to God<sup>7</sup>. This dedication to God is a condition *sine qua non* not only for the functioning of the community, but even for its long-term survival.

This first quality of a member of a mature community had been present in the entire life of Father Papczyński. In the *First Testament*, which he wrote in the belief that he would die soon due to poor health after his return from Rome in 1692, he returns to this idea of total devotion to God: “I, unworthy Priest and greatest sinner, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary, every day expecting the day of death, uncertain as to the time for all, am ready to accept it with humble thanksgiving as defined by the Lord of life and death.”<sup>8</sup> Further in the text, he explains why he is so devoted to God and stripped himself completely of his personal will: the reason is his vow of obedience that he practiced in the communal life. This explanation is provided because – as a religious – he has no cause to write a will in a secular legal

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<sup>6</sup> *Oblation*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternital Life In Community*, “Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor”, 40, Rome, 1994 (afterwards: FLC).

<sup>8</sup> *The First Testament*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, pp. 93-94.

sense<sup>9</sup>, and he obeys this rule entirely. This clearly shows that 22 years after making his *Oblatio*, our holy Father Founder remains faithful to the idea of a total dedication to God, although he expresses it in a different way.

The way in which this dedication is shown in his *Another Testament* is interesting. This document was written some months before the Founder's death: he states that he values God's inspiration for the founding of the Marian Congregation more than the honors and benefices offered to him<sup>10</sup>. It is possible – even in the Church – to “live for oneself,” striving for glory and goods; probably, in most cases this is not a wicked way of life, but Father Stanislaus discerns that it is right to follow what is more difficult and what – as he believes – is God's will for him.

Offering oneself to God is also an important vocational element in the life of a modern Marian. Our standing Constitutions are not only a legal document, they also contain matters that could be called ascetic. Many articles can be used for meditation or conferences. As an example, we should mention here article 4, inspired both by the *Oblatio* and the exhortation *Vita consecrata*, which reads:

Responding to the prevenient love of the Triune God, in order to bear more abundant fruit from the grace of Baptism, the confreres renounce everything and, through their religious consecration, totally devote and dedicate themselves to God the Father Almighty, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. May God truly be the center of life for the individual members and the entire Congregation.<sup>11</sup>

It may be concluded in the light of the present arguments that the idea of a total, radical offering of oneself to God is a challenge for the Marian community today. Furthermore, it raises a question as to whether every Marian is ready to completely devote himself to God, to give Him all of his abilities and talents in order to build up the religious community and the whole Church.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Another Testament*, in: *Historical Writings of...*, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> *Constitutions and Directory of the Congregation of Marian Fathers*, p. 74, Rome, 2018.

## Serving as a Community Superior

Declaring his belonging in a community which he intended to “found by the grace of God,” Father Papczyński shows his role in that community, emphasizing that he would be in it a “whole-hearted servant-slave”<sup>12</sup>. The fact is that he had carried out the functions of the superior ever since he found himself in the Korabiew Forest among the hermits, who had lived there for 12 years under the leadership of Krajewski. Regardless, it seems right to say that he considered it a service and a service in obedience to “His Holiness the Vicar of Jesus Christ and to his delegated official authorities.” Furthermore, although Father Stanislaus considers himself the founder of the Marian Order, and therefore an authority for all of the members of the community, he emphasizes that he will obey “all my mediate and immediate Superiors.”<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, in the *First Testament* our holy Father Founder strongly emphasizes that, being bound by the vow of obedience, “I do not make any will as regards belongings, because voluntarily poor, I do not have any; since I held all in common *and for common, I also leave everything to the community*.”<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, *Another Testament* contains some specific dispositions, but Father Stanislaus himself provides the reasons for making them: “Mindful of the vow of poverty, I should not order anything about other things, but since many things usually are done improperly, therefore by the Divine will I distribute in this way from the sums [...]”<sup>15</sup> It should not surprise anyone that he modifies his opinion a few years after writing his first testament. This indicates his realism rather than the desire to rule. Furthermore, it is significant that in his last will, he repeatedly calls himself “an unworthy superior,<sup>16</sup>” and names our Lord and His Blessed Mother the true directors of the Order<sup>17</sup>. It should also be added that he constantly emphasizes the dependency of the Marian community on the Church’s authority<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> *Oblation*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *The First Testament*, in *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> *Another Testament*, in *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> *Another Testament*, in *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 108.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

It is worth emphasizing Saint Stanislaus Papczyński's statement that he intends to serve "chastely and zealously."<sup>19</sup> This was not only his desire, but also a program for his life, as it were, as well as a pointer for future members of the community. Reading both testaments, one may conclude that Fr. Stanislaus was endeavoring to do just so. One might wonder what Father Papczyński meant when speaking about chastity. Although this subject can be discussed, in the light of both testaments, it seems right to say that it is about having a right intention.

It is also obvious that our holy Father Founder's service is a model for the contemporary superiors of the Congregation. The aforementioned document of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life devotes a great deal of attention to the fact that being a superior at all levels always mean selfless service to the community, assistance in seeking God's will, but not the fulfillment of personal ambitions<sup>20</sup>.

Contemporary Marian legislation confirms the Founder's intuition on the subject, presenting the role of the superiors in the Congregation as follows:

The Superiors, who will have to render an account for the souls entrusted to them, should first try to understand well and have a love for the will of God, which they are to reveal to others in a spirit of brotherly service, as it relates both to the entire Congregation and to each one of the members over whom they preside.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, the Constitutions also stipulate that – following the example of our holy Father Founder – every Marian, regardless of his office or status within the community, must show respect for the pope and the local bishop and – as the text of the *Oblatio* indicates – "reasonably understood obedience", not a blind and passive one.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> In 2008, I discussed this topic in Master's thesis: Dmitrijs Artjomovs, *Władza zakonna w świetle Instrukcji Życie braterskie we wspólnocie „Congregavit nos in unum Christi Amor”*, Lublin (mps), 2008, to which I now refer.

<sup>21</sup> *Constitutions of the Marian Fathers*, op. cit., art. 63, p. 94.

<sup>22</sup> *Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 30.

## Importance of the Law

Reading the *Oblatio* for the first time, without knowing Father Papczyński at all, one may get the impression that his attitude towards the law is too rigorous:

I also promise that I will adjust my way of life to its laws, statutes and rites, and that I will never act nor permit or consent, not even indirectly, that these be in some way abolished, or changed, or that dispensation be given from them, except that a grave and lawful necessity requires it.<sup>23</sup>

Why is it so important to keep the letter of the law? The text of *Another Testament* shows that Saint Stanislaus understood human weakness well. Giving instructions on how to manage specific sums of money, he says: "... since many things usually are done improperly, so you need to keep the law."<sup>24</sup> Through his *Oblatio*, Saint Stanislaus personally undertakes the same obligation of not changing or abolishing these laws, statutes and rites, which – as we know – were about to be shaped.

Father Papczyński's intuition regarding the significance of the law can be discerned in the *First Testament*, where he makes a strong connection between upholding the laws and something more important and more meaningful for the religious vocation:

To my most dear Brothers in Christ I especially and urgently recommend Love for God and neighbor, a union of minds, humility, patience, sobriety, modesty, a faithful fulfillment of their vocation and a constant perseverance in it, an enduring veneration of the Virgin conceived without sin, a fervent help to the Deceased, an observance of religious rules, religious discipline and perfection, and always a more zealous spirit; let them remember, that for those things that they have vowed to God and to the Most Noble Virgin, a most certain and infallible reward is laid up in heaven for them.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Another Testament*, in *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 110.

<sup>25</sup> *First Testament*, in *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 96.



And also:

To my Companions, and (if it is proper to say) to my Sons, I greatly commend love for God and neighbor, zeal for the Catholic faith, respect, reverence and obedience to the Most Holy Apostolic See; observance of the vows, humility, patience, help to the Deceased, and peace with all<sup>26</sup>.

Further in the text, our holy Father Founder insists quite rigorously on the necessity to uphold the standing law:

Father Joachim of St. Anne<sup>27</sup> was elected as a Coadjutor for me; now I declare him also as [my] successor, obliging his conscience by the severe judgment of God to maintain most strictly the regular observance implanted by God.<sup>28</sup>

And he also adds:

And if Father Joachim by the consent of the Fathers should again be confirmed as a Coadjutor, then I oblige him, by the terrible judgment of God, that – with regard to what has been prescribed by me – he does not introduce any innovations in the habit, in the title of the Order ...<sup>29</sup>

These words clearly indicate that our holy Father Founder greatly cared about preserving the structure and law of the Marian Order even in the face of his death.

In the context of modern-day consecrated life, religious by-laws constitute an important element of the functioning of the community. This is a complex and multi-faceted issue, so we shall mention only such elements that seem relevant in the context of our reflection on the *Oblatio*. Each

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<sup>26</sup> *Another Testament*, in *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 108.

<sup>27</sup> Father Joachim of St. Anne Kozłowski was one of the first companions of Father Stanislaus Papczyński. In 1698, he was elected Fr. Stanislaus's Coadjutor; in Rome, he endeavored to obtain papal approval of the Congregation of Marians.

<sup>28</sup> *Another Testament*, in *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 110.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 112.

religious community in the Church carries out its own specific mission, defined by its charism, but the manner in which this mission is fulfilled is defined by the Institute's by-laws, which regulate the manner of the Congregation's functioning, the way of governance, etc.<sup>30</sup> The by-laws are normative factors that allow the community as a whole, as well as its individual members, to seek and fulfill the will of God while building up the Church. The absence of by-laws would lead to everyone's attempt to act "on their own" without regard to others, which is contrary to the essence of religious life. Therefore, the idea of the significance of the by-laws is still important today, but with the proviso that the function of the by-laws is auxiliary to the mission and charism of the community.

On the one hand, articles in the Marian by-laws that treat the value of the law are particularly important:

The confreres are to strive to conform their entire life to the Gospel as expressed in the laws of the Congregation. They should have a high regard for these laws as means to attain holiness that are well-suited to their vocation; they should become familiar with them and observe them faithfully. Let them remember that both the personal progress of each confrere and the prosperity of the entire Congregation depend above all on this fidelity.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the legislators' implication is clear: the norms of the Congregation are the actualization of the Gospel guidelines for the confreres today and have their worth insofar as they lead to the development of both the individual confreres and the entire community.

On the other hand, article 304 of the Constitutions is very important, which may seem incomprehensible at first glance, but which shows the auxiliary and subordinate function of the by-laws:

The Constitutions, as well as the Directory, do not of themselves oblige under sin; however, one cannot in any way be free from sin who transgresses them in matters pertaining to the precepts of God and the Church or to the vows, or with scandal to others, or out of contempt.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Instruction "Fraternal Live in the Community,"* op. cit., 49.

<sup>31</sup> CM, 303.

<sup>32</sup> CM, 304.

Briefly summarizing this aspect, it can be said that – in the light of the *Oblatio* – the religious by-laws should not be considered the highest value, but they are an important element of the common life and work of the Marians, because they help the confreres determine their place in the community and shape the realization of its charism.

## Religious Poverty

The topic of religious poverty has already been raised in the context of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński's offering himself to God, and this is understandable, because various aspects of the religious life are interconnected and interdependent. However, it is necessary to examine this topic strictly in relation to the evangelical counsel of poverty. In the wake of the promise of obedience, our holy Father Founder states in his *Oblatio*: "I shall possess nothing privately, but have all in common."<sup>33</sup> One sentence shows that religious poverty also considers everything that a religious uses not as his private property but as communal property, which allows the community to be built up, while increasing one's independence from material possessions.

Both Father Papczyński's testaments attest to the fact that he realized his original intention in full:

I do not make any will as regards belongings, because voluntarily poor, I do not have any; since I held all in common and for common, I also leave everything to the community.<sup>34</sup>

As we have mentioned before, as he gives instructions as to sums of money inscribed to him, Father Founder also indicates that he leaves everything to his confreres expressly for the needs of their community.<sup>35</sup>

The significance of religious poverty in the context of community life is very clearly demonstrated in the document *Fraternal Life in Community*:

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<sup>33</sup> *Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 29.

<sup>34</sup> *First Testament*, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>35</sup> *Another Testament*, op. cit., p. 110.

*Poverty*, the sharing of goods, even spiritual goods, has been from the beginning the basis of fraternal communion. The poverty of individual members, which brings with it a simple and austere life-style, not only frees them from the concerns inherent in private ownership but it also enriches the community, enabling it to serve God and the poor more effectively.<sup>36</sup>

This clearly demonstrates the absolute need for selflessness, which undoubtedly affects the functioning of the community and the accomplishment of its mission in the Church and the world.

Faithfulness to the idea of total poverty and reliance on the community, which Saint Stanislaus Papczyński fulfilled in his life, is reflected in the Constitutions of the Congregation. First of all, they emphasize the non-material aspect of this vow. In the modern world, especially in Western countries, it is scarcely right to say that religious are lacking things. The basis of the vow of poverty is not material shortage – although it is worth experiencing it sometimes – but above all, it is an imitation of Christ and of Mary, the rejection of unnecessary attachments, and trust in an eternal reward.<sup>37</sup> It can be said, therefore, that theoretically, the Congregation of Marian Fathers is also faithful to the Founder's idea of poverty, and the realization of this vow in practice can become not only a catalyst for the spiritual growth of the entire community, but also an indicator of whether there is unity among the confreres of a given community. After all, a lack of unity causes a lack of freedom in regard to material goods, and the desire to appropriate.

## Faithfulness to the Church

Speaking of our holy Father Founder's self-offering to God, we also mentioned another aspect of this act, that is "obedience to His Holiness the Vicar of Jesus Christ and to his delegated official authorities,"<sup>38</sup> which does not require further comment. However, the *Oblatio* also indicates yet another aspect of fidelity to the Church. Namely, the Founder speaks of faithfulness to the Church's teaching: "I confess that I believe in everything that the

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<sup>36</sup> *Fraternal Life in Community*, 44.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. CM 44-45.

<sup>38</sup> *Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 29.

Holy Roman Church believes, and in what she will teach everyone to be believed in the future.”<sup>39</sup> The fact that the text of the *Oblatio* includes this statement attests to its importance for Father Papczyński as to adhering to the principles of orthodoxy. We know that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary was not yet proclaimed at the time of Father Stanislaus’s making his *Oblatio* nor would it be during his lifetime, and yet the Saint states: “I especially confess, in truth, that Mary the Most Holy Mother of God was conceived without original sin, and I promise that I will spread and defend her honor even at the cost of my life.”<sup>40</sup> This tells us that his fidelity was not based only on the truths of the faith already defined, but was open to future theological perspectives. He did not lock himself in a safe framework of dogmas, important and fundamental for the faith, but which did not always give simple and comprehensive answers.

Summing up his life, our holy Father Founder returns to the matter of fidelity to the Church, both from the perspective of discipline and of teachings. He states that he was born in the Catholic faith and persevered in it; however, if he had made some mistake, he revokes every wrong thought or word.<sup>41</sup> He also expresses his respect and recognition for bishops and for all whom, having ecclesiastical authority, contributed to the creation and development of his Congregation<sup>42</sup>.

At the beginning of *Another Testament*, Saint Stanislaus Papczyński emphatically demonstrates his faithfulness, describing an event from 45 years before, as he was ready to give his life for the faith during the occupation of Warsaw by the Swedish army<sup>43</sup>. And he recommends to his confreres to stay faithful to the teachings of the Church: “I greatly commend love for God and neighbor, zeal for the Catholic faith, respect, reverence and obedience to the Most Holy Apostolic See.”<sup>44</sup> Also in, *Another Testament*, Saint Stanislaus, full of gratitude, offers thanks to the Church hierarchy.<sup>45</sup>

To answer the question as to whether the example of our holy Father Founder can help build up the community today, it is enough to recall a selected fragment of the document concerning fraternal life: “Religious com-

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<sup>39</sup> *Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 29.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *First Testament*, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>42</sup> *First Testament*, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>43</sup> *Another Testament*, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>44</sup> *Another Testament*, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

munity [...] is a participation in and qualified witness of the Church-Mystery, since it is a living expression and privileged fulfillment of its own particular ‘communion.’<sup>46</sup> This statement clarifies why loyalty to the Church is necessary: it is impossible to be in the Church and to bear witness to her unity without being faithful to the Church. If this loyalty is absent, then the very unity of the community becomes a caricature of the Church, because it is then not a “unity for” but a “unity against.” Unfortunately, we have the unpleasant experience of various religious communities which close ranks against the pope, the bishops and even the Magisterium.

The Marian legislation is very precise on the issue of fidelity to the Church:

In submitting to the universal government of the Supreme Pontiff, whom they are also obliged to obey by virtue of the vow of obedience, as well as to the pastoral authority of the bishops according to the norm of universal law, the members should be convinced that, in this way, they are more strictly bound to the service of the Church and respond more profoundly to their own apostolic vocation.<sup>47</sup>

Summing up this brief discussion of the subject of faithfulness, we should emphasize that updating this idea today and reading the *Oblatio* in the context of our time allows us to say that this fidelity is neither blind nor uncritical. On the one hand, the Marians are called to a filial fidelity, to regard the Church not as an institution but as a reflection, however imperfect, of the Kingdom of God. And on the other hand, we are to be open to the future following the example our holy Father Founder, to accept the valid teachings of the Church of today and to recognize that – while the essence of Christ’s teaching does not change – the Church adapts it to the needs of the present. Only then does a religious community in the Church become a true example as it gives an authentic witness to its fidelity to the Church.

### **The Ability to Forgive**

The *Oblatio* concludes with a paragraph which should be read rather as a formal expression of Father Stanislaus’s courtesy, especially because ana-

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<sup>46</sup> *Fraternal Life in Community*, 2a.

<sup>47</sup> CM, 58.

lysts claim that it might have been added later, after the ceremony of his release from religious vows in the Piarist Order. We will quote it here in full:

Kazimierz near Cracow, in the Residence of the Priests of the Order of Pious Schools of the Poor of the Mother of God, in the presence of Very Reverend Father Michael of the Visitation, Vice-Provincial of the Polish Province, of the Religious Father Joseph of the Mother of God, President of the said Residence, and Venerable Clerics of Minor Orders Casimir of the Angels, and Bernard of the Lord's Passion, on December 11, 1670.<sup>48</sup>

The manner, in which Father Papczyński refers to the Piarist delegate, Father Michael, calling him “Very Reverend,” may indicate that he bore no grudge against anyone despite the harm done to him by the Piarist authorities. This may also be indicative of how highly our holy Father Founder valued forgiveness. Although he gives a detailed description of his relationship with the Piarists in his *Apology for the Departure from the Institute of Pious Schools*, written only a year after his release from vows in the Order of Pious Schools, yet this autobiographical document shows no animosity towards his former confreres, although Father Stanislaus certainly feels sorry that things went that way<sup>49</sup>.

In the *First Testament*, he closely links his begging forgiveness for his giving offense to others with offering his own forgiveness: “similarly, I forgive all, even those who will attack me after my death, and I desire and entreat the God of all goodness to be most merciful to them.”<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, in his second will, he returns to the matter of being persecuted in the Piarist Order, and although he does not hide his pain, he reproaches no one. Reading St. Stanislaus Papczyński's other autobiographical works and letters, one can see that he highly valued the religious vocation and wanted to realize it as a Piarist, so even on the threshold of death he could not think about it calmly. In his testament he states:

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<sup>48</sup> *Oblation*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> See *Apology for the Departure from the Institute of Pious Schools*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007.

<sup>50</sup> *First Testament*, op. cit., p. 95.



For I suffered very grievous persecutions in the Institute of Pious Schools, I was even nearly killed out of ill will, and finally I was unfairly dispossessed of my first vocation.<sup>51</sup>

Somewhat further in the document, he asks to be forgiven for all his inequities, giving his motive thus: “ ... pleading that for the love of Jesus Christ they forgive my frailty.”<sup>52</sup> It may be inferred from this phrase that for the love of Christ, he also forgives everyone, although he does not say it directly anywhere in his testaments.

In the modern understanding of life in the community, one should be guided by realism, as Father Papczyński was. Wherever there are people, there will always be differences of opinion that may lead to conflicts. The document *Fraternal Life in Community* states:

The communitarian ideal must not blind us to the fact that every Christian reality is built on human frailty. The perfect “ideal community” does not exist yet: the perfect communion of the saints is our goal in the heavenly Jerusalem. Ours is the time for edification and constant building. It is always possible to improve and to walk together towards a community that is able to live in forgiveness and love. Communities cannot avoid all conflicts. The unity which they must build is a unity established at the price of reconciliation.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, it seems right to say that the growth of a community would be possible only when its individual members break out from their personal limitations by forgiving all who really – or only in their subjective perception – caused them harm. Naturally, this does not mean that evil may be condoned or justice given up, but forgiveness is the beginning of a dialogue between the conflicted parties.

It is not surprising then that such a personal act as forgiveness is a point of interest of the Marian legislation. We cannot possibly quote the entire Chapter II of Part Three of our Constitutions<sup>54</sup>, which very strongly emphasizes the importance of fraternal love and forgiveness<sup>55</sup>, but we will cite

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<sup>51</sup> *Another Testament*, op. cit., pp . 106-107.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 108.

<sup>53</sup> *Fraternal Life in the Community*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> CM 98-104.

<sup>55</sup> See particularly VM 98.

article 101, so very important in this context, which outlines a helpful attitude in preventing conflicts:

Carrying one another's burdens, the members should patiently bear with the faults and weaknesses of their confreres, which are inevitable in human life. In charity, they should try to understand and tolerate the opinions that are different from their own, as well as other disagreements that arise from the diversity of character, age or nationality. In this way, let unity of spirit in the bond of peace be preserved in the Congregation.<sup>56</sup>

The courteous form of address alone, that appears in the *Oblatio*, speaks today of the Author's wisdom, who was able to forgive, despite his weaknesses of which he was fully aware. This short paragraph can serve as a guide to contemporary Marians in their striving toward more perfect fraternal love in the community.

## Conclusion

Closing these reflections, we should add that the complexity of life in the community, its formation and the personal growth of its members constitute broad topics. Many authors, including the Marians, have already examined this subject. It is not even possible to briefly present this important topic in an article, because of its size limitations, which is why it was decided to accept the text of the *Oblatio* for its framework.

Expressing his desire to found the Marian Congregation, Saint Stanislaus Papczyński specified only some of his decisions. Their list could be supplemented by reading his other works; however, focusing only on the aforementioned text, looking at it through the prism of our Founder's life experience and the contemporary experience of the Marian community, we single out the following characteristics of a religious which contribute to building a charismatic community of life: an ability to offer himself completely; an ability to serve, both as a superior and as a subordinate; a proper attitude toward religious law and institutions; a freedom from worldly goods in the broad sense; a fidelity to the Church's teaching and an open-

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<sup>56</sup> CM 101.

ness to the development of that teaching, as well as a reasonable respect for the hierarchy; the ability to forgive and to tolerate each other, because there is a richness in diversity.

Living in community has always been a challenge for the religious, but it should be remembered that when God calls, He also gives grace; we should not forget that cooperating with this grace is always necessary, because nothing happens by itself.

## **Father Stanislaus Papczyński's *Oblatio* Then and Now. An attempt at a theological interpretation**

The renewal of the religious life in the entire Church, as well as in our Marian Congregation of the Immaculate Conception, should always involve our constant return to the source of all Christian life – Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God in His Paschal and Incarnational mysteries. Furthermore, it is necessary to always remember what Pope Paul VI officially called “the charism of the founder.”<sup>1</sup> He was the first in the Church after the Second Vatican Council to do so. This means the original spirit, which is the inspiration and constant reference point for religious institutes.<sup>2</sup> A true renewal of these institutes will always cause the hearts of their members to burn with truth and love in accordance with this charism. For it does not come from the lust of the flesh, nor from an attitude of mind shaped by this world, but it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, always working in the Church (cf. ET 11).

The Canonization of our Founder, Father Stanislaus Papczyński, confirmed the faith of many generations of his spiritual sons that the Spirit, that had animated and inspired him to give rise to a new religious family dedicated to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother, came from God Himself. There was also a conviction in Father Stanislaus himself that his actions had been inspired by God, as he wrote:

“Divine goodness and wisdom begins and brings to an end what it wants, in spite of countless difficulties standing in the way, and the very unfitness, according to human judgment, of the means. [...] This

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<sup>1</sup> St. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio* (ET), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, 2. Therefore, “it is necessary to recognize and strictly observe the spirit and intentions of their founders, as well as healthy traditions, because all this is the hereditary property of each institute”; PC 2 (author’s translation based on: PC, in: *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, EDB, Bologna 1966-, vol. 1, No. 706, p. 388).

shone forth most clearly in me [...] most inadequate, most unfit instrument [employed by God] for founding the lowest and the smallest Congregation of the Fathers of the Blessed Virgin Mary Conceived without sin. [...] But God himself [...] inspired me for this work [...]” (FDR, 1, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, pp. 61-62.)

For the first time, this divine vision, imprinted on the soul of Father Papczyński, found its distinct manifestation in his act of offering himself to God and Mary Immaculate on December 11, 1670, known as the *Oblatio*. Our Congregation rightly sees its charismatic beginning in this very event. As Father Stanislaus Papczyński was legally severing his bond with the Piarist Order, he also made a step in faith and voiced, albeit in an “embryonic” manner, the intention behind the existence of a new religious community. Three hundred and fifty years since this founding act, we must ask ourselves anew - what was the *Oblatio* for Father Founder himself in the context of his life and work that began then? What can and should it be today for us Marianists who want to rediscover the mystery of the person and charism of our father, St. Stanislaus, and thus to understand anew the path which he originated for us?

### **The *Oblatio* yesterday an expression of the Marian Founder’s *individual sense of faith***

On the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Marian Order, the author of the *Positio*, Father Casimir Krzyżanowski, who dedicated many years of his long religious life to studying the life and work of our holy Father Founder, wrote:

“According to the earliest concept, to this idea, which God conveyed to Fr. Founder in his mind, was that this Congregation was to be primarily devoted to spreading devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Father Papczyński wrote about this many years later in his *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*. This conclusion emerges clearly as we analyze a document in which Fr. Papczyński declares for the first time his intention to found the Congregation of Marian Fathers. This intention was solemnly declared on December 11, 1670, on the same day that he made his departure from the Piarist

Order at his own request and with a Papal dispensation. After a small ceremony involving this formal act, which took place at the Piarist Residence in Kazimierz near Krakow, Father Papczyński publicly delivered before the attendees of the ceremony, an offering of himself (i.e., *oblatio*) to the service of God and Mary Immaculate, solemnly pledging to persevere in his religious vows in the ‘Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception,’ which – as he mentions – he wishes to establish ‘by the grace of God.’”<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, chronologically, the *Oblatio* is the earliest expression of the “original spirit” or charism, enlivening the Marian Founder and aiming at the initiation of a new religious Institute. On the other hand, since spreading devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M. had to be at the time the only and most important aim of this Institute, the *Oblatio* of St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary appears as the expression of his *individual sense of faith* that fits in the context of the *sensus fidei* of the entire Church. This very charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit became the most important foundation for the solemn proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, made on December 8, 1854.

Anyone, however slightly interested in the history of this dogma, is familiar with the centuries-old controversy and difficulties associated first with the formulation of the doctrine, and then with the proclamation of the dogmatic definition of the Mother of Christ’s extraordinary sanctity. There were many *for* and *against* this truth of the Catholic faith, titular for the Marians. Although the liturgical feast of the Conception of the Most Holy or the Most Pure Virgin traditionally existed in the Christian East since the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, consequently spreading to the West in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century under the name of the Feast of the Conception or the Conception of Anna, yet, until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Holy See did not make any dogmatic statement on this subject, mainly due to the lack of direct biblical corroboration. In fact, there were Popes<sup>4</sup>, and even Councils, who had been nearly successful in dogmatically defining the truth about Mary’s Immaculate Conception,

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<sup>3</sup> K. Krzyżanowski, *Powstanie i rozwój Zakonu za życia Założyciela*, in: J. Bukowicz, T. Górski (Eds.), *Marianie 1673-1973*, PUG, Roma, s. 18-19.

<sup>4</sup> A special mention is due to Pope Alexander VII (1599-1667), Father Papczyński’s contemporary, and particularly his famous brief *Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum* critical for the later dogma of the Immaculate Conception, of which an extensive excerpt was quoted by Pius IX in *Ineffabilis Deus*. Cf. J. Królikowski, *Papież Aleksander VII i niepokalane poczęcie Maryi*, in: “Salvatoris Mater”, t. 6, No 2 (2004), pp. 330-337.

but their statements were not universally accepted. It is sufficient to mention the schismatic Council of Basel, which clearly proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1439, but precisely because the Council was schismatic, its decrees were not recognized. Pope Paul III Farnese approved the divine office of the Immaculate Conception in 1538. In 1546, the Council of Trent, formulating the doctrine on original sin, made a stipulation that it did not apply to Mary. They thus indirectly recognized the doctrine by excluding the Mother of God from the law of the universal participation of Adam's children in his guilt. The debate over the Immaculate Conception was still going strong between the *immaculists* and the *maculists*. The former defended the doctrine of Mary's freedom from original sin and sought a consistent theological justification for it, while the latter argued for the rejection of that doctrine. It should be noted, however, that this rejection did not come from the absence of their love for Mary or a lack of comprehension of her important role in the work of salvation, but that it was based on subtle theological distinctions, supported by the authority of saints such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas, who deemed it impossible that the Mother of Christ might be redeemed before even entering into the history of the Savior of mankind.

Such was also the situation during the lifetime of Father Papczyński (1631-1701). Although the arguments that had undermined faith in the truth about Mary's Immaculate Conception and which called this doctrine erroneous, had been long since banned by the Popes: Sixtus IV in 1477 and Pius V in 1570, fierce discussions sometimes still erupted, but more in the theological and academic spheres than in pastoral and practical ones<sup>5</sup>. We

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<sup>5</sup> Objections to the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception, supported by grave theological arguments about the universality of original sin as a kind of *fatum* [fate], were also proffered by the Roman inquisition. This is what two Marian scholars wrote on this topic: "Faith in this truth, restrained by serious theological objections and supported by such authorities as St. Bernard and St. Thomas Aquinas, was something suspicious for the inquisition, which was discreetly acting against the immaculists. The inquisition issued a secret decree prohibiting the use of the term 'Immaculate Conception.' Strictly speaking, the inquisition forbade applying the adjective 'immaculate' to Mary's conception, but not to her person. It was acceptable to say: 'The conception of the Immaculate Virgin,' not 'the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin.' Since 1627, on the strength of a decree, the inquisitors repeatedly objected to books that had prohibited phrases in their title. In 1644, this decree was made public. It placed supporters of the Immaculate Conception in a difficult position. Yet, there were still works dedicated to this issue. However, their authors became very careful in giving titles to their works as to being able to publish them even in the vicinity of Rome. Theologians were amassing testimonies and opinions, printing and re-editing ever more new works. This was a tremendous work, often warped by polemical attitudes. It is difficult to imagine today the violence of the reactions of the *pro* and *con* advocates of



should acknowledge the important role played by the Polish immaculist, St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński in the context of the struggles to discover the fullness of the Catholic truth and to properly “heed” what the Spirit was saying to the Church about the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. His *Oblatio* of December 11, 1670, was preceded by his poetic work entitled *Triumphus sine originali macula conceptae magnae virginis* [The Triumph of the Great Virgin conceived without original sin – no English edition, note of the translator], composed towards the end of 1669. In that work, the author praises the victory of Mary over the ancient serpent and supports the then new way of reasoning in favor of the classic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, proposed by a Polish Franciscan, Fr. Dominik Korwin Kochanowski. Father Papczyński’s poem was included in the introduction to the second edition of Father Kochanowski’s book (see *Introduction to TMV*, p. 1232 in *Pisma zebrane*). The poem by St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary contains a striking emphasis on the *supernatural relationship* that exists between the Mother and the Son, which constitutes her freedom from Adam’s sin. One can even get the impression that Father Papczyński parallels the conception of Mary in the womb of her mother Anna and the virginal conception of Jesus by Mary herself. Our Founder writes [for the want of an English translation, the Latin original is given]:

“Quae culpa totum polluit hominum genus, Abest abest a Virgine.  
 Concepta naturae ordinem contra fuit; Ut ipsa concepit Deum.  
 Posterius ergo quando creditur, prius Cur non sit aptum creditu?”  
 (*Triumphus sine originali macula Conceptae Magnae Virgini* in: S. Papczyński, *Norma vitae et alia scripta*, Ed. C. Krzyżanowski, MIC, Varsaviae, 2001, pp. 153-154) [“Whatever fault pollutes the whole human race; It is far from the Virgin. She had been conceived against the order of nature; And she has similarly begotten God. Since the latter is believed, therefore, Why not believe the former?”]

However, the point here is not to make the Immaculate Conception of Mary equal to the Virginal Conception of Jesus, but to show God’s *supernatural action* in both extraordinary salvific events. The author of the ‘full-

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this doctrine. The Holy See had to intervene more than once in the disputes over the truth about the Immaculate Conception”; cf. M. Piszczak, Z. Proczek, *Niepokalana, ślub krwi i świadectwo mاریanów*, in: “Salvatoris Mater”, t. 6, No 1 (2004), pp. 233-234.

ness of grace' preserving the Savior's Mother, chosen centuries ago, from the stain of Adam's sin that weighs upon all mankind, and the 'Power of the Most High,' shielding the Virgin of Nazareth at the Annunciation, is the same Holy Spirit who comes from the Father and who gives life to the world. The mystery of the *relationship* between the Mother and the Son, sanctifying her from the very beginning of her existence, is the mystery of the Holy Spirit. Mary's Immaculate Conception is the very mystery of this *relationship*, the mystery of the extraordinary holiness of the Virgin Mother of God, Blessed among women because she believed the Word. It is the mystery of Mary's *beginning* in God who chose her and created her through Christ, in Christ and for Christ (cf. Eph 1: 4-5; Col 1:15-17).

From the very beginning, there was a common belief in the Church among the faithful about this special situation of the Mother of Jesus Christ<sup>6</sup>; while defending faith in her Immaculate Conception was often associated – especially from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century – with the so-called 'vow of blood'<sup>7</sup>, which Father Stanislaus Papczyński thus expressed in his *Oblatio*:

"I confess that I believe in everything that the Holy Roman Church believes, and in what she will teach everyone to be believed in the future, I especially confess, in truth, that Mary, the Most Holy Mother of God, was conceived without original sin, and I promise that I will spread and defend her honor even at the cost of my life" (*Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings ...*, p. 29).

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<sup>6</sup> "The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world, is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer. Redeemed by reason of the merits of her Son and united to Him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God, by which account she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth. At the same time, however, because she belongs to the offspring of Adam she is one with all those who are to be saved. She is 'the mother of the members of Christ . . . having cooperated by charity that faithful might be born in the Church, who are members of that Head.' Wherefore she is hailed as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity. The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother." (LG, 53).

<sup>7</sup> See J. Stricher, *Le Voeu du Sang en Faveur de l'Immaculée Conception. Histoire et Bilan Theologique d'Une Controverse*, t. 1-2, PAMI, Romae 1959.

Thus, for Father Stanislaus the truth about the Immaculate Conception of Mary, which the Roman Church will propose for belief in the future, and which has already been particularly defended by many Popes, is not only a matter of private Marian devotion and a subjective conviction. It is an integral part of the faith of the Church which, although not yet made dogma, exists among the People of God and – as an active response to the action of the Holy Spirit is confessed and defended by the baptized.

Pius IX referred to this infallible *sensum fidei* of the People of God as the sufficient and most important theological argument in his brief *Ineffabilis Deus* of December 8, 1854, which defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Pius XII also acted similarly, as he proclaimed in 1950 the dogma of the Assumption of Mary.

There is no doubt that Father Papczyński's charismatic intuition about actively spreading devotion to Mary and serving the truth about her Immaculate Conception, by founding the Order of Marians, is part of the tradition of this *sensus fidei* of the Church, which cannot make mistakes in matters of faith and morals (CCC 91-93)<sup>8</sup>.

The International Theological Commission claims that in order to understand how the *sensus fidei* functions in the life of the Church, it is necessary to place this phenomenon in the context of history in which the Holy Spirit acts and speaks<sup>9</sup>. In this very history, the Church developed certain pious practices, devotions and prayers that often expressed truths which were not yet proclaimed as dogma. Father Papczyński's *Oblatio* of 1670 and his vow of blood, seen in the historical context of his times, clearly place the Founder of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of Mary among such believers who prophetically discerned what the Spirit was saying to the Church of their time and even had the courage to proclaim it at the cost of their life.

### **The *Oblatio* now – a call to interpret anew and accept the main charism of the Marians**

By offering himself to God and Mary Immaculate, Father Stanislaus laid the foundations for his life's work: the Marian Order of the Immacu-

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<sup>8</sup> See also: International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei w życiu Kościoła*, Dehon, Krakow 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, No 69.

late Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose vision God etched on his soul in a mystical way. While still existing only in the mind of Father Founder, this Order was already closely linked to the mission of spreading devotion to Mary in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. This was precisely the purpose for which it had been founded. We may venture to say that – just as the Immaculate Conception of Mary is inseparable from her person – the existence of the ‘Society of Marian Fathers’ loses its sense if it is detached from the main goal set by the Founder.<sup>10</sup> This charismatic goal was not a result of Father Stanislaus’s theological or any other speculative reflection. Nor was it the fruit of his pious ambitions and projects. It had its source in an authentic encounter with God, a spiritual experience subjected to the discernment of the Church and constantly challenged by the voice of his conscience. This is why, on December 11, 1670, he uttered in a “low voice” the words flowing out of his heart:

“I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczyński, [...] offer and consecrate to God the Father Almighty, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and also to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary, conceived without original sin, my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, my whole mind, my whole spirit, my interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself, so that in this way I may be henceforth the whole-hearted servant-slave of the same Almighty [God] and of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. And so I promise that I shall, to the end of my life, serve Them chastely and zealously in the Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (which by the grace of God I resolve to found)” (*Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings* ... p. 28).

On December 11, 1670, St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary gave himself to God and Mary Immaculate, thus responding to the charismatic gift of spreading the honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother, to which God called him and the entire future Marian community. Did Father Founder know then how to fulfill his mission? Did he have a strategic action plan and the means to implement it? The answer is no. He knew one

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<sup>10</sup> “But lest you remain without work in the Vineyard of the Lord (cf. Mt 20:31), to the utmost of strength you will promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God,” in: St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *The Rule of Life*, on: [padrimariani.org/resources/marian\\_library/Spirituality, Consutations, Antique\\_materials](http://padrimariani.org/resources/marian_library/Spirituality, Consutations, Antique_materials), p. 11.

thing: he was to found the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God. So he followed the voice of God who called him to be totally self-sacrificial. 'Go out of your native land and your father's house to the land that I will show you' (Gen 12:1). He left the Piarists, although not to found the Marians, but he had to leave them God's plan to fulfill. When he left the Order of the Pious Schools, without renouncing his religious status, God showed him the 'promised land' which had to be and still is to be won: the Order of Mary's Immaculate Conception. This key *mystery of the identity* of the Mother of God – her Immaculate Conception – which the Church of his times endeavored to discover and to accept, was left by Father Stanislaus to his spiritual sons as a gift and a task which – although it is already a dogma of the Catholic faith – is still to be re-discovered and accepted.

Then, what does this truth of the faith mean, whose catechistic formula most Marians probably know by heart? It is not just about the chronological beginning of the life of the Mother of Jesus, detached, as it were, from her person and her history, forever connected with the Son, nor about her very freedom from original sin. It is precisely the saving relationship with the Triune God, the personal identity which Mary herself refers to on March 25, 1858, in Lourdes, as: "I am the Immaculate Conception."<sup>11</sup> An Alsatian theologian, François-Xavier Durrwell, who passed away in 2005, thus spoke about it:

One day, the Church, through the mouth of the parish priest of Lourdes, asked Mary to disclose her name. The beautiful lady that appeared, devoted herself to prayer for weeks. To give her name she waited for the day from which she drew her name, the day of the holy conception. On the morning of the Feast of the Annunciation, 25 March 1858, she reappeared, "small and young" as when she was betrothed and did not delay replying. She opened her hands that had been joined together, lowered her arms, then raised them, resplendent with gratitude: "I am the Immaculate Conception". Bernadette went to the parish priest and told him: "She answered: 'I am the Immaculate Conception'". Mary does not call herself merely immaculate

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. Perrier (Ed.), *Je suis l'Immaculée Conception. Colloque organisée par les sanctuaires Notre-Dame de Lourdes et la Société Française d'Études Mariiales*, Parole et silence, Paris 2006; J-M. Hennaux, *La formule de Lourdes: «Je suis l'Immaculée Conception»*, in: "Nouvelle Revue Théologique", t. 130 (2008), pp. 65-78.

in her conception, exempt from the stain of original sin. Of course, she affirms this, but she indicates infinitely more. Her unique and unshareable grace, her eternal identity, the name that characterizes her is not to be found in being exempt from the sin of Adam. God could have protected other creatures from their beginnings from the evil which has from the start spread over the world (Rom 5, 12). Moreover, every Christian is freed from original sin by Baptism which raises him or her up, beyond the sinner Adam, to the point of the divine sonship of Christ who “is before all things” (Col 1, 17). There is a grace more radical than that of being born exempt from “the stain of the sin of Adam”. Again, no human being is radically a sinner, as God does not create sinners. At root, man is created in Christ and directed towards Christ (Col 1, 15-16): sin appears outside, on the surface of this inner reality, seeking to contradict the covenant of fatherhood and sonship which by creating, God has established between himself and his creatures. At root, man is immersed not in sin but in an original grace because before being dependent on Adam, he is created by God in his Christ and for his Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Speaking in this way, the Alsatian theologian does not intend to undermine the truth about the universality of original sin, nor to minimize its significance. Adam’s sin is evident in every human being who, by sinning, snubs and even destroys his *original identity* as a child of God, created in the image of God, that is, in Christ and for Christ (cf. Col 1: 15-18). However, it is not sin that constitutes the deepest principle and truth about man. It is the grace of *creation* and *redemption*, as well as *adoption as sons*. Grace comes first. The firstborn is not sin, but the gift of the Creator’s Spirit who, on God’s day of creation, “hovered over the waters” (Gen 1: 2). Mary, shown as the Immaculate Conception, is the *icon* and *face* of this Spirit.

In article 53 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council calls Mary “the Tabernacle of the Holy Spirit,” thus expressing the truth about the extraordinary *relationship* and *union* of the Mother of Christ with the Spirit, in which the Father begets the Son from eternity.

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<sup>12</sup> F-X. Durrwell, *Mary, Icon of the Spirit and of the Church*, Saint Paul, Slough 1991, pp. 26-27.



Teaching about the mystery of the Holy Trinity, St. Augustine said that the Father is the one who loves, the Son is the beloved, and the Spirit is love.<sup>13</sup> Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish holy martyr from Auschwitz and the eulogist of the Immaculate Virgin, would write on the day of his arrest by the Germans as if paraphrasing the great Father of the Church, that the Father is the one who begets the Son from eternity, the Son is eternally begotten, and the Spirit is the fruit of God's love, the miraculous Immaculate Conception.<sup>14</sup> F.-X. Durrwell, to whom we have already referred above, shows the Holy Spirit as the power of God's begetting, God's womb, where the Father eternally begets the Son, while the Son, through His filial obedience and acceptance, opens Himself to the Father's action and so becomes the source of eternal salvation to those who through faith, which means making a self-offering to God, approach Him (cf. Hbr 2, 5-18).<sup>15</sup>

Four years after the proclamation of the dogma by Pius IX, Mary introduces herself as the Immaculate Conception, finalizing what could not be adequately expressed even after centuries-long theological discussions. She is God's true creation, such a one that God always wanted to have; an authentic *person*, living in close relation to God as the Mother of His Son, because she was filled with His Spirit from the beginning. It is in her that the eternal mystery of God, begetting the Son by the Father, was fulfilled in the earthly realities of human life "when the fullness of time had come" (Gal 4:4). Redemption consists in the fact that the Father begets the Son for the men of the world that he has created, and whoever accepts Him is saved (cf. Jn 3:16). In God's salvific plan, Mary, as the created Immaculate Conception, allows the Son to be begotten also in the flesh (cf. LG 56). She becomes the icon and temple of this Spirit, by whom Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, the Savior and the Salvation of the world, is conceived in her womb.

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<sup>13</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, VIII, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. M. M. Kolbe, *Wybór pism*, No 370, Ed. J. Bar, ATK, Warszawa 1973, pp. 597-598. A concise presentation of St. Maximilian Kolbe's views on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception is found in: G. Bartosik, *Duch Święty a pośrednictwo Matki Bożej według świętego Maksymiliana M. Kolbego*, on: <http://ptm.rel.pl/czytelnia/artykuly/44-duch-swiety-a-posrednictwo-matki-bozej-wedlug-sw-maksymiliana-m-kolbego.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. F.-X. Durrwell, *Mary, Icon of the Spirit and of the Church*, op. cit., pp. 13-28. A detailed discussion of this issue is found in: F.-X. Durrwell, *Christ our Passover. The Indispensable Role of Resurrection in Our Salvation*, Redemptorist Publications, Hampshire 2004.



Therefore, the 'Immaculate Conception' is Mary's title, specifying her vocation and mission as precisely as titles given to her by believers: Mother (cf. Jn 2:1; 19, 25; The Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus of 431, which called the Virgin Mother – Theotokos – the Mother of God). The fact that Mary became the Mother of Christ and of the Church is inseparable from the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, i.e. such a full union between her and the Holy Spirit that what exists eternally in God could come to pass on earth. *Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis*. Her Immaculate Conception is therefore revealed in the Annunciation, and she also announces her title on this holy day in Lourdes. The sign of this theological reality in Mary is her *Fiat* offered to God: *Fiat mihi secundum Verbum Tuum*.

This is the prototype of Father Stanislaus Papczyński's *Oblatio*. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary requires of her a total *gift of herself*, for God fills Mary with all fullness, respecting her human capacity to receive Him. If God inspired Father Papczyński to found the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, then he must indeed have engraved on his soul the image of this Institute, whose essence is a total *self-offering* to Christ and the Church. The Marian motto *Pro Christo et Ecclesia* indeed expresses the essence of the mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception. It was uttered first by Father Founder in his *Oblatio* in response to the charismatic gift of this Marian mystery. Nothing for myself. All for God and His Work. The desire for such a life can only come from the Holy Spirit. He also inspired St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary to open the way of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary for the Marians by offering themselves to God and the Church. Therefore, the Marian charism is the way of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The first step on this path, the *Oblatio* of Father Papczyński, is also the manifestation of its fullness and the essence of the mystery.

## ***Oblatio* and the Evangelical Counsels: From Consecration to Vowing the Evangelical Counsels**

### **Introduction**

This lecture presents the passage from *self-offering* or *consecration*, that is, the first paragraph of the *Oblatio* of our Founder, St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, to that of *promising the evangelical counsels* of chastity, obedience, and poverty. The purpose of the lecture is to present the inner connection between the two, inasmuch as the *total self-offering* of Stanislaus forms the essence, or “soul” of the *Oblatio*, while the *evangelical counsels* form its shape, or the “body”. As will be seen, the primacy of his *total self-offering* as the expression of charity toward God and neighbor (cf. Mt 22:36-40) provides the proper foundation and completion of religious consecration lived out through the observance of the evangelical counsels. For the goal of religious consecration is holiness, the perfection of self-gift in charity.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the purpose of the evangelical counsels is to serve as instruments for the perfection of charity, which is the perfection of holiness.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 39: “... this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested. It is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity... in a very special way this (holiness) appears in the practice of the counsels, customarily called “evangelical.” This practice of the counsels, under the impulsion of the Holy Spirit, undertaken by many Christians, either privately or in a Church-approved condition or state of life, gives and must give in the world an outstanding witness and example of this same holiness.”

<sup>2</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 93: “This is a primary requirement, inscribed in the very essence of the consecrated life by the fact that, just as every other baptized person, and indeed even more so, those who profess the evangelical counsels must aspire with all their strength to the perfection of charity.”

## Consecration as Total Self-Offering and Self-Dedication

In the first paragraph of the *Oblatio*, our Founder first identifies himself and then uses two Latin verbs: *offero* and *dedico*.<sup>3</sup> Although the English translates *dedico* as consecrate,<sup>4</sup> I consider it important to reserve the word consecrate to God, who is at the origin of Stanislaus' self-offering. "Consecration is the basis of religious life. By insisting on this, the Church places the first emphasis on the initiative of God and on the transforming relation to him which religious life involves. Consecration is a divine action."<sup>5</sup> The self-offering of Stanislaus thus presumes – while not explicitly or verbally stating it – the initiative of the Father who first gives of Himself through Jesus Christ. This previous gift of God – namely, that He has loved first (cf. 1 Jn 4:10) – enables the self-gift of Stanislaus in return. "God calls a person whom he sets apart for a particular dedication to himself. At the same time, he offers the grace to respond so that consecration is expressed on the human side by a profound and free self-surrender. The resulting relationship is pure gift. It is a covenant of mutual love and fidelity, of communion and mission, established for God's glory, the joy of the person consecrated, and the salvation of the world."<sup>6</sup>

*Offero* and *dedico* thus are the verbs that illustrate the human cooperation or correlate to the divine action of consecration. In this light, the present self-offering of Stanislaus depends upon the previous and continuous self-gift of the Father in Jesus: "The origin of the Marian consecrated life is in the gracious and loving call of God the Father."<sup>7</sup> Stanislaus'

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<sup>3</sup> *Oblatio*, in: *Fontes Historiae Marianorum* 8, n. 5: "Ego Stanislaus a Iesu Maria Papczynski Filius secundum carnem Thomae de Podgrodzie Diaecesis Cracoviensis, annorum quadraginta, offero, ac dedico..." Cf. *Scripta Historica P. Stanislaw a I.M. Papczyński*, critical edition by C. Krzyzanowski, Varsaviae 1999, p. 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński*, trans. Casimir Krzyzanowski, MIC (Stockbridge, MA: 2007), p. 28: "I, Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczyński... offer and consecrate to God the Father Almighty..."

<sup>5</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Religious Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* [EE], I.5. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsrlife\\_doc\\_31051983\\_magisterium-on-religious-life\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc_con_ccsrlife_doc_31051983_magisterium-on-religious-life_en.html). Accessed on 11 March 2020.

<sup>6</sup> EE, I.5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ratio Formationis*, n. 14: "...This call - coming wholly at the initiative of the Father - is absolutely gratuitous, personal, and unique... Responding to this call of divine love, we feel the need to respond by the unconditional dedication of our lives to His service, taking up the obligation of the common life and striving for the perfection of charity through the evangelical counsels." cf. *Vita Consecrata*, n. 17.

eventual promise to live the evangelical counsels are thus his response to the prior gift of God the Father.<sup>8</sup> The counsels make possible his total gift of self through reproducing in himself Christ's form of life.<sup>9</sup> The basis for such a profession of the evangelical counsels is the special relationship that Christ gave to Stanislaus through the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup> This background is a necessary complement to the self-offering of Stanislaus, since it provides its foundation: his *Oblatio* serves as the response to the previous self-offering of God in Christ.

Indeed, this aspect of experiencing the gratuitous, merciful call of the Father is of the essence for St. Stanislaus and the Marianists, who are called to imitate the Immaculata responded fully to the gift of her Immaculate Conception: "The authentic living of our identity as Marianists of the Immaculate Conception requires that we experience for ourselves the gift of the saving love of God in a personal encounter with Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our experience of God's saving love, as in the life of Mary, manifests itself in a life of joy, love, praise, gratitude, and humility, to which we Marianists are called to give witness before all. This gracious and merciful gift is the source of our desire and strength to respond to God's initiative. It leads us to a generous giving of ourselves to Christ and his mission..."<sup>11</sup> Just as Mary experienced the gift of God from the moment of her conception, St. Stanislaus – delivered by the prayer of her mother while he was still in his womb – experienced the protection of the Virgin and the Providence of the Father who protected him and his mother from death.

After the two main verbs *offero* and *dedico*, Stanislaus identifies those to whom he offers and dedicates himself: the omnipotent God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the ever-Virgin Mother of God, conceived without

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<sup>8</sup> EE, II.13: "These [the evangelical counsels] are a response to the prior gift of God which, being a gift of love, cannot be rationalized. It is something that God himself works in the person he has chosen."

<sup>9</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 16: "It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which, in the consecrated life, makes possible and even demands the total gift of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels... By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, "that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world."

<sup>10</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 14: "The evangelical basis of consecrated life is to be sought in the special relationship which Jesus, in his earthly life, established with some of his disciples... Many of the baptized throughout history have been invited to live such a life "in the image of Christ". But this is possible only on the basis of a special vocation and in virtue of a particular gift of the Spirit."

<sup>11</sup> *Ratio Formationis*, n.1 9.

original sin. The emphasis – as evident in the Latin word order – is placed upon the offering of one person (Stanislaus) to the other persons (of the Trinity and of Mary). Following this, Stanislaus names all that this personal self-offering includes: “[my] heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, my whole mind, my whole spirit, my interior and exterior senses, leaving absolutely nothing for myself”<sup>12</sup>, so as to be thenceforth a servant entirely belonging to the omnipotent God and the Virgin Mary.

The first paragraph of the *Oblatio* thus emphasizes the present action of offering and dedicating, which is the human response to the divine action of consecration. Through such consecration, Stanislaus professes and ratifies the reality that he totally belongs to the Triune God through his total self-gift “leaving nothing for myself.” This prayer of St. Stanislaus is very similar to the *Suscipe* prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola,<sup>13</sup> though it is more highly personalized and detailed. Noteworthy, however, is that St. Ignatius of Loyola places the *Suscipe* at the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*, amid the *Contemplation to Attain Divine Love*, as the *response* to the overwhelming generosity of God. It can be presumed, though, that St. Stanislaus was aware of such divine generosity, as evidenced in two meditations in *Inspecio Cordis* on general and particular divine blessings.<sup>14</sup>

The profession formula provided in *Norma Vitae* follows the order of the *Oblatio*, placing the primacy upon self-offering that is then lived out through the evangelical counsels: “I... out of pure love of God, for his greater glory, and the honor of the Virgin... offer myself to the Divine Majesty... and I vow Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience to its Superior.”<sup>15</sup> This is notably different than the current vow formula, which begins with the profession of vows according to the Constitutions.<sup>16</sup> Although it can be presumed that

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<sup>12</sup> *Historical Writings*, p. 28. Cf. *Oblatio*, “cor meum, animam meam, intellectum, memoriam, voluntatem, affectus, mentem totam, animum totum, sensus interiores et exteriores, et corpus meum, nihil mini plenitud reliquendo”

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, *The Contemplation to Attain Divine Love*, (trans. E. Mullen) p. 120. “Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.”

<sup>14</sup> *Wejrzenie w głąb serca [Inspecio Cordis]* in: *Pisma Zebrane*, Warsaw 2007 (PROMIC), *O dobrodziejstwach ogólnych*, p. 982ff and *O poszczególnych dobrodziejstwach Bożych*, p. 984ff.

<sup>15</sup> *Norma Vitae*, n. 1.6.

<sup>16</sup> *Constitutions and Directory of the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary*, Stockbridge, MA, 2018, n. 192: “I, N., N., for the glory of the Triune God, for the honor of the Immaculate Immaculate Conception of the Most

such a total self-gift is included in the vows, it is nonetheless an important element that St. Stanislaus verbalized the self-gift first, with only a brief mention of the evangelical counsels as the means for living that self-gift.

### Consecration through Promising the Evangelical Counsels

Thus, only in the second and third paragraphs of the *Oblatio*, our Founder Stanislaus *promises* (*promitto*) until the end of his life to live in chastity, obedience, and poverty. Whereas the first paragraph emphasizes the present, the second paragraph - as a promise - emphasizes the future action of Stanislaus unto death. He identifies the concrete way in which he intends to live out such self-offering to God: in cooperation with the consecrating action of the Holy Spirit, that is, through the evangelical counsels.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the profession of the evangelical counsels are a triple expression of the single 'yes' to a relationship of total consecration to God.<sup>18</sup>

Whereas the total self-offering of the first paragraph can be described as the form or inner reality of consecration, the evangelical vows are the matter or visible manifestation of such a consecrated life.<sup>19</sup> This concrete shape is taken from the example of Jesus Christ, who Himself lived in chastity, obedience, and poverty during His earthly life. Stanislaus - and all future Marian - through the counsels enjoin upon themselves the principal task of the closer imitation of Christ and the way of life He has embraced.<sup>20</sup> The evangelical counsels then are not external additions to a life of self-offering

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Blessed Virgin Mary, to assist the dead, and to spread the Kingdom of God, in the presence of the entire community, through your hands, Reverend Father, vow to almighty God..."

<sup>17</sup> *EE*, I:7: "This profession, in imitation of Christ, manifests a particular consecration which is 'rooted in that of baptism and is a fuller expression of it' (*Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 5). The fuller expression recalls the hold of the divine person of the Word over the human nature which he assumed and it invites a response like that of Jesus: a dedication of oneself to God in a way which he alone makes possible and which witnesses to his holiness and absoluteness. Such a consecration is a gift of God: a grace freely given."

<sup>18</sup> *EE*, II: 14: "As a response to the gift of God, the vows are a triple expression of a single 'yes' to the one relationship of total consecration. They are the act by which the religious 'makes himself or herself over to God in a new and special way' (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 44)."

<sup>19</sup> *EE*, II, 15: "The vows themselves are specific: three ways of pledging oneself to live as Christ lived in areas which cover the whole of life: possessions, affections, autonomy. Each emphasizes a relation to Jesus, consecrated and sent."

<sup>20</sup> *Ratio Formationis*, n. 15: "The principal task of a Marian is the closer imitation of Christ by taking up the same type of life he embraced - poor, celibate and obedient to the Father - for the sake of the Kingdom."

to God; rather, they are the incarnate expression of such a life entirely offered and dedicated to God. That is, one cannot live a life totally given over to God in any manner, but only by imitating the life of the Consecrated One.<sup>21</sup> “Jesus himself is the one whom the Father consecrated and sent in a supreme way (cf. *Jn* 10:36).”<sup>22</sup>

The other example of such total dedication to God is that of Mary Immaculate, who lived her life in intimate communion with Jesus: “Mary in fact is the sublime example of perfect consecration, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to him...”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the profession of the evangelical counsels puts one in close communion with Mary.<sup>24</sup> As adopted in the first rule of life (namely, *The Rule of the Ten Evangelical Virtues of the B.V.M.*), Marianists were and are to live their self-offering to the Triune God through imitation of Mary’s evangelical virtues.<sup>25</sup> There is, then a particular and unique self-gift to God in and through Mary, as Stanislaus emphasizes in the *Oblatio*: he not only offers Himself to God but to the Blessed Virgin, conceived without sin.<sup>26</sup> This self-gift to Mary is justified because she is the model of Marian consecrated life, inspiring a life of fruitful response to the Lord through the counsels.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 22: “Jesus is the One whom “God anointed ... with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38), the One “whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world” (*Jn* 10:36). Accepting his consecration by the Father, the Son in turn consecrates himself to the Father for the sake of humanity (cf. *Jn* 17:19).”

<sup>22</sup> *EE*, I.6.

<sup>23</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 28: “Consecrated life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Spirit, in the knowledge that acceptance of the “virginal and humble life” of Christ also means imitation of Mary’s way of life...”

<sup>24</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 18: “Nor can it be denied that the practice of the evangelical counsels is also a particularly profound and fruitful way of sharing in Christ’s mission, in imitation of the example of Mary of Nazareth, the first disciple, who willingly put herself at the service of God’s plan by the total gift of self.”

<sup>25</sup> *EE*, II.53: “It is especially in Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, that religious life comes to understand itself most deeply and finds its sign of certain hope (cf. LG 68). Mary showed throughout her life all those values to which religious consecration is directed. She is the Mother of religious in being Mother of him who was consecrated and sent, and in her *fiat* and *magnificat* religious life finds the totality of its surrender to and the thrill of its joy in the consecratory action of God.”

<sup>26</sup> *Historical Writings*, p. 28: “and also to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary, Conceived without original sin...”

<sup>27</sup> *Ratio Formationis*, n. 20: “Thus, Mary is the model of our consecrated life. For this reason, we draw from her life inspiration for the responses that we must make to the Lord in our daily lives. We look to her to learn how to live fruitfully our consecrated chastity, poverty and obedience, in a continual struggle against the three-fold concupiscence (cf. 1 *Jn* 2:16), every temptation and sin.”



## The Primacy of Self-Gift: The Proper Order of the *Oblatio*

When the three aspects (divine consecration, self-offering and dedication, and the profession of the evangelical counsels) are held together in tension and in proper order, it becomes apparent that the profession of the evangelical counsels is not an end in itself but rather a means to more fully receiving the gift of God and for more fully giving of oneself to Him. The profession of the counsels manifests itself as an end in itself when the external observance of rules is unduly emphasized, without the corresponding interior dynamism of self-gift. The proper goal of the evangelical counsels is to make Christ visible to the world.<sup>28</sup> The counsels are thus expressions of the work of the Spirit, who moves the heart of each Marian to respond fully to the Father by configuring him to Christ.<sup>29</sup> The Holy Spirit thus imprints upon the entire person, like a potter upon his clay (cf. Is 64:8; Jer 18:1-10), the sentiments of Christ (cf. Phil 2:5-8; 1 Cor 2:16).<sup>30</sup> In this regard, the path of the evangelical counsels serves as the complement to total self-offering as the particular means chosen by Christ and Mary Immaculate to grow in that self-offering *unto death* (cf. Jn 13:1-2; Phil 2:6-11). Such consecration signifies a death to the mode of existence of this world, so as to assimilate oneself already now to the mode of existence of Christ in the Kingdom to come (cf. 1 Cor 7:29-31)

In recognizing the divine action of consecration as a call to total self-gift, man discovers that he never belonged to himself, but only to the Lord, who created us in His image and likeness (cf. Romans 14:7-9; Genesis 1:27). In truth, no person – particularly no religious – is ever in total possession of himself; rather, man always belongs to God as His beloved creature and son. Sin is the attempt to sever that filial dependence on the Father. Through such a radical self-surrender to the Father in imitation of Jesus,

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<sup>28</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 1: “By the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus — the chaste, poor and obedient one — are made constantly ‘visible’ in the midst of the world.” n. 18: “The evangelical counsels, by which Christ invites some people to share his experience as the chaste, poor and obedient One, call for and make manifest in those who accept them an explicit desire to be totally conformed to him.”

<sup>29</sup> *Ratio Formationis*, n. 18. “It is the Holy Spirit who has moved our hearts to respond fully to God’s call to take up the Marian way of life. It is he who guides the growth of this desire, helping it to mature into a positive response and sustaining it as it is faithfully translated into daily life; it is he who shapes and molds our hearts, configuring us to Christ and prompting us to make his mission our own.”

<sup>30</sup> cf. A. Cencini, *I Sentimenti di Figlio: Il cammino formativo nella vita consecrata* (EDB 1998).

the Holy Spirit teaches the Marian to participate in the Trinitarian life *in the incarnate modality of the evangelical counsels*.<sup>31</sup> Through the evangelical counsels, man lives *from* the Father (entirely dependent upon Him), *in* the Spirit (breathing and acting in Love), *with* the Son (in imitation of His way of life). That is, inasmuch as the Son has received *all* in the gift of the Spirit from the Father, He returns *all* in the same Spirit in thanksgiving to the Father through His life of the evangelical counsels and especially through His Paschal Mystery (cf. Heb 9:14).

The evangelical counsels form a unity when seen from the perspective of the Triune God of Love: they are the incarnate expressions of the divine Love become flesh in Jesus Christ and in His disciples and religious. The evangelical counsels thus incarnate and bring to completion the divine work of consecration of the human person. The total self-giving that is made in *word* through the *Oblatio* is lived out in the *flesh* of Stanislaus and of each of the Marians in their daily religious life. That is, through the action of the Spirit who consecrates, the *word* spoken by Stanislaus becomes *flesh* in the evangelical counsels (Jn 1:14).

### Implications for Marians Today

The basis of living the evangelical counsels is the *total* self-offering to God *without reserve: nihil mihi penitus relinquendo*. The regulations in the Constitutions regarding how to live the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience ought not *limit* self-giving, but rather give it *direction* and *firm purpose*: namely, the perfection of charity expressed in total self-giving. Indeed, the Marian vocation grows out of a personal experience of the love of God for him: “The authentic living of our identity as Marians of the Immaculate Conception requires that we experience for ourselves the gift of the saving love of God in a personal encounter with Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>32</sup> This gift of the saving love of God begins

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<sup>31</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 21: “21. The deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is revealed when they are viewed in relation to the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness. They are in fact an expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. By practising the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with particular intensity the Trinitarian and Christological dimension which marks the whole of Christian life.”

<sup>32</sup> *Ratio Formationis*, n. 19: “Our experience of God’s saving love, as in the life of Mary, manifests itself in a life of joy, love, praise, gratitude, and humility, to which we Marians are called to give witness before all. Th is gracious and merciful gift is the source of our desire and

at conception, from the moment when the Holy Spirit first infuses life into each person, and continues unto eternity; only in light of that total gift of self in love is a Marian capable of returning that total gift of self in love for Christ and the Church.

However, one can thus ask: what happens if a Marian were to profess poverty, chastity, and obedience, but without this personal experience of the love of God, enabling him to participate in this *total* self-offering, in imitation of Stanislaus? In such a case, we find a confrere who does not live in communion with the risen Lord, offering all freely to Him (cf. Mt 10:8) to fulfill His will and proclaim His Kingdom (cf. Mt 6:33). Rather, such a confrere is limited in his generosity; he may be intent more upon the verbal rules and regulations than upon the Spirit who inspires and transcends them (cf. Mt 23:23; 2 Cor 3:6).<sup>33</sup> In his book *Kinship by Covenant*, Scott Hahn explains this point in light of the biblical model of the covenant: covenants are an exchange of persons, such that they become kin, whereas contracts are an exchange of duties between two parties who remain unrelated.<sup>34</sup> Religious life, as stated above, forms a covenantal relationship with God; the contractual nature of juridical laws is subordinated to that covenant.<sup>35</sup>

When the aspect of covenant (as indicated in the first paragraph of the *Oblatio*, which emphasizes the exchange of persons: *ego, Deo, and Mariae*) is lacking, then the Spirit of the Constitutions is missing, and there is the lack of such total self-offering and dedication to God. The contrast between these two ways of living the Law (one interior, the Holy Spirit, the other exterior, in written word)<sup>36</sup> is visible in the difference between the Pharisees, well-dressed and respected by all, and the total self-offering of the Lord on

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strength to respond to God's initiative. It leads us to a generous giving of ourselves to Christ and his mission..."

<sup>33</sup> Cf. The contrast that Jesus repeatedly highlights between the letter and the inner dynamism of the Torah in the Sermon on the Mount, particularly in Matthew 5. Cf. Curtis Martin and Edward Sri, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: The Gospel of Matthew*, Commentary for Matthew 5 (Baker Academic, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*. Cf. Also, Scott Hahn, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises* (Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> I.10: "The very nature of religious vocation involves a public witness to Christ and to the Church. Religious profession is made by vows which the Church receives as public. A stable form of community life in an institute canonically erected by the competent ecclesiastical authority manifests in a visible way the covenant and communion which religious life expresses."

<sup>36</sup> Cf. CCC 1966; cf. ST I-II, q. 106, a. 1, resp. Cf. F.X. Durrwell, *The Holy Spirit of God* (Servant Books, 2006).

Calvary, who was crucified naked and publicly humiliated (cf. Matthew 23; Hebrews 13:12). The danger is nothing short of the danger which Jesus time and again indicated in regard to the Pharisees: an adherence to the written law without being caught up in the inner movement of the law, namely, total self-gift in love (cf. Gal 5:14).<sup>37</sup> Such a difference stems from the incapacity to live the total detachment proposed by St. Ignatius of Loyola in the *First Principle and Foundation* in choosing God alone as the final goal.<sup>38</sup> This manifests itself often in subtle manners, primarily in unwillingness to surrender and obey:<sup>39</sup> for example, in the unwillingness to surrender a particular apostolate or to be sent abroad; quoting the constitutions on poverty to justify retaining possessions in an attached, disordered manner;<sup>40</sup> living the vow of chastity as mere abstinence, rather than as fullness of love for Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:25). Total self-giving entails giving up what is called one's "comfort zone" of personal expectations and customs, so as to be continually called forth from our homeland like Abraham (cf. Gen 12:1-2) and leave all to follow Jesus like the first disciples (cf. Mt 4:18-22; Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:1-11).

What results is a certain minimalist attitude of maintaining the *status quo* (sometimes hidden behind an inordinate desire for being conservative and orthodox in theology) without entering into the dynamic of the first paragraph, namely, a radical and continuous conversion demanded by the Gospel for the sake of total gift of self that lasts until the end of life in the concrete manner of the evangelical counsels.<sup>41</sup> It is important to remember that Stanislaus, while being faithful to the teaching of the Church (as indicated in paragraph four of the *Oblatio*), nevertheless fulfills the prophetic function of a religious in going beyond the written doctrine of the Church

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Curtis Martin and Edward Sri, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: The Gospel of Matthew*, Commentary for Matthew 5:20.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 23. Cf. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I.11.4, on the image of the bird that is withheld from flying by a large chain or by a thin thread, as a symbol of attachment that prevents total transformation for His glory. Cf. Bl. George Matulaitis, *Spiritual Diary* (Stockbridge, MA 2003), p. 31, entry for 13 October, 1914: "Let God and His glory be the axis of my life."

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Wejrzenie w Głęb Serca, O potrzebie rachunku sumienia z cnót*, p. 985, and *O posłuszeństwie*, p. 987, in: *Pisma Zebrane*.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Wejrzenie w Głęb Serca, O cnocie ubóstwa*, p. 994 and *O tej samej cnocie ubóstwa*, p. 996, in: *Pisma Zebrane*.

<sup>41</sup> EE, II.16: "There is also the willing undertaking of a life of radical and continuous conversion as demanded by the Gospel, further specified in the content of each of the vows."

and profess (even at the cost of his life) the Immaculate Conception.<sup>42</sup> The vows cannot be separated from the radical demands of discipleship to Jesus Christ that are made possible by the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 19:26). Otherwise, legislation turns into attempts to domesticate the radical demands of Jesus, which is contrary to the Constitutions that enjoin the complete disposition of one's entire life to the Gospel and to discipleship to Jesus.<sup>43</sup>

## The Primacy of Discipleship and Love in Marian Formation

What is at stake here in formation is the necessity of forming Marians who are first and foremost disciples fascinated with the person of Jesus and the Immaculata. Only through the personal encounter with them – receiving their gift of love – are men made capable of following their example in love.<sup>44</sup> Vocational crises arise not primarily from having discerned incorrectly one's vocation, but rather, doubt that shatters the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>45</sup> The root, then, of vocational crises - both the lack of vocation and the number of men who leave during formation and even after perpetual vows - is in part due to weak identity of a Marian as a disciple of Jesus Christ.<sup>46</sup> That is, they lack the capacity to encounter Christ and respond positively to the demands not only of being His disciple (cf. Lk 14:25-33) but also of seeking perfection in sharing Christ's way of life (cf. Mt 19:16-30).

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<sup>42</sup> *Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings*, p. 29: "I confess that I believe in everything that the Holy Roman Church believes, and in what she will teach everyone to be believed in the future, I especially confess, in truth, that Mary the Most Holy Mother of God was conceived without original sin, and I promise that I will spread and defend her honor even at the cost of my life. So help me God and this Holy Gospel of God."

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Constitutions*, n. 22: "22The holiness of the Church of Christ becomes apparent and is strengthened in a special way by the observance of the Evangelical Counsels, which, rooted in the words and examples of the Lord, are taken up gratefully by the confreres and are employed as the most apt means for the purification of their hearts and for acquiring likeness in charity to Christ and Mary Immaculate." N. 23: "Motivated by this charity, they should not only faithfully observe the evangelical vows, which they have solemnly pronounced, but should also dispose their interior and exterior lives entirely according to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the laws of their own Congregation, thereby striving for the perfection proper to their state of life." See also, n. 303.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Ratio Formationis*, nn. 14-20. Cf. *Constitutions*, nn. 4-7.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Constitutions*, n. 104. Cf. George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Church* (Basic Books, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Ratio Formationis*, n 29ff.

As a corrective to a disordered emphasis upon legislation regarding the evangelical counsels, St. Stanislaus emphasizes the primacy of charity in his *Norma Vitae*, which he conspicuously places before the third chapter on the evangelical counsels, as love of God and neighbor (Dt 6:5, Mt 22:37) is the “common rule and the safest way to heaven.”<sup>47</sup> Without love, a servant of God (namely, a Marian) would be a tinkling bell or a clanging cymbal (cf. 1 Cor 13:1); therefore, Marians ought to obtain this pearl of great price (cf. Mt 13:44-46), so that all that is done by a Marian is done in love (cf. 1 Cor 16:14). Love forms the “motor” that enables Marians to observe the Gospel counsels, as well as all other rules, since “all of these” are to “be observed out of the love of God” (cf. Jn 14:23).<sup>48</sup> All good works are carried out in love, and all evil is to be avoided on account of love. “You will consecrate to divine Love all of your entire life, daily actions and sufferings, and each and every moment... Each and every action and suffering ... [will be consecrated] for all eternity on the altar of love.”<sup>49</sup>

Religious consecration by its very nature establishes a communion between the religious in the community – and not merely a personal relationship between God and the individual religious.<sup>50</sup> Communion with Christ in consecration is expressed in a stable and visible way through community life.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, one of the primary characteristics of religious consecration is its testimony amid communal life.<sup>52</sup> *Norma Vitae* thus emphasizes the corollary to love of God, namely, mutual love: “let it be known that the one who excels in mutual love is more dear to the Divine Majesty. Each of you should keep in mind that the soul of his Institute is love, and to the extent

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<sup>47</sup> *Norma Vitae*, n. 2.3. Cf. Chapter Two on *Love*, and Chapter Three, on *Obedience, Poverty, Chastity*. Cf. A Pakuła, *Charity - the essence of the communal life and the organizing principle of the religious community according to Blessed [sic] Stanislaus Papczyński*, *Ephemerides Marianorum* 2(2013) 395-410; cf. *Religious Spirituality According to Stanislaus Papczyński and the Early Tradition of the Congregation of Marian Fathers*, in which he describes the uniqueness of the order of *Norma Vitae*.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Norma Vitae*, 2.2.

<sup>49</sup> *Norma Vitae*, n. 2.3.

<sup>50</sup> EE, II.18: “Religious consecration establishes a particular communion between religious and God and, in him, between the members of the same institute. This is the basic element in the unity of an institute.”

<sup>51</sup> EE, II.19: “For religious, communion in Christ is expressed in a stable and visible way through community life.”

<sup>52</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 92: “92. This testimony of consecration takes on special meaning in religious life because of the community dimension which marks it. The fraternal life is the privileged place in which to discern and accept God’s will, and to walk together with one mind and heart.”



that he withdraws from love, he withdraws from life.”<sup>53</sup> The works of mercy are to be practiced (cf. Mt 25:31-46), surrounding with “devoted love” friends, adversaries, and enemies.<sup>54</sup>

However, an important aspect that is missing in the *Oblatio*, since the community has not been founded, is the particular mission, the concrete manner of partaking in the salvific mission of Christ, which appears later in the first chapter of *Norma Vitae* and the first (and current) vow formulae. Our current Constitutions explicitly state the mission in the third paragraph, immediately after the charism, namely to “profess, proclaim and honor the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary; assist the dying and the souls suffering in Purgatory; and spread the Kingdom on Earth, serving Christ and the Church.”<sup>55</sup>

In *Inspectio Cordis*, Stanislaus further speaks about the necessity and primacy of love, describing in stark contrast the difference between the religious with and without love: “The man without love, the religious without love is a shadow without the sun, a body without a soul, he is simply nothing... Take the sun from the world, and you take away everything; take away love from a man, and you leave him with nothing.”<sup>56</sup>

Thus, during initial formation, emphasis is to be placed upon generous discipleship to Jesus, capable of self-giving and responding ‘yes’ to loving Jesus Christ and fulfilling the demands of the Gospel (cf. Jn 21:15-19). Without this interior dynamism of personal love for Jesus that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Marians may be partially capable of living the external aspect of the Constitutions, but without the inner joy of entrusting oneself entirely into the hands of the Father (cf. Mt 6:26-29; Lk 23:46), that is part of living our patrimony of Divine Providence.<sup>57</sup> There is the corrective aspect provided by the evangelical counsels as well: one cannot give oneself to God and then proceed along one’s life according to one’s own desires or plans, while claiming to follow God’s will. When lived fully, the evangelical

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<sup>53</sup> *Norma Vitae*, n. 2.4.

<sup>54</sup> *Norma Vitae*, n. 2.5.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Constitutions*, n. 3, for the full description of the mission.

<sup>56</sup> *Wejrzenie w Głęb Serca, O tej samej nocy miłości*: “Człowiek bez miłości (*sine charitate*), zakonnik bez miłości (*sine amore*), jest cieniem bez słońca, ciałem bez duszy, po prostu niczym. Czym w ciele jest dusza, tym w Kościele, w zakonach i w domach zakonnych jest miłość... Zabierz ze świata słońce, a wszystko zabierzesz; zabierz człowiekowi miłość, a niczego mu nie zostawisz.” W: *Pisma Zebrane*, p. 1001-1004.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Constitutions*, nn. 13, 20, 45, 67, 282.



counsels ensure that one lives in light of the Father's will, in the concrete imitation of Jesus and the Immaculata.

The Liturgy – particularly the Eucharist as the self-offering of Christ to the Father – is a privileged source of formation for Marians, “the font from which all its evangelical strength flows.”<sup>58</sup> The manner of worshipping God in spirit and truth (cf. Jn 4:24) is by offering our bodies as our spiritual offering to God (cf. Romans 12:1). That is, true worship is the offering of the bodily, fleshly human existence in a way that is conformed to the *Logos*, to Jesus. The concrete manner in which a Marian worships the Triune God finds its culmination in the Eucharist but is completed through the daily imitation of the evangelical way of life of Jesus and Mary. In living according to the Holy Spirit who inspired the law, Marians learn to fulfill it in the manner of Christ (cf. Mt 5:17-20), whose self-offering in the Paschal Mystery is the perfect worship of the Father. In Christ, there is no contradiction between the letter and the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:6): the Constitutions indicate the daily path to living the Gospel and the counsels.<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusion

Prior to the *Oblatio*, is the gift of God to Stanislaus that enables him to make a return gift; that gift is the Holy Spirit who imparts the charism of religious life and consecration to Stanislaus, to which he responds in his entire self-surrender and gift in the *Oblatio*. The *Oblatio* thus emphasizes not a mere canonical state (of preserving his status as a religious priest), but Stanislaus' intentional covenantal relationship with God the Father in imitation of Jesus' total self-giving through the particular gift and charism of the Holy Spirit. In light of that gift, Stanislaus freely chooses to undertake the commitments proper to religious life. The way to live out religious consecration is precisely by undertaking a common life through public profession of vows, lived out through the Constitutions. For the “distinguishing mark of the religious institute is founding the way in which these

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<sup>58</sup> *Ratio Formationis*, n. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Preamble of the Constitutions: “PREAMBLE—INVOCATIO DEI: In the name of the Triune God and for His glory, out of love and reverence for the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of our Savior, under her protection and following her example, faithful to the Holy Church, for our sanctification and the salvation of others, We, the Marians, accept these Constitutions as a rule of life for living the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

values of Christ are visibly expressed... in its constitutions.”<sup>60</sup> It is telling, then, that Stanislaus - in reciting the *Oblatio* - states it in public (in the presence of his former provincial),<sup>61</sup> stating that he will live his total self-gift to the Trinity and the Immaculata according to the Constitutions of the Society that he intends to found.<sup>62</sup>

The order of the *Oblatio* is important for Marians today, both those already in perpetual profession and those in initial formation. For self-offering and total dedication (in other words, “consecration”) form the “soul” while the evangelical counsels, as expressed in the Constitutions, form the “body” of the *Oblatio*. Only together do they form a unity and a whole, as do the human person composed of body and soul, so as to be a “living being” (cf. Gen 2:7) that has “life to the full” (cf. Jn 10:10). “Total self-giving to God through religious profession is for us the means of arriving at a deeper love and service of God. On the basis of this consecration, we are called to plant and nurture the seeds of the Kingdom in others and to spread it to the ends of the earth. This consecration is also the source of the strength and freedom necessary of our service of the Church.”<sup>63</sup> Only when these two aspects of self-giving and the profession of evangelical counsels are held in proper order and balance in imitation of the *Oblatio* can full Marian maturity – in imitation of St. Stanislaus, Bl. George, and other Marian figures – be attained.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> EE, II.15: “For this reason, the content of the vows in each institute, as expressed in its constitutions, must be clear and unambiguous.”

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings*, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> EE, I.11: “Religious consecration is lived within a given institute according to constitutions which the Church, by her authority, accepts and approves. This means that consecration is lived according to specific provisions which manifest and deepen a distinctive identity. The identity derives from that action of the Holy Spirit which is the institute’s founding gift and which creates a particular type of spirituality, of life, of apostolate, and of tradition (cf. *Mutuae Relationes* 11).”

<sup>63</sup> *Ratio Formationis*, n. 23.

<sup>64</sup> *Ratio Formationis*, n. 33.1: “The maturity of a Marian religious can be gauged from the depth of his love for the Triune God and Mary Immaculate, his zeal for the service of the Church, and his fidelity to the eschatological element of our charism. In the effort to identify with Christ and strengthened by his grace, the Marian strives to love God and neighbor in daily activities with greater zeal. Thus, he is ready to practice and to witness to fraternal love. He becomes a person who is an “expert in communion,” capable of living the Marian lifestyle, and eager to extend his fraternal love to the whole Church (cf. PI 21; C 2-13, 37-38).” Cf. *Ratio Formationis*, n. 24.

**“I shall, until the end of my life, serve”  
(St. S. Papczyński, *Oblatio*).  
The Irrevocability of the *Oblatio* today?**

In this conference, we shall attempt to present the *Oblatio* as an act of total dedication to God, which came as a fruit of Saint Stanislaus Papczyński's experiencing God's actions in his heart. In the life of our holy Father Founder, the *Oblatio* was a turning point, designating the beginning of a new stage, which was the founding of our Congregation. Knowing its effects, the paths leading to it, and the circumstances in which it was made, we shall attempt to resolve the question of its relevance today. In this conference, we shall try to give a plausible spiritual interpretation, not only of the meaning of the word *Oblatio*, but also of the process that took place in the heart of our holy Father Stanislaus prior to, during, and after making his *Oblatio*, as well as the conclusions we can draw for ourselves today.

### **The Heart**

In order to realize the importance of this process, we need to recall the meaning of the term “heart,” so as to be aware of the reality being discussed. The *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, tells us about this term:

[...] In concrete and generally accepted biblical anthropology [...] it is the seat of the conscious, intelligent and free personality of man, the place of decision-making, the seat of the unwritten Law (cf. Rom 2:15), and the place of God's mysterious actions. Both the Old and the New Testament regard the heart as the place where man meets God with this encounter becoming fully effective in the human heart of the Son of God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is my translation of the Polish quote from *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, Ed. X. Léon-Dufour, transl. K. Romaniuk, Pallottinum, Poznań 1990, p. 871.

Following the definition in the *Nowy słownik teologii biblijnej*, one can add that “in a spiritual sense, ‘the heart’ is the area of the inner life and personality of man, his intellectual and rational capacities, and the entire inner nature of his person.”<sup>2</sup> The concept of the heart occupies a central place in religion and mysticism. It is a central part of a person, of his inner life. It is the heart that thinks, ponders, gives birth to plans, makes decisions and resolutions, and takes responsibility. It is the place where ideas, plans, and the paths of their realization are born. It is noteworthy that Fr. Papczyński understood the concept of the heart in this very manner, as he stated in his *Oblatio*:

I [...] offer and consecrate to God the Father Almighty, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and also to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary, Conceived without original sin, my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, feelings, my whole mind, my whole spirit, my interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself.<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, the heart is the primary place of discernment, struggle, and ultimately the place of the manifestation of God Himself. We can speak of it as of a *locus theologicus*. Although Melchior Cano<sup>4</sup>, the creator of this concept, did not *explicite* include this category among other *loci theologici*, yet we may count this term among other theological places without committing a methodological blunder. Calling upon such authorities as St. Bernard of Clairvaux or St. Augustine, Saint Stanislaus Papczyński wrote in his *Mystical Temple of God*:

But if God is the possession of man, then certainly He is most deserving of the most noble place in men; for the more excellent things are to be held in a more excellent way, and the more sublime are to be honored in a more sublime way. Yet what is more excellent or

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<sup>2</sup> *Nowy słownik teologii biblijnej*, Ed. H. Witczyk, Lublin – Kielce 2017, p. 812n.

<sup>3</sup> *Oblatio* in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, MA, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Melchior Cano presented the following systematization of the “theological sites”:

a) fundamental: 1. The Holy Scripture and 2. The tradition of the Apostles;  
b) explanatory: 3. The Catholic Church, 4. The Councils, 5. The Roman Church, 6. The Fathers of the Church, and 7. The Scholastic theologians;  
c) auxiliary: 8. Intellect, 9. Philosophers and lawyers, 10. Human history.

more sublime than God? Since then there is nothing in man either more deserving, or more noble, than his heart, God is to be placed here as on His altar, so that He may rejoice most fully in His whole possession.<sup>5</sup>

Father Papczyński often described his spiritual states, inspirations, suffering and various experiences in connection to his inner self.<sup>6</sup> He described the manner of understanding the facts and events that have taken place and he interprets the resulting emotions as a reaction to these facts or interpersonal relationships.

### **The initiative of God, a preparation for making a decision**

This is the meaning of the call to the consecrated life: it is an initiative coming wholly from the Father (cf. *Jn* 15:16), who asks those whom he has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive devotion. The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and so powerful that the person called senses the need to respond by unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God, consecrating to him all things present and future, and placing them in his hands. This is why, with Saint Thomas, we come to understand the identity of the consecrated person, beginning with his or her complete self-offering, as being comparable to a genuine holocaust.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned earlier by Fr. Tomasz Sekulski, MIC, starting from the biblical texts right up to the texts of the Second Vatican Council and the contemporary texts, the priority of God's initiative is emphasized. Human activity in its every form is always a response to His action. "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you" (*Jn* 15:16). We find the awareness of the primacy of God who is looking for man to introduce him into his mysterious plan in the broad religious experience and especially in the experience of conversion. In the beginning is God's pleasure, who never leaves His creation alone. This absolute beginning does not mean that human ac-

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<sup>5</sup> St. Papczyński, *Mystical Temple of God*, Stockbridge, MA, 2005, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> The expression "inner self" should be understood as its central part, i.e., "the heart."

<sup>7</sup> Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* of the Holy Father John Paul II, March 25, 1996, No 17.

tion is not necessary or that man does not have to respond to it. Through the facts of life, in the midst of struggles, questioning and answering (or receiving answers), man “allows” God reach to him in order to open himself to new challenges. The moment when Father Founder made his *Oblatio* marked the end of a certain stage and the beginning of a new one.

It will probably not be improper to compare the calling of our Father Founder with the calling of the Prophet Amos. “The Lord took me from following the flock, and said to me, go, prophesy to my people Israel” (Amos 7:15). This “[being taken] from following the flock” had a double meaning in the life of Father Stanislaus. The first is the calling itself. Although he was a son of a peasant yet well-to-do family, little John never yielded in the face of difficulties and overcame initial humiliations related to “intellectual impotence.” Entrusting himself to God and Mary’s protection and intercession, he was steadfast in following his heart and he became a religious. There is no need to retell the whole story of his difficult and painful experiences. We all know it well. Many years later, reflecting on his life from a spiritual perspective Father Stanislaus wrote in his *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*:

Divine goodness and wisdom begins and brings to an end what it wants, in spite of countless difficulties standing in the way, and the very unfitness, according to human judgment, of the means. For nothing is impossible for the Almighty. This shone forth most clearly in me the most wretched, most despicable sinner, most inadequate, most unfit instrument for founding the lowest and the smallest Congregation of the Fathers of the Blessed Virgin Mary Conceived without sin. In me the spirit was unequal to [the task], no virtue, little prudence, all were by far too small, for dreaming of rather than for undertaking a matter of such great difficulty. But God himself, God (to whom be everlasting and endless glory, and thanksgiving), as he inspired me for this work of his admirably, that is lovingly, mercifully, wisely, wonderfully, so he himself accomplished it and is accomplishing it for ever and ever.<sup>8</sup>

As remarked by Fr. Casimir Wyszynski, the second aspect of Fr. Stanislaus’s “[being taken] from following the flock” was his “entering the school

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<sup>8</sup> *Founding of the House of Recollection*, in: *Historical Writings...*, pp. 61-62.

of humiliations.”<sup>9</sup> Father Casimir – the author of St. Stanislaus Papczyński’s biography – interpreted this incident, caused by circumstances preventing the continuance of his studies, as a period of learning to worship God and to be humble, as well as a specific “protective period,” preserving him from both the epidemic ravaging central Poland and the pernicious influence of the world. Another important result was his increased trust in Divine Providence, which bore fruit particularly during the period of establishing his new religious community.

Therefore I thank God that, by His will, at that time I was obliged by my Parents to tend the sheep, because (I dare to make it known with tranquil conscience) while I stayed in the fields among the sheep I kept my conscience pure and holy! O my Lord, I humbly beseech of you, that this kind of Providence of Your Majesty, may lead me till the end of my life, – what I hope and believe shall be, – so that you may be glorified in all my works, thoughts and words. Amen.<sup>10</sup>

As demonstrated by the above examples, the time before making his *Oblatio* had become for Fr. Papczyński a period of maturation marked, on the one hand, by personal, intellectual and spiritual growth and prolific authorship; and on the other, by suffering and painful experiences that formed his faith, trust and determination in following the One who called him. Father Stanislaus had a full awareness of himself: of both his original state and the fact of being gifted.

“Be blessed, o Lord, for ever, and after so many bad things done, make me do good ones in my vocation, because in truth, I find that, of myself, I am not fit for anything good. You, however, who are reading about these events do not wonder that they have been related by me, for I thought that it is a wicked thing to conceal God’s benefits, and I wanted to spur you to praising God’s omnipotence and his care about us. To whom may praise, honor, glory be for ever. Amen.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa marianów. Wybór pism o. Kazimierza Wyszyńskiego*, transl. and ed. by Z. Proczek MIC, Warszawa – Stockbridge 2004, p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Second excerpt from *Secreta Conscientia*, in *Historical Writings...*, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> First excerpt from *Secreta Conscientia*, in *Historical Writings...*, p. 13.



This confession, addressed to the Novice Master, seems to be not just a pious act, perhaps slightly exaggerated or even pathetic, of showing humility. It came as a particular profession of the faith proclaimed by the Church against such trends as Semi-Pelagianism.<sup>12</sup> “God’s benefits” may signify God’s action (also through Mary), which Saint Stanislaus Papczyński experienced as early as in his mother’s womb, in his childhood and the period before joining the Piarists. The realization of God’s faithfulness and protection did not leave him in his painful experiences of that time, as well as during the trials and persecution that he suffered at the Piarists, including his imprisonment in Podolínec and Prievidza. Acquired or refreshed alertness to the actions of the Holy Spirit allowed him to perceive subtle inspirations, one of which took place at the moment preceding the *Oblatio*. In the tangle of doubts, fears and anxieties (see FHR, No. 3, pp. 62-63), he “heeded” this glorious inspiration not to dwell on them.

Although just before the time of the release [from simple vows] Divine Majesty **suggested to me**, that while I was going to be released from these, in the same act I would bind myself freely to God by other vows, which I did by offering myself **taken out of my heart**, and made publicly, although in a rather quiet voice (see FHR, No. 3, p. 63).

The *Oblatio* was not an act of desperation. The internal driving coercion and resolve to leave the Piarists were just a part of the whole story, which God directed. Saint Stanislaus was not departing from the Piarists in order to found the Marianists, nor was he intending to fulfill his personal plans of changing his status. We can probably say without falling into some kind of determinism, that God Himself decided to give flesh – in the form of yet another community bearing the name of the Immaculately Conceived – to

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<sup>12</sup> Semi-Pelagianism is a misnomer for a Christian theological and soteriological school of thought on salvation. Semipelagian thought stands in contrast to the earlier Pelagian teaching about salvation, Pelagianism (in which people achieve their own salvation by their own means), which had been dismissed as heresy. Semipelagianism in its original form was developed as a compromise between Pelagianism and the teaching of Church Fathers such as Saint Augustine, who taught that people cannot come to God without the grace of God. In semipelagian thought, therefore, a distinction is made between the beginning of faith and the increase of faith. Semipelagian thought teaches that the latter half – growing in faith – is the work of God, while the beginning of faith is an act of free will, with grace supervening only later.<sup>[8]</sup> It too was labeled heresy by the Western Church at the Second Council of Orange in 529 (online Wikipedia).

the conviction carried in the heart of the Founder and confirmed by the intuition of many theological authorities, as well as by the awareness present in the Church that Mary was conceived without sin. “The Divine vision, which was imprinted upon my soul in respect to the founding of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the B. V. M., having spurned all things, and also the possibility of a return to the Institute of Pious Schools having been hindered, was compelling me to the goal of that vision” (see FHR, No. 6, p. 65).

### **The *Oblatio* as a founding act**

I will start with a personal note. The fact that the *Oblatio* was recognized as the beginning of our Congregation proves the growing awareness of our community’s identity. This awareness involves the charismatic layer. The year 1673 was the moment when the Church, in the person of Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski, recognized our Congregation as an ecclesial community. December 11, 1670, can be called the origin of a new entity, meager and vulnerable in many aspects. All things considered, the rise of the Marianians may be compared with the rise of the Jesuits, who named August 15, 1534, as the date of their origin: on this day, St. Ignatius and a group of students of the Sorbonne made their first vows at the Saint Denis Chapel on Montmartre. The *Oblatio* is more than an act of self-offering or the first formula of a religious profession. It is also a decision: something ended then for Father Stanislaus (the period of life in the Piarist order) and a new stage began (as a Marian).

Although just before the time of the release [from simple vows] Divine Majesty **suggested to me**, that while I was going to be released from these, in the same act I would bind myself freely to God by other vows, which I did by offering myself **taken out of my heart**, and made publicly, although in a rather quiet voice (see FHR, No. 3, p. 63).

It looked as if the grain fell to the ground and died. However, a new life, a new reality burst forth from this (cf. Jn 12:24). This grain fell on the fecund soil, prepared to receive it. The moment of making the *Oblatio* was very dramatic. Father Papczyński was released from his vows in the Piarist Order, which meant leaving it. Being inwardly convinced of his religious

vocation, he made the act of the *Oblatio* out of faithfulness to what God had done in his heart.

Not a few knew that I was in the Congregation of Pious Schools, which was more dear to me than my life, in that most sweet Society of the Poor of the Mother of God. It is very difficult to explain how highly I valued my vocation stirred up solely by God. Moreover I belonged to that most holy company, bound to it not only by the bond of love, but truly also bound by a commitment of the oath of persevering in it for ever. I wanted the first to be indissoluble; the other was dissolved by the one, to whom was given the highest authority of binding and of loosing, the Vicar of the Most Holy Jesus Christ, the legitimate Successor of Saint Peter, Pope Clement X. And yet ah! It came to this by what way of the cross! (FHR, No. 2, p. 62).

The *Oblatio*, which was born and expressed out of pain, reflects the fundamental and most important feature of our charism. It expresses not only the personal charism of our Founder, but is also a part of the founding charism. Naturally, we mean the truth about the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, expressed two centuries before its solemn proclamation by the Church as a dogma. The acceptance of the *Oblatio* as the moment of the Congregation's origin can be understood as the community's desire to draw from it the inspiration for our way of life *ad intra* and *ad extra*. This also fits in with the Church's modern teaching on loyalty to the charism of the religious family.

In the first place, there is the need for *fidelity to the founding charism* and subsequent spiritual heritage of each Institute. It is precisely in this fidelity to the inspiration of the founders and foundresses, an inspiration which is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, that the essential elements of the consecrated life can be more readily discerned and more fervently put into practice (VC, 36).

The biography of Father Stanislaus written by Father Casimir Wyszynski stated that he [i.e., Fr. Stanislaus] "changed his original vocation."<sup>13</sup> Intending no offense to the one of the most eminent figures in the history of our

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<sup>13</sup> *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa marianów*, op. cit., p. 69.

Congregation, we should perhaps clarify this statement. Father Stanislaus did not change his original vocation. What changed was the manner and place of its implementation. The original vocation to the consecrated life remained intact. The bonds linking Father Stanislaus to God (maybe also with the community of consecrated persons), and described by him as “indissoluble” (FDR, No. 2, p. 62), remained alive. The bonds of institutional affiliation to the previous community were dissolved by the Pope’s decision (see FDR, No. 2, p. 62). It is difficult to determine what legal comments were made in regard to the transition of a religious from one institute to another or to his departure in order to found a new community. Probably, the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas were applied. Perhaps today’s legal interpretation of such a situation, however, reflects the ecclesiastic spirit that has been present for a long time. One of the comments on Canon Law regarding religious orders reads:

Considering the vocation to a given institute and the truth about its charismatic origin and character, one could think that a professed member should not transfer from one order to another [...]. However, objective reasons justifying or even recommending this transition may come into play, especially because the transferee does not abandon the state of the evangelical counsels nor compromise his consecration. Therefore, the possibility of transfer – especially to institutes of more rigorous discipline – has a **centuries-long** recognition.<sup>14</sup>

Further analyzing the reasons for a transfer, the author of the above work states: “These kinds of reasons may have a basis in a desire for [attaining] a greater perfection in an institute of a more rigorous way of life (as per St. Thomas), the intention to overcome difficulties created by either superiors or members of the original institute.”<sup>15</sup> As we know, Fr. Papczyński’s departure and the founding a new congregation did not free him from doubts, fears, and questions. In his letter to the Superior General of the Piarists of 1688 or 18 years after making his *Oblatio*, our holy Father Founder expressed his readiness to return to that Order and asked for advice and a confirmation (or a disproof) of his early decisions (see *Letter to*

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<sup>14</sup> F. Bogdan SAC, *Prawo zakonów, instytutów świeckich i stowarzyszeń życia apostołskiego*, Pallottinum 1988, p. 319.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320; also cf. *Apology*, in *Historical Writings...*, pp. 31-60.

Fr. Alexis Armini, SP, in *Historical Writings...*, pp. 77-82.) This speaks of how hard and painful it was to decide to leave the Piarists.

### **Irrevocability of the *Oblatio* today?**

The topic assigned to me by Fr. General contains a question mark. It may be interpreted as an overture to further research. It may also be an encouragement for the Marians to question themselves about both their sense of personal identity and the importance of the *Oblatio* as a founding act that defines our main charism. Everything that led Father Stanislaus to make his *Oblatio*, including the circumstances, his feelings, experiences, etc. that accompanied him, as well as his solid formation suggest perhaps that it [i.e., the *Oblatio*] cannot be ignored in the process of discerning our own attitude and everyday choices, as well as the main element of perceiving candidates and their formation.

The act of the *Oblatio* was a double confirmation of our holy Father Founder's intentions and desires. On the one hand, it confirmed and fortified him in his vocation to live according to the evangelical counsels. On the other hand, it revealed his readiness and resolve to found the Congregation of Marians of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also defining its primary goal. Let's consider the first of these elements. As it has been established before, God is the first to work in the human soul and in life. God is the first who makes the choice and – after the positive response of man – consecrates. It is necessary to recall again the Latin version of the Vatican II documents. This issue was raised by Father Tomasz Sekulski in his paper. Father Papczyński's writings are also a confirmation in which he recognizes the Triune God as the initiator of internal intuitions and movements and gives His love to men. He also gives the calling, or the way of realizing this gift. Even the reading of some of his writings shows that the calling and the fact of being endowed by God were not something that can be questioned or subjected to any interpretation depending on the circumstances, "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" says Saint Paul (Rom 11:29). This seems to be the key to interpret Fr. Stanislaus's immediate dedication of himself in the *Oblatio* after receiving the papal brief, so that no one could question his religious calling. His love of God expressed in the calling was not caused by sentiments or emotions. His biggest worry was aroused by the prospect of "interrupting" or "delaying" its realization. The modern teaching of the Church repeatedly confirms

the continuance of consecration. “The faithful of Christ bind themselves to the three aforesaid counsels either by vows, or by other sacred bonds, [...] a person is totally dedicated to God, loved beyond all things,” the Second Vatican Council teaches (LG, 44). Pope Paul VI supplements this teaching in his exhortation *Evangelica testificatio*: “This teaching of the Council illustrates well the grandeur of this self-giving, freely made by yourselves, after the pattern of Christ’s self-giving to His Church; like His, **yours is total and irreversible** [Latin. **absolutissimus et irrevocabile** – the author’s note],” (ET 7). Religious consecration is not a function assigned to a person, but it is the expression of a bond between God and that person. Though the act of the *Oblatio* was made three centuries earlier, it is in perfect harmony with the teaching of the Church today. It would not have been possible if not for Father Founder’s union with God, purified and fortified in the fire of various experiences. The first paragraph of the *Oblatio*, listing all natural and spiritual powers, speaks of his total offering of himself. The solemn character of this act testifies, on the one hand, to the gift’s irrevocability, and on the other to its totality, its everlasting character: “And so I promise that I shall, to the end of my life, serve Them [i.e., the Holy Trinity and the Blessed Virgin – the author’s note] chastely and zealously in the Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (which by the grace of God I resolve to found),” (*Oblatio*, p. 28).

If our holy Founding Father is for us not solely the subject of reflection, research and analysis; if he is not only a person to be proud of, then he should be regarded as a reference point. It is not so much a matter of what he did, but **how he did** the work of founding the Congregation, his faith and self-abnegation with which he entered the new reality given to him by God. In our imitation of Christ (*sequela Christi*), the Founder is given to us as a leader, setting the standards of discernment and decision making. Basing on some personal observations, one may remark with sadness at a certain “lightness” of some, now former, members of our community in making their decision to leave the community, either by joining the diocese or returning to the secular state. Perhaps I am wrong, but the speed of their making such a decision and determination in submitting petitions for an indult of departure are definitely telling. It looks as if their previous discernment, choice, membership in the Congregation, and therefore, their religious vows and the promise of perseverance in the Congregation were purely formal. These men’s unfulfilled expectations, new perspectives, gradual distancing themselves from the community, and their certain sins seemed to be heading in one direction – departure. Naturally,

these are only personal assessments. Sometimes blackmail came into play: if I don't get... (specific requirements followed), I shall leave." I cannot recall any perpetually professed member, any priest leaving our community for an institute of a more strict rule (please correct me if I am wrong). It would seem that the aforesaid inseparable "bonds of love," the spiritual struggle to remain faithful to one's calling to the consecrated life were absent. Perhaps, an independent study (for formation purposes) analyzing the reasons for departure is indicated here. However, certain observations allow one to venture a theory of a lack of sufficient faith that shapes the "oblativ" attitude, the confidence that God keeps giving His blessing to each one of us, similar to the one that Father Michael Kraus, the Vicar Provincial of the Piarists, gave to Father Stanislaus after making his *Oblatio*: "May God strengthen what He has worked in you!" (FHR, No. 4, p. 63). This lack of faith may be associated with an excessive trust in oneself and one's own abilities, which consequently leads to scandal at one's own and others' weakness. Our holy Father Founder trusted in Divine Providence and believed that God's promises would be fulfilled. He made his choices not according to the measure of his personal abilities, but based on the experience of God's proximity and loyalty. Bishop Kiernikowski stated this truth very clearly:

If we follow the path of fulfilling God's promises, it is not because we can – for we must see that we cannot do certain things – but because we believe, on the other hand, that we have experienced that there is someone Who is powerful to fulfill what He promised, despite some mishaps or human errors. That was the faith of Abraham. And that is everything. If this is missing at the foundation, for example at the beginning of formation, on entering the community, then everyone will cling to their wants, and will not follow the promise. It will be a sign that he does not accept the program of life and promise being offered by Someone else, that program which has already been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup>

And here we come to the question of formation. Without going beyond the scope of this conference, it is possible to say that the *Oblatio* may become a foundation or particular leitmotiv of Marian religious formation.

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<sup>16</sup> Fr. F. Blachnicki, Bp. Z. Kiernikowski, *Moria, Mara i Nebo*, Krakow 2020, p. 78.



Its every part, or at least the beginning and the next four paragraphs, deserve to be further expounded and updated. It can form a solid part of our formation in the theological and kerygmatic climate.

Closing this conference, it seems logical and just to cross off the question mark contained in its title. *Oblatio* does not “deserve” to be solely referred to as a historical fact belonging to the historical patrimony, something that **once was**. Since this act was recognized as the beginning of our Congregation’s history, then it should perhaps go even further, becoming a signpost for us and those whom God will want to join us.

## Consecrated life as a mission in the Church to the World<sup>1</sup>

### Why consecrated life?

The condition of a community of consecrated persons, that is its liveliness, strength, and growth, as well as its stagnation, disease and dying, depends on its heart – a specifically understood center of life: “For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be...” (cf. Mt 6: 19-23). As long as its life remains truly religious, a community may look calmly into the future. Yet, wherever the religious way of life suffers degradation – even if a community continues to thrive administratively – stagnation and marks of death will inevitably appear. Therefore, what determines the strength, significance, and mission of consecrated life in the Church and in the world?

That which attests to the strength and the value of the life of the religious and their usefulness in the Church is definitely not their numerousness nor even their activities, and most certainly not the structures of their well-organized apostolates. The radically evangelical way of life is the secret of the consecrated persons’ attractiveness to the world and it is what makes them credible in its perception. All the rest follows.

Pope Paul VI remarks: “Without this concrete sign there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church would grow cold, that the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted, and that the ‘salt’ of faith would lose its savor in a world undergoing secularization.”<sup>2</sup>

St. John Paul II explains: “... the consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very nature. This is clearly seen from the fact that the profession of the evangelical counsels is intimately connected with the mystery of Christ, and has the duty of making somehow present

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<sup>1</sup> Based on: Krzysztof Wons, SDS, *Rozwój i zamieranie instytutów zakonnych* [Development and decline of religious institutes], SALWATOR Publishing House, Kraków 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio* (June 29, 1971), 3: AAS 63 (1971), 498.

the way of life which Jesus himself chose and indicated as an absolute eschatological value”<sup>3</sup>

This is the very nature of the consecrated life!!!

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council reads: “...the disciples must always offer an imitation of and a testimony to the charity and humility of Christ (42).”<sup>4</sup> This way of life raised by Christ Himself and based on the profession of the evangelical counsels, inviolably belongs to the deepest essence of the Church: her life and holiness. If it were missing, the Church would be crippled!

In this way, Christ Himself makes sure that the Church faithfully lives according to the Gospel, that she never lacks people who imitate His evangelical way of life in the closest manner, and that the Church’s chastity, poverty, and obedience *are made constantly “visible” in the midst of the world (VC 1)*.

It is the path of a particular imitation of and devotion to Jesus with an *undivided heart (VC 1)*. This is the internal dynamic of a vocation to the consecrated life (*VC 15*). Its loss leads to the loss of the identity of the consecrated persons. Therefore, as the Council reminds us, “Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels, let this be held by all institutes as the highest rule.”<sup>5</sup> It means to surrender one’s entire existence to Christ. This is possible only if a special bond and internal communion exists between the consecrated person and Christ (*VC 9 and 16*).

This bond is something absolutely specific in the religious life: it does not chase after distinctiveness, “originality” that would attract attention or cause sensation. It has the same features that characterized Jesus Himself – ordinariness, simplicity, resignation from successes; it does not aspire to achieve something unusual, significant, to be noticed.

In a different context – for he was discussing the formative process of candidates for the priesthood – Joseph Ratzinger thus speaks about this issue:

“A priest must be a man who knows Jesus thoroughly, who has met Him and learned to love Him. Therefore, the priest must be, above all, a man of

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<sup>3</sup> St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (March 25, 2996), No. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *Lumen gentium* (November 21, 1964), No. 42.

<sup>5</sup> Vatican II, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965, No. 2a.

prayer, a truly spiritual person. Without a strong spiritual substance, he will not find enough strength to perform his service for a long time. Moreover, he must learn from Christ that life is not about self-fulfillment and success. [...] The overworking, fatigue, and frustration of today's priests result from some persistent search for success. Faith then becomes too heavy a burden which is hard to carry."<sup>6</sup>

Let's summarize: "At the heart of the consecrated persons' life is assimilating to Christ through an intimate bond with Him and through a total dedication to imitate Him on the path of the evangelical counsels; not only to make Christ the whole meaning of their lives, but to strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, *that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world*" (VC 16).

The work of sanctification and redemption carried out only in unity – deep communion – with Christ is the indispensable mission of the religious in the Church and in the world. It is achieved not through some individualized or collective activism, but by imitating Christ, His way of life and what He stood for: being obedient to the Father, He "emptied himself taking the form of a slave" (Phil 2:7). Jesus nurtured a wish that His disciples open themselves to the power of the evangelical life, to the Gospel – Himself (cf. Mk 1:1), which has value in itself, even if stripped of many earthly means and values, i.e., spectacular signs and wonders. In this way, the religious life becomes a sign and a witness because it has in itself sanctifying and redemptive values. Saint John Paul II said: "**The first duty of the consecrated life is to make visible the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world**" (VC 20).

## Center of Life

The Holy Spirit imparts to a founder and his disciples a specific understanding and love of the mystery of Christ (cf. Eph 3: 5), which becomes the center of life of a given religious community and its members. This is

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<sup>6</sup> NB: the reference is given for the Polish-language quote: Joseph Ratzinger, *Opera omnia*, tome XII: *Głosiciele Słowa i służby waszej radości*, Ed. Krzysztof Gózdź, Marzena Górecka, transl. Marzena Górecka, Monika Rodkiewicz, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2012, p. 47., the text in English is a translation from Polish.

a unique or charismatic way to imitate Christ, thanks to which their vocation to holiness of life is realized. In this way, the founder initiates in his disciples a new form of holiness – a special form of union with the Master – which becomes the source and spiritual force for the development of his work. Thus, the actual maturing of the initiated work depends on the religious community's taking up and continuing this specific form of union with Christ, which was implanted in the community by the founder. Consequently, the primacy of the spiritual life, in both personal and communal life, based on the specific school of the evangelical spirituality of the founder, guarantees the apostolic fruitfulness of the entire Congregation (VC 93).

### **Life or Decline of a Community – Symptoms**

Studies, analyzing this topic, indicate two symptoms signifying either the life or decline of religious communities: the increase or decrease of vocations and the increase or decrease of the standard of living by the evangelical values.

Let's not try to find a simplified justification for the decreasing number of vocations to our religious community in something along the lines of, "God so willed it ..." or else by blaming certain entities such as provincial governments, vocation ministry, the formators or situations out of our control. Let's ask ourselves frankly: to what measure is this due to social changes, because of which young people move away from a life marked by gospel values, move away from the Church; and to what measure is this a bitter fruit of the bad changes taking place within our community such as a **departure from evangelical ideals, the charismatic vision, and an authentic life lived according to vocational values?**

The Instruction, *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* suggests in n. 12, that interpersonal relationships, the ability to build them, to establish bonds, to solve problems, and to undertake new challenges are the main gauges of these symptoms. An important factor here is also the degree of faithfulness to and the quality of living according the values of the religious community's charism.<sup>7</sup> A valid question arises: **is our consecrated life – the way we live it out – still a clear witness capable of attracting young people?**

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<sup>7</sup> See: Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ*, May 19, 2012, No. 12.

If the interpersonal relationships between the religious evident in a given community is one of the signs that young people look for, then it is worth realizing that the poor state of these relationships is also one of the more serious symptoms of a community crisis. There are opinions that indicate the weak evangelical character of the fraternal interactions. What often binds religious together is discipline and observing the law, carrying out their clearly defined tasks or functions. However, personal relationships based on closeness, solidarity, genuineness, and cordiality seem to be neglected. **Meanwhile, Paul VI in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio* (No. 39) writes about the need for “a community spirit, friendship and fraternal cooperation in the same apostolate, as well as mutual support in a shared life chosen for a better service of Christ, are so many valuable factors in this daily progress.”**<sup>8</sup>

Experience suggests that poor relationships between individual religious contribute to upsetting first the community’s mental and then its spiritual balance. This seems logical, because the relations in a convened community, where we do not choose our companions, but instead all have been chosen by Christ, is impossible to build in accordance with any other model except: God – myself – the other person. Is there any chance of such a weakening of the bonds between the confreres as to confirm what Leon Bloy – a converted French Catholic writer, who was an agnostic full of hatred for the Church in his youth – attempted once to state, looking at the religious: “They say they love God because they do not love anyone”? One thing is quite certain: evangelical relations in communities are important vocational indicators, perceived by the prospective or would-be candidates. They become valuable critics of our way of life.

It also should be said that the crisis of vocations manifests itself not only in people’s decision against joining religious communities, but also in the departures from the communities either externally or internally. There is a considerable group of brethren who – still remaining in a community, and even fulfilling to an extent its communal daily practices, but whose vocation – in reality – is only skin-deep: they do not deeply believe in the values of their vocation and remain strangers within a religious community. These are people who have failed to overcome the routine, disappointments, individualism, and to escape from the challenges of the new times (VC 70). An observation of everyday life gives plenty of evidence of the

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<sup>8</sup> See: St. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio*, June 29, 1971.

so-called ‘premature retirements;’ the tendency to treat the community as a ‘safe haven,’ and having demanding attitudes; a desire to strive for uniqueness, attractiveness, to build one’s life on efficiency; and to succumb to unprecedented criticism and gossip.

How to respond to these signs of crisis? The Instruction *Starting Afresh with Christ* says: “The difficulties and the questioning which religious life is experiencing today can give rise to a new *kairos*, a time of grace. In these challenges, an authentic call of the Holy Spirit lies hidden to rediscover the wealth and the potentialities of this form of life.” (13). Religious Orders affected by numerical decline and the aging process should ask themselves whether they are capable of establishing bonds and truly incorporating people who come to them from different cultural backgrounds. What is the providential sign manifested in the decrease of vocations? The instruction, *Starting Afresh with Christ* further suggests in n. 13 that it “can be seen as a providential sign which invites them to recover their very essential tasks of being leaven, sign and prophecy. The greater the mass of dough to be raised, the greater the quality evangelical leaven called for, and the more exquisite the witness of life and charismatic service of consecrated persons.” Addressing the crisis of the consecrated life is much more than just securing the right number of vocations to guarantee the survival of a religious community; it is rather the quality of life that guarantees fidelity to the identity of the consecrated life in the Church.

### **Reciprocity Between a Religious and the Community**

The beginning of the community crisis is not – after all – the numerical decrease of its membership or the breakdown of its apostolic structures. It begins with its individual member – with the collapse of his evangelical identity. This is when the newness of the spirit and the authenticity of the consecration disappear thus giving rise to a secular model of life.

Therefore, the renewal of a community starts with its individual members. Neither membership numbers nor structures change a religious Order. Only evangelical and charismatic personalities ferment the growth. Since the early ages, the imitation of Christ has been the goal of evangelical communities, and it has been inseparably connected with the personal conversion of their members. The essence of this conversion is the pursuit of becoming like Jesus Christ (J.M.R. Tollard).



If this process is not noticed and responded to early enough, it will likely lead to the actual death of the community or to a simulation of life, which will only be working externally. In the latter case, the community will be preserved for some time at least, but it will inevitably lose its religious identity. It will slowly change into a kind of secular charitable institution that fulfills only some temporal goals, which is, *de facto*, also its death.

**The lives of our holy Father Founder  
and of Venerable Servant of God Casimir Wyszyński  
in the spirit of *imitatio Mariae***

As the life of Father Stanislaus Papczyński was approaching its end, Januarius Francis Wyszyński arrived into this world on August 19, 1700, in the village of Jeziora Wielka near Grójec (today Jeziórka) some 40 km from Góra Kalwaria. Although these two great figures of the Congregation of Marian Fathers never met in person, with the passing of time, Fr. Casimir grew to become a continuator of Father Papczyński's work and an interpreter of his life.

It seems that our holy Father Founder's ideas inspired Venerable Servant of God Casimir Wyszyński as he shaped his theology of imitating Mary, and particularly in its Christological dimension. His work contained references to the Marian charism developed by Father Papczyński. Furthermore, in the *imitatio Mariae*, Father Wyszyński especially emphasized the presence of the Holy Spirit. He believed that the Holy Spirit was the inspirer and the herald of the future followers of Christ who were called to imitate the evangelical virtues of Mary for the greater glory of God and the Mother of Jesus. For this very purpose, the Order of the Annunciation of the BVM was established in the Church and its foundress, St. Joan de Valois "became a proof that the imitation of Mary's virtues makes us pleasing to the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Son."<sup>1</sup> Then "also in the Polish Kingdom, not so long ago, God called His servant Fr. [now St.] Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, the Founder of the Marians, that is, of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the first religious order from Poland, to imitate the virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary."<sup>2</sup> As he described and interpreted Fr. Stanislaus's life, Fr. Casimir looked at the Marian Order and its founder in the perspective of God's plan and the call to *imitatio Mariae*.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Wyszyński, *Foreword* in: F. Arias, SJ, *Morning Star*, Stockbridge, 2019, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

On December 11, 1670, as Fr. Stanislaus was released from (simple) religious vows and the oath of perseverance in the Congregation of the Pious Schools, thus becoming a diocesan priest, he also made the *Oblatio* or *Offering of himself*, in which he stated clearly that he did not wish to abandon the religious way of life and priesthood, or to take off his habit. Instead, he expressed a desire to found a new religious order. He wrote: “And so I promise [to God the Father Almighty... and also to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary,]—that I shall, to the end of my life, serve Them chastely and zealously in the Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (which by the grace of God I resolve to found).”<sup>3</sup> The author thus opened his *Oblatio*: “In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified. Amen,” and then he offered and dedicated himself “to God the Father Almighty, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and also to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary, Conceived without original sin (*sine macula originali Conceptae*).”<sup>4</sup> It is significant that Father Stanislaus placed the Holy Trinity and their will at the center of his life, and he wanted to fulfill this will with all his might. Mary also occupies an important—but not the central place in his life and piety, as indicated by the order she is mentioned in the offering.

Father Stanislaus was convinced that the new Order, which he was about to found, was the fulfillment of God’s will. He ascribed a special role in the discernment and undertaking of this work to the Holy Spirit, who inspired him to do it: “I lived at the house of the Lord Nobleman Karski for nearly two years—[September 1671– September 1673—JR] as I was searching for the ways to begin the Society of the Immaculate Conception already formed in my mind by the Divine Spirit (*dandi formatae iam in animo meo a Divino Spiritu*).”<sup>5</sup> Father Casimir Wyszynski similarly viewed the events as he wrote in Fr. Stanislaus’s biography that the latter had rejected many honorable offices offered to him by Church dignitaries, because “he was mindful of the promise made to God and—guided by His inspiration [...]—he decided to focus on the founding of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> S. Papczyński, *Oblatio*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> S. Papczyński, *Foundation of the House of Recollection*, in: *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, Stockbridge, 2007, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> K. Wyszynski, *Żywot Czcigodnego Sługi Bożego Ojca Stanisława od Jezusa Maryi Papczyńskiego*, in: *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa marianów. Wybór pism o Kazimierza Wyszynskiego*, transl. and ed. by Z. Proczek, Warszawa–Stockbridge 2004, p. 70.

In 1723, when the new Marian Constitutions, adopted to the *Rule of the Ten Virtues*, were approved, Father Casimir, [while on pilgrimage,] met Fr. Joachim Kozłowski in the Eternal City. The latter related to him the story of the dispersal of the Marian Order and the role played in it by the novice Józef Wyszyński—Casimir’s brother. Moved by this account, the young pilgrim declared: “I wish to repair what my brother ruined; please, your Reverence, grant me the [religious] habit”<sup>7</sup> and on November 18, 1723, in the Church of St. Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr, he received the Marian garb and the religious name of Casimir of St. Joseph.

This fact is all the more surprising and significant because the Wyszyński family did not sympathize with the founder and the Marian Order, and Fr. Casimir would mention later “a noble family that was opposed to the Servant of God and the Congregation (...). This is a known and evident matter, because a member of this family [that is, Fr. Casimir—J.R.] was the postulator for the cause of the Servant of God at the Holy See.”<sup>8</sup> Years later, in a letter written in 1752 to his brother Valerian, Fr. Casimir explained his decision to join the Marians: “Like a second Saul, I came to this Congregation which one of our own, namely our brother Joseph, had attacked. The Blessed Mother said to me: ‘Francis [Fr. Casimir’s baptismal name—JR], why do you persecute me?’ Not daring to kick against the goad, I felt impelled to take the habit in Rome.”<sup>9</sup> This analogy with Saul’s adventure at Damascus and Mary’s identifying herself with the Order founded by Fr. Stanislaus prove how deeply Fr. Casimir was touched by the account about his brother and his negative impact on the Order founded under the title of Mary Immaculate, whom he venerated.

Already in the novitiate, Fr. Casimir showed himself as a fervent religious and a follower and promoter of Fr. Stanislaus’s sanctity. He was also a man of great faith, completely devoted to the matters of the Order, for whose internal renewal he zealously endeavored and encouraged by his personal example of life.

Father Casimir also was a man of great wisdom and piety, which contributed to the spiritual and numerical growth of the Congregation. During

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<sup>7</sup> *Testimony given by Michael Wyszyński about his brother*, in: *Najstarsze świadectwa o Słudze Bożym o. Kazimierzu Wyszyńskim*, transl. and ed. by Z. Proczek, Warszawa–Stockbridge 2005, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> K. Wyszyński, *Żywot Czcigodnego Sługi Bożego Ojca Stanisława od Jezusa Maryi Papczyńskiego*, in: *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa marianów. Wybór pism o. Kazimierza Wyszyńskiego*, transl. and ed. by Z. Proczek, Warszawa–Stockbridge 2004, p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> *Father Casimir Wyszyński, His Life and Mission*, Stockbridge 2020, p. 21.

his two terms in the office of Superior General, new religious houses were established outside of Poland and the community became internationalized, as Czechs, Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Hungarians and Italians began to join the Marians. In short, it can be said that his life was guided mainly by three goals: “care for the development of the Marian Order, devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary and endeavors towards the beatification of Father Stanislaus Papczyński—the Founder of the Order.”<sup>10</sup>

The first steps towards opening the beatification process were made by Fr. Casimir Wyszyński, who—convinced of the Marian Founder’s sanctity—collected information about his life, the testimonies of witnesses, wrote his biography, and prepared instructions that described measures to be taken to start his beatification process. Father Casimir perceived a close correlation between the efforts to beatify the Marian Founder and God’s blessing for and development of the Marian Order: “I cannot help but marvel at eternal Divine Providence: as soon as I began to busy myself in earnest to promote the process of our Venerable Father Founder. [...] God imparts His blessing unexpectedly on those who remember their ancestors and forefathers. It is quite evident that after the exhumation and placement of the bones of our Father in a new casket, which the Marians in Poland did upon my urging, in turn, the Lord God provided me with a comfortable cell in Rome. And as soon as I sent to Poland the instructions for opening our Father’s process and confirmed the readiness of the Marians to do so—the Father Pastor [Superior General -JR] himself corroborated their intention of doing their utmost for this process—a great blessing from God came upon us at once: the unexpected invitation from the highly esteemed Portuguese monarch.”<sup>11</sup> Father Casimir saw not only the increased number of vocations as God’s blessing and providence, but also the invitation for the Order to begin apostolic work in a new country.

As has been emphasized many times, Fr. Casimir was Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński’s faithful son and a model in imitating the Founder in the religious life in order to stay faithful to the ideals of religious perfection as a path to holiness. Both men were great venerators of Our Blessed Mother Immaculately Conceived. Their devotion found its clearest manifestation in the desire to imitate her, especially according to the *Rule of the Ten Virtues of*

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<sup>10</sup> P. Smoliński, *Zawsze z Chrystusem*, in: *Powołanie i misja. Sługa Boży o. Kazimierz Wyszyński (1700–1755)*, ed. J. Kumala, Licheń 2005, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Father Casimir Wyszyński, His Life and Mission*, Stockbridge 2020, p. 45.

*the Blessed Virgin Mary*, to which Fr. Casimir communicated a profound theological basis in his *Foreword* to the translation of *Morning Star*.

The above statement finds confirmation in one of the testimonies given by Fr. Charles Hondlewski, who emphasized Fr. Casimir's special bond with Fr. Papczyński and stated that Fr. Casimir's *imitatio Mariae* had become indeed a model for others: "admitted to the Marian Order, he dedicated himself entirely to works of piety and the practice of virtue. He living according to the Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary in such a way, that he was given to all as an example of mastering one's senses, piety, and obedience. He was so seasoned in vigils, fasting, mortifications, prayers and the observance of his Order's regulations, that he was regarded as a true [spiritual] son of the Venerable Servant of God Stanislaus."<sup>12</sup>

The Marian Founder placed Jesus Christ at the center of the concept of imitation. This does not mean that he did not promote the *imitatio Mariae* even prior to the acceptance of the *Rule of the Ten Virtues* at the end of his life, because he gave Jesus' Mother as a model to follow for his brothers. It was Mary whom he called in his writings "a special Patroness and Advocate" (*Patronam et Advocatam singularem*)<sup>13</sup> and made her a model of life (*imitatio Mariae*) for future generations of Marians.

In Fr. Stanislaus's written works, the term "imitation" referred both to the following Christ, His actions and His entire life, as well as the imitation of other people and attitudes and virtues, for which purpose he used the Latin words *imitare* or *sequor* in appropriate [grammatical] forms. In his *Rule of Life*, the author repeatedly exhorted his confreres to "imitate [Christ]" (*Christi imitari*)<sup>14</sup>; while writing about poverty, he indicated that the religious should rejoice upon finding themselves in the state of "utmost poverty" (*summa paupertas*), because "then they can be true disciples and followers of Christ the Lord"<sup>15</sup> (*veri Christi Domini discipuli et sequaces*).

The concept of imitating Mary also appears in Fr. Stanislaus's writings, which gained its special place with the acceptance of the *Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Although the adjustment of the *Rule* to the Marian statutes was made after the Founder's death, yet from the moment

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<sup>12</sup> K. Hondlewski, Świadectwo o gorliwym marianinie, in: *Najstarsze świadectwa o Studzie Bożym o. Kazimierzu Wyszyńskim*, transl. and ed. by Z. Proczek, Warszawa–Stockbridge 2005, p. 79.

<sup>13</sup> S. Papczyński, *The Crucified Orator*, Stockbridge, 2014, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> S. Papczyński, *The Rule of Life*, in: MIC Library at padrimariani.org, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

of its acceptance, it had a special impact on the spirituality of the Marians and the shape of Marian devotion, which they lived out and preached.

Father Wyszynski greatly desired to see all Marians faithfully observing this *Rule* and the idea of imitation and thus striving for holiness. Not only did he not bar lay people from practicing *imitatio Mariae*, but instead, he fervently encouraged them to adopt it, because, as he stated in his main [written] work, it was meant for people of all walks in life.

In creating the biography of our holy Father Founder, Fr. Casimir follows the key of *imitatio Mariae*, which found expression, for example, in his narration of Fr. Stanislaus's death: "Since the Venerable Servant of God has been a life-long venerator of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and a fervent defender of devotion to her, Christ the Lord wished to bestow a double privilege upon His Most Beloved Mother's servant, namely: before he died, he [was able] to make his profession upon the Rule of the imitation of the Mother of God and he died at a place similar to her place of death. Like the Mother of God, who died in Jerusalem, Fr. Stanislaus died at [the monastery of] Our Lord's Cenacle in New Jerusalem, having lived to be 70 years of age."<sup>16</sup> Father Casimir also emphasizes the joy of Fr. Stanislaus and the other Marians at accepting the Rule of imitating Mary, which he compares to the precious evangelical pearl: "The Venerable Servant of God, Fr. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary has seen what he desired and, holding [in his hand] this Rule of the Virgin Mary as a precious evangelical pearl found anew, he rejoiced with the confreres as they wished each other well."<sup>17</sup>

In his Circular Letter of June 10, 1740, Fr. Casimir reminded all that the evangelical virtues of Our Lady should be imitated not in words or thoughts, but above all in actions. In another Circular Letter of June 3, 1749, announcing the next General Visitation, Fr. Wyszynski indicated the topics and areas of the religious life that the Visitation would touch upon: "... I would want to learn: Are we implementing in our lives what the Holy Spirit has worked in us? Are there Marians who truly imitate Mary (*cum inveniam Marianos vere Mariam imitantes*) and diligently observe the Rule and the Constitutions? Do they grow in charity and fraternal peace? Do they properly practice poverty, chastity, and obedience? Do they glorify

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<sup>16</sup> K. Wyszynski, *Żywot Czcigodnego Sługi Bożego Ojca Stanisława od Jezusa Maryi Papczyńskiego*, w: *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa marianów. Wybór pism o. Kazimierza Wyszynskiego*, transl. and ed. by Z. Proczek, Warszawa–Stockbridge 2004, p. 129.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.



God day and night according to the regulations? Finally, do they strictly follow the principles of religious discipline?”<sup>18</sup>

Casimir Wyszyński was a man who properly interpreted the will of God for his life and was obedient to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. His greatest desire was to lead everyone to Christ under the guidance and following the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Virgin. He trusted that Mary, whom Christ gave as a Mother to all people, was constantly interceding for her people and wanted to shine upon them on their path to her Son as the Morning Star. Therefore, no one should reject this special model and protection that Divine Providence has left to people. It is necessary to get to know Mary and her virtues, contemplate and imitate them in one's life, and thus to please Mary and to please Christ together with her.

Father Casimir's concept of *imitatio Mariae* included in his *Foreword to Morning Star* is the result of his own reflections and a synthesis of earlier knowledge that he acquired as a religious order member. He was undoubtedly inspired by such figures as Gabriel Nicolas and St. Joan of France, Francis Arias and Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński, but he also drew abundantly from the Holy Scriptures and the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

For the Congregation of Marian Fathers, Casimir Wyszyński was a providential man given by God at that Order's difficult time. The connection between our holy Father Founder and the subsequent, two-time General of the Order, consisted above all, in the total dedication of their lives to the Triune God, love of Mary Immaculate, striving for perfection in the religious life and a deep concern for their Order, which they both saw as the work of Divine Providence.

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<sup>18</sup> K. Wyszyński, *Circular letter of June 3, 1749*, in: *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa marianów. Wybór pism o. Kazimierza Wyszyńskiego*, transl. and ed. by Z. Proczek, Warszawa–Stockbridge 2004, p. 184.

# APPENDIX



**CHARISM IN THE EXPERIENCE  
OF THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY  
OF THE MARIAN FATHERS**



## Introduction

### *The beginnings of the Congregation of Marian Fathers in Vietnam and the testimonies of the first Vietnamese Marians*

As I arrived in Saigon on September 8, 2015, to initiate the presence of our Congregation there in accordance with the decision of the Superior General, questions about the sense and purpose of this mission, which had already been raised by many, came back to me with redoubled force. Nobody expected us there. Although Catholics constitute only 7% of Vietnam's population of ninety-million, their churches, more numerous than in many countries of the secularized West, are bursting at the seams. There is no shortage of priests. Religious congregations, both foreign and domestic still spring up like mushrooms after the rain. The vast majority of young men considering the path of God's service called there "đi tu," opt for diocesan seminaries rather than joining a religious congregation, especially a foreign one. This situation is especially noticeable in big cities such as Saigon with its nearly nine-million pool of residents. Diocesan priests enjoy great respect and authority among Vietnamese Catholics, much greater than religious order members, which is due to the former's social standing as leaders of frequently very large parishes. Our relatively small Congregation did not seem attractive to those who compared it with the other communities which were already established or which had newly come to Vietnam. Nobody knew us here. If someone had heard of the Marians, he was convinced that our main goal was to spread the Divine Mercy devotion, which was what attracted his attention. In fact, in recent years, this devotion has become very popular here. Already in the first month of my stay in Saigon, a priest of a certain diocese was introduced to me, who expressed his readiness to join our community, provided that our main goal in Vietnam was to promote devotion to the Divine Mercy. After he was told about our charism and our goals, his interest in the Marians and his enthusiasm diminished considerably.

However, this meeting urged me to ask myself a specific, and at the same time, fundamental question: what is this mission about? Am I here only to look for so-called "vocations" or potential candidates for the Congre-

gation to satisfy current or future “staffing needs,” in other words, to run the recruitment activity in which the logic of attractiveness plays a decisive role, or was it about something more? Since my first year in this big South-Vietnamese city was dedicated to learning the Vietnamese language, I spent time – almost alone (especially in the evenings) – at the Caritas Vietnam house. I therefore had lots of time to find an answer to this recurring question, also thanks to having access to a chapel with the Blessed Sacrament. I was able to realize that our mission in this country cannot consist only in our being yet another religious congregation, more or less attractive and useful for the local Church. Rather, we have to give witness to the deep inner experience of our holy Father Founder, which he himself called the “divine vision, which was imprinted upon my soul” (FDR 6), and which indeed came from the Holy Spirit and concerned the founding of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin Mother of God. Father Papczyński spoke about this experience as he was giving an account of the various offers and proposals which he had received after leaving the Piarists.<sup>1</sup> These offers and proposals might have seemed attractive and even beneficial, but they would have led him away from the charism which God Himself had bestowed upon him. This charism was then and is now the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

Consequently, it was necessary to focus – in the conditions of a new country, which Vietnam was to us five years ago and still is – on spreading the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the manner of Father Founder and the first Marians, heirs of the charism. Among the latter, special attention is due to the Servant of God, Father Casimir Wyszyński, the first Marian missionary, lover of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and promoter of the person and work of Father Papczyński. After the crisis caused by Father Joachim of St. Anne Kozłowski’s inappropriate ambitions and the “Rostkavian dispersion,” he gave a new impulse to the development of the Order, by completely devoting himself to the service of the Immaculate and returning to the original spirit of the Order initiated by our holy Father Founder.

The correctness of my reasoning was confirmed by the Canonization of Father Stanislaus Papczyński in June 2016. Our Father Founder – now Saint Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński – captivated the hearts of the young Vietnamese men who initially visited me once a week to learn

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 6, in *Historical Writings of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński*, transl. from Latin by C. Krzyzanowski, Stockbridge, 2007, pp. 64-65.



English, and who, on September 8, 2016, exactly a year after my arrival in Saigon, took up residence together with me in a rented house, thus giving rise to the Marian Formation House in Vietnam. Currently, this house has nine candidates and three seminarians in first vows. Out of the first four candidates who had entered the path of discerning a Marian vocation, only one, Nguyễn Văn Hà, persevered until the novitiate. In the meantime, other people came, some of whom left after a shorter or longer time, while others remained. In addition to Hà, two other postulants: Nguyễn Văn Biên and Nguyễn Tiến Dũng entered our first novitiate, established in the second house purchased by the Congregation. They, too, made their first religious vows on August 15, 2020, and began their studies of philosophy and theology at local religious institutes, which prepare candidates for the priesthood according to the norms generally accepted in the Church.

As to the Marian character of our Congregation, it is nothing exceptional in the context of the Church in Vietnam, especially if understood only in a devotional dimension. Devotion to the Mother of God is very popular here and it is already established on the basis of the Marian apparitions in La Vang in 1798. Since the Church in Vietnam owes its origin and development mainly to the efforts of French missionaries, devotion to Mary Immaculate is also related to the Miraculous Medal of Catherine Labouré and the apparitions at Lourdes, and it has taken deep root in the hearts of Vietnamese Catholics. It finds its expression in beautiful Marian songs of deep theological content.

It seems, however, that our Congregation has an important role to play here, in Vietnam, in the service of the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, not perhaps on the worship level or even that of theological reflection, but more in the existential dimension, through a total dedication to Christ and the Church. This is the character of Father Stanislaus Papczyński, who showed us the way of spreading devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary through the *Oblatio* of December 11, 1670.

What was later expressed in the renewed Congregation in the motto “Pro Christo et Ecclesia,” is already present at its beginnings in the act of offering oneself to God, made by Father Papczyński, as well as in his person, because the *Oblatio* is the proof of Father Founder’s identity and that of his entire life. The mystery of Mary’s Immaculate Conception is, in fact, the total gift of oneself given to Mary by God the Father and Creator in the Holy Spirit for the sake of Christ and the Church. It is also the response of the Handmaid of the Lord to this Gift by giving herself completely to

Christ and the Church, expressed in the first *Fiat* at Nazareth and completed through her motherly suffering under the Cross of Christ on Golgotha, where the Church was born. Thus understood, the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception constitutes the spiritual identity of Mary revealed by her to Saint Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes on March 25, 1858.

Therefore, the proclamation of this mystery requires of us not to multiply various pious or promotional practices, otherwise important and necessary to celebrate it, but, above all, it calls on us to become a sign of the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception by making a total and selfless offering of ourselves to God and the Church. For this reason, the first step on the path of serving this mystery is the *Oblatio* of St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, whom God prepared through the sufferings which he experienced in his life, and especially through the arduous experience of his departure from the Piarists, to the initiation of the Order of the Immaculate Conception. The *Oblatio* was our holy Father Founder's response to the charism of the Immaculate Conception, a gift freely given to him in order to proclaim Christ and to build up the Church. Father Founder received this gift at the most trying moment of his life, probably when, after making the decision to leave the Piarist Order, he was imprisoned by his superior for about 3 months, which he spent first in Podoliniec and then in Prievidza.<sup>2</sup> The "divine vision" concerning the founding of the Marian Congregation became Fr. Papczyński's point of reference throughout his life. It also communicated a new meaning to his life and religious vocation, and enabled him to go through the experiences of the Cross following the example of Christ. Fidelity to this mystical encounter with God led our Father Stanislaus to

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. T. ROGALEWSKI, *Lumen Marianorum, Stanislaus Papczynski (1631-1701). Founder of the Congregation of Marian Fathers and Inspirer of the Marian School of Spirituality*, Stockbridge, 2012, p. 209. Having written two petitions to the Piarist Superior General, Fr. Cosmas Chiara (August 15 and ca. October 15, 1669), asking to be released from simple vows and the oath of perseverance in the Congregation of the Pious Schools, Fr. Papczyński, who was then staying in Kazimierz near Krakow, just before Christmas 1699, also requested protection and transfer to the jurisdiction of the Ordinary of Krakow, Bishop Andrzej Trzebicki. A positive response arrived at the end of that year. However, his Provincial Superior, Fr. Wacław Opatowski, ignored this act and using force, transported Fr. Stanislaus first to Podoliniec, on January 8, 1670, and then, on January 28, to Prievidza, where the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Krakow, who claimed this prisoner, no longer applied. It was only on March 22, 1670, that Fr. Stanislaus was released from the Piarist prison in Prievidza, Slovakia, thanks to a special intervention from the Auxiliary Bishop of Krakow, Nicholas Oborski. Cf. *Ibidem*, cit., pp. 190-196; STANISLAUS PAPCZYŃSKI, *Apology for the departure from the Institute of the Pious Schools*, Nos. 19-20, in: *Historical Writings ... cit.*, pp. 40-41.

true holiness, which the Church confirmed by the act of his Canonization in 2016.

Also for the above reasons, we dedicated much attention in the formation of our first Vietnamese candidates and novices to teaching them about the person and work of St. Stanislaus Papczyński since his life and example are the key to understanding and embracing the charism of our Congregation. It turned out that the era and the native Polish culture, of which St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński was a product, were not so dissimilar indeed from the backgrounds of our Vietnamese students, in whose hearts Fr. Stanislaus took a prominent place. I have seen many times that they identified themselves with the challenging living conditions of young Jan Papka, with his desire for an education, and his early learning problems. Also, they were deeply touched by the fate that befell him in Lviv, where he – when he was only a teenager – had to live like Lazarus in the Gospel; or by his desire to die for the faith with the zeal and courage of the saints which he showed at the beginning of his religious life. Our collective reading of *Norma vitae* and *Templum Dei Mysticum* did not prove to be too difficult or discouraging for them. On the contrary, it allowed them to get to know better our holy Father Founder's spiritual character and to love him. May the simple testimonies written by our young newly professed members at the end of their novitiate be an opportunity to learn how St. Stanislaus Papczyński and our charism were received in Vietnam.

*Bogusław Gil MIC*

## **Saint Stanislaus Papczynski – my Spiritual Father**

The saints are models of Christian perfection. They live completely for Christ and are united with Him at all time. They are truly the mirror and inspiration for all of us, the pilgrims on the earth.

Before I entered the Marians, I was touched by the life of the Martyrs of Việt Nam. They were the heroes and warriors of Jesus. They always live in my heart and inspire my daily life. But when I entered the Congregation of the Marian Fathers, I received another great gift from God. It is our Father Founder. I did not know anything about him before. I was not even much interested in him. His name was so strange for me. I could not read correctly and remember his name. But after three years spent with the Marians in Saigon, I learned a lot about Saint Stanislaus Papczynski, especially from Father Superior of the Community. I have also read the books about Father Founder which helped me to come closer to him.

At the beginning I did not really pay much attention on the person of Father Founder. Only sometimes I read some information about him in the internet. This was certainly not enough to know such a great person as Father Founder. Anyway, it was like this at the beginning, when I was just a candidate to the Congregation. But now I am a novice of the Marians in Việt Nam. I study a lot of things during this time, specially the History of the Congregation. Our Novice Master while teaching brings us closer to the important people from the history of the Marian Fathers such as Father Casimir Wyszinski, Father Renovator Blessed George, Blessed Martyrs George and Anthony, but first of all Father Founder. He is the most important person for us. Father Novice Master wants every novice to know him well and even better than the others. In fact, there is no way to be a true Marian without knowing the one who is the Founder of the Congregation and who is also the mirror for every Marian to look at and so to recognize self-identity.

I remember the words of Father Novice Master that when we go to the sea it is not enough to put only the feet in the water but we should dive deep into the water. In the same way we must know deeper the charism and

the person of Father Founder who is at the source of the Marian Congregation. So, I try to understand the character and charism of Marian Fathers by means of a reading more books written by Father Founder and other books about him. There are two books which touch me most: “Norma vitae” of Saint Stanislaus Papczynski and “God’s Mighty Champion” which describes clearly the person and the life of Father Stanislaus. We have studied these books together with Father Novice Master. After reading them I see Father Founder in the different way. He is not any more a person from the past who lived around 350 years ago. He is not for me a stranger as I felt at the beginning and his name is not any more difficult to read and to remember. Now, he is a living person for me, always present in my life and my heart as my spiritual Father. This spiritual Father accompanies me on the way to follow Jesus Christ in the Marian Congregation. He teaches me how to accept the difficulties and hardships in the name of Jesus Christ and how to be faithful to my vocation as he was faithful to his own vocation to found the new Congregation which God imprinted in his heart. Furthermore, this spiritual Father shows me how to love God, Blessed Virgin Mary and neighbor. Finally, Father Founder is for me an example of a true Christian, a disciple of God, a warrior of Blessed Virgin Mary and a Marian whom I also would like to become.

After all, Father founder is the model for my life. It does not make sense for me to be in the Congregation without knowing and loving Father Founder. Therefore, I must keep him in my heart and never forget. If I ever forget him it would mean that I have lost the special gift of God.

*John Baptist Nguyễn Văn Biên MIC*

## Father Stanislaus Papczynski

My name is Peter Nguyen Tien Dung. After three years spent in the Formation House of the Marian Fathers in Saigon, I recognize that I love the Congregation. I am sure that it is a fruit of learning in the Novitiate the life of Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski and the Charism of the Congregation. Above all, I realize that through the Holy Father Founder I experience the love of Jesus Christ and Immaculate Mother Mary for me. Every day of my life I desired to imitate Jesus. I understood that through Father Founder I can draw closer to Jesus Christ. Through Father Founder I have learnt how to obey God and how to give my heart to Him.

From the beginning of the Novitiate I was impressed by the sentence: “The Lord imprinted in the heart of Father Stanislaus Papczynski the desire to found the new Order to spread the mystery of the Immaculate Conception”. It made me to live my identity of the “child of Mary who should imitate his Mother”.

The time of the Novitiate was very important for me. I have learned a lot about the Congregation, its foundation by Saint Stanislaus Papczynski and the values of the consecrated life.

I understood that first of all I have to give up myself if I want to follow Jesus Christ. Like Father Founder I need to entrust everything to God and be the witness of His love by living the Gospel. Saint Stanislaus Papczynski had to passed through many difficulties and challenges. As a young man he was not able to study well; he got seriously sick; there were many false accusations against him and the Congregation and there were also many other difficult events at the birth of the Order. But in all these situations he showed the trust in the God’s Providence and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

I want to imitate him and also serve the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is the charism of our Congregation.

*Peter Nguyễn Tiến Dũng MIC*

## **Why do I love Saint Stanislaus Papczynski?**

Saint Stanislaus Papczynski is one of the most important people in my life. It is the grace for me to know, imitate and love him. Why do I love him? It is not because of the many miracles God has done through his intercession; not because of his wisdom or his extraordinary work for the Church; not because he founded the Marian Fathers' Congregation. I love him because of his style of life, his acceptance of difficulties and his faithfulness to the will of God.

At the beginning, when I entered the Marian Formation House in Saigon, I was not much interested in his life and in his person. I thought that between him and me there was a too long distance: nationality, language, culture, life's time and, first of all, nobody in Vietnam knew him. However, after studying a lot about him during the Novitiate under the direction of Fr. Boguslaw, our Novice Master, my opinion was completely changed. I have realized that I can see myself in his person like in the mirror. I understood that I am a little bit similar to him. Everything what God wanted to do with him He also wants to do with me. He wants me to become a holy person. Because of this I want to know Father Founder more and more. I'm sure that I can learn many things from him. First of all, how to accept the suffering and the difficulties on the way of my vocation.

Father Stanislaus was able to accept everything without complaining. Especially, when as a young man he got seriously sick and became even a beggar. He had nothing in that time; no house, no relatives, no money. People despised him. He laid down on the street and begged. How much he had to suffer! How shamed he was! However, he accepted everything in the faith and because of the faith in Jesus Christ. That situation makes me reflect a lot about myself. How many times I did not want to accept my reality? How many times I wanted to escape my problems? I avoided to speak about my weakness because I was afraid of the truth. Father Founder teaches me that only through the sufferings and difficulties I can discover the will of God in my life. He makes me understand the sufferings and difficulties as the grace through which I can come closer to God.



From Saint Stanislaus Papczynski I also learn the great love for God and neighbor. "Let everything you do, be done in love" (*The Rule of Life*). I understand that love is the source and the foundation of all things. If I truly love God, I am able to live the consecrated life according to the three evangelical counsels. If I truly love God nothing is difficult for me. Because of love Saint Stanislaus decided to give his life for God. He vowed to do everything for His greater glory and the honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (*Oblatio* December 11, 1670). The love is the source and the summit of Christian faith which I want to learn imitating Father Founder.

Saint Stanislaus Papczynski shows me also the great hope and trust in Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. There were many things contrary to his will in his life: as a child he could not study well; he did not pass the exam to the college in Lvov; then he got very sick; he was troubled in founding the Congregation which God has imprinted in his soul; long time he could not obtain the approval for his Order. But he never lost the hope and trust in Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. He joyfully accepted everything. His hope and trust in Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary strengthen me on the way of my vocation. I am often discouraged and disappointed because of myself: my not very great abilities, my health, my personality, my little understanding and knowledge. Because of this I lose the hope and trust but Father Founder encourages me that I do not need be afraid because God is with me and I am in His Heart. He knows everything that happens to me. His Providence is always upon me. He wants me to live in accordance with what I pray in Divine Mercy Chaplet: "Jesus I trust in you".

When I sometimes see in the catholic bookstores the books about many different saints, the question appears in my mind: "why there is not here a book about Saint Stanislaus Papczynski? He is a one of the greatest saints and the people should know him. He is a good example to imitate. He is a good disciple of Jesus Christ and a faithful servant of the Virgin Mary in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. I know that I have not yet enough capacity to write a book about our Father Founder but I always look for an opportunity to introduce him to the Vietnamese people who do not know him yet. First of all, they are the candidates to the Marian Fathers who came after me. They must know Saint Stanislaus Papczynski. Then my family, relatives, friends and those who ask me for prayer. I also desire to introduce Father Founder to the Vietnamese youth.

Anyway, I see that the presence of Father Stanislaus in Vietnam is more and more visible. Last month on his feast day May 18 I heard from a one of our candidates that his sister-in-law was pregnant but the fetus was very weak. She often went to the hospital to make the tests. The doctor said that it was very difficult to protect the fetus because the mother had already miscarried before. When our candidate heard this, he immediately started to recite the Novena to Saint Stanislaus Papczynski and so pray for the life of the child and the health of his mother. After few days his sister-in-law went to the hospital and the doctor declared that her child was healthy and his life was not in danger any more. Last month that woman gave birth to a healthy son. Our candidate who prayed for them both believes that they were saved because of the intercession of Saint Stanislaus Papczynski. It is one of the signs of the presence of Father Founder in Vietnam.

After 4 years spent in the Marian Community as the candidate, postulant and novice, I discover that I am here not only because the Congregation has accepted me but also, because Father Stanislaus welcomed me. He wants me to love God and the Blessed Virgin Mary as he did. He wants me to follow Jesus Christ according to his example. He wants me to do everything for Christ and the Church according to the Marian Charism. Saint Stanislaus Papczynski has become a living person for me, always present in my heart. I cannot sleep well if I do not say something to him.

*Peter Nguyễn Văn Hà MIC*



350 YEAR JUBILEE  
MARIAN FATHERS

*Documents of the 1st Theological Symposium of the Marian Fathers' School of Spirituality* assembles articles prepared for the symposium, which was planned for October 20-21, 2020 in Licheń, as part of the General Convention of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers. Unfortunately, the pandemic, which affected the whole world at that time, made it impossible for the authors of the articles to meet and to discuss the proffered issues. However, this did not stop us from publishing these materials. Furthermore, with time, it was possible to add to the previously planned symposium conferences other papers that interpreted in a broader context the meaning of the act of the *Oblatio* and religious consecration. These two issues are clearly connected with one another, creating a point of reference for the religious identity in the spirituality of the Marian Fathers. Consequently, the title “*Oblatio* and Consecration” was chosen for the planned symposium. For the *Oblatio* made by St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary is an act of consecration, constituting a turning point: it closes his Piarist period and also opens the stage of his new vocation, that is, the founding of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers. By making the act of the *Oblatio*, our Saint becomes the Father and Founder of a new institute and publicly declares the founding charism, already imprinted on his heart by the Holy Spirit. A few years later, he personally recalled these moments and described his experiences in the work entitled *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis* (Founding of the House of Recollection). Recognizing the *Oblatio* as the beginning of a new religious community is tantamount to acknowledging religious consecration as the most important element of the religious identity in the spirituality of the Marian Fathers: it means that someone is recognized as a Marian religious and that the origin of his religious life began with his consecration. It is also true, even if sometime later – for various reasons judged necessary – this consecrated person was unable to live in the community. Such are the theological and spiritual effects of assigning the primacy to religious consecration.

From the Foreword