

Małgorzata Pagacz

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

ORCID 0000-0003-4504-9142

Faith as the Foundation of the Renewal of the Consecrated Persons' Life in the Light of the Thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI¹

Abstract: The article addresses the issue of faith in the life of consecrated persons. Its aim is to state in what sense – in the light of the thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI – faith is the foundation for the renewal of the life of those consecrated to God. The article points out that their task is to strengthen the faith; it explains what consequences this mission entails. Benedict XVI emphasises that only a consecrated life lived in faith does not fail to live up to its essence. He expects persons totally dedicated to God to live a profound faith, an intense and living personal relationship with Christ, in a dynamic of constant search for the Face of the Lord, and the renewal of their lives depends on the concrete realisation of these attitudes. The analysis of the Pope's thought allows us to draw important conclusions that point the way out of the crisis situation in which consecrated life finds itself today.

Keywords: faith, consecrated life, Benedict XVI, Christian spirituality

Introduction

The contemporary crisis of consecrated life, with its manifold manifestations, calls for an in-depth reflection on the complexity of the phenomenon in order to look for what will allow us to take the right direction towards renewal. Benedict XVI, in his numerous speeches and homilies addressed to consecrated persons, shows what is the essence of a life totally consecrated to God; how they are to realise their vocation in the contemporary Church and world; how full devotion to Christ and his Mystical Body is to be expressed; and what the significance of persons consecrated to God is

¹ Translated from Polish by Maciej Górnicki.

in the face of current cultural and worldview challenges. The Pope calls consecrated life a pilgrimage of faith;² he exhorts those living the evangelical counsels to strengthen their faith. At the same time, throughout his teaching, Benedict XVI deals extensively with the question of Christian faith, making it one of the guiding thoughts of his pontificate.

In his homily on the Day of Consecrated Life, the Year of Faith instituted by the Pope, Benedict XVI addresses those consecrated to God, encouraging them to renew the faith by which they are pilgrims towards the future. He calls consecrated life a pilgrimage of the spirit in search of the Face which sometimes reveals itself and at other times hides itself (see Ps 27:8). This desire is to be a constant striving of the heart, a fundamental criterion, directing the path of consecrated persons, both in small daily matters and in the most important decisions.³ This article will argue that – in the light of the thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI – the task of consecrated persons is to strengthen the faith; it will explain what this means in their lives and what consequences it has. The aim of the article is to present and show in what sense faith is the basis for the renewal of the life of consecrated persons.

1. Recalling “First Love” in the Pilgrimage of Faith

Pope Benedict XVI explicitly encourages and urges those consecrated to God to strengthen their faith so that it may illuminate their vocation, pointing out to what is worth taking up again and again in the internal renewal of consecrated life.⁴ The gift of faith is a grace and requires constant cultivation, which is why Benedict XVI recommends consecrated persons to remember, as if on a spiritual pilgrimage, the “first love” with which Jesus inflamed the hearts totally devoted to Him. However, this does not consist in an emotional recollection of past history in a nostalgic sense, but

² See Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

³ See Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013.

⁴ See Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013.

in kindling the flame of faith.⁵ The Pope asks consecrated persons: “Do you remember your enthusiasm when you began the pilgrimage of the consecrated life, trusting in the grace of God? Try not to lose this first fervour, and let Mary lead you to an ever fuller adherence. [...] Whatever the mission entrusted to you, whatever cloistered or apostolic service you are engaged in, maintain in your hearts the primacy of your consecrated life. Let it renew your faith.”⁶ The remembrance of God’s love and of his action in the life history of the one called is a way of opening oneself up to receive and consolidate the grace of faith and to develop it further.

Recalling with faith the journey of vocation the Pope writes about presupposes a profound awareness of what a vocation is in essence, i.e., a gratuitous gift of God inviting those whom He himself wishes to have for a greater service in the Church for the kingdom of God. Originating with the Creator, the initiative is addressed to individual people from whom God expects a response flowing from a living faith. Consecrated life is a path of faith and trust in God, of placing oneself in his hands, so no human being can predict what paths God will choose to follow.⁷ The choice of this path, therefore, is not the result of human calculation, but an event of faith, a loving response to God’s call, to His voice, demanding that the believer listen and discern. The Pope points out that this can only take place where faith is lived as a personal relationship: “This process, which enables us to respond positively to God’s call, is possible in Christian communities where the faith is lived intensely, where generous witness is given of adherence to the Gospel, where there is a strong sense of mission which leads people to make the total gift of self for the Kingdom of God, nourished by recourse to the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and by a fervent life of prayer.”⁸

The choice of the called person is animated by the certainty of faith, which can be expressed in the words: “We have known and believed the love that God has for us” (1 John 4:16). Benedict

⁵ See Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013.

⁶ Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

⁷ See Benedict XVI, Message, 21.04.2013.

⁸ Benedict XVI, Message, 21.04.2013.

XVI acknowledges that God's love follows paths that are sometimes difficult to foresee and understand, but it always reaches those who, through faith, allow themselves to be found by Him. The one who is called entrusts himself/herself to the faithfulness of God himself, enters into a relationship with Him, relying on God's love.⁹ This experience can only be lived and understood in the light of profound faith, so when it is lacking, the very foundations of consecrated life are shaken.

Taking up the path of a vocation is therefore exactly the same as living by faith: it is a response to the love of God. Faith – according to the Pope – constitutes “personal adherence – which involves all our faculties – to the revelation of God's gratuitous and ‘passionate’ love for us, fully revealed in Jesus Christ. The encounter with God who is Love engages not only the heart but also the intellect.”¹⁰ A Christian is someone won over by the love of Christ,¹¹ and the consecrated person allows himself to be won over by the Saviour completely, surrendering his/her whole existence to Him and adopting His way of life. Knowing the living God is a path that takes into account the mind, the will and the heart.¹² “One path towards love, and the ‘yes’ of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all-embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never ‘finished’ and complete.”¹³ According to Benedict XVI, the whole Christian life is a response to the love of God:¹⁴ “The first response is precisely faith as the acceptance, filled with wonder and gratitude, of the unprecedented divine

⁹ At the same time, the Pope points to the action of God himself: “He, the Father, pours his love into our innermost self through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5). And this love, fully manifested in Jesus Christ, engages with our existence and demands a response in terms of what each individual wants to do with his or her life, and what he or she is prepared to offer in order to live it to the full”: Benedict XVI, Message, 21.04.2013.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2013, no. 1.

¹¹ See Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2013, no. 1.

¹² See Bachanek, “Racjonalność wiary,” 115; Babiński, “Interpretacje ratybońskiego,” 86.

¹³ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 17.

¹⁴ See Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2013, no. 1.

initiative that precedes us and summons us. And the ‘yes’ of faith marks the beginning of a radiant story of friendship with the Lord, which fills and gives full meaning to our whole life.”¹⁵ The consecrated person is one who, moreover, has said another “yes” in faith, wishing to follow Christ and accepting the commitments flowing from the practice of living the evangelical counsels.

Moreover, the choice of the path of following Christ as an event of faith means finding a deeper meaning of life.¹⁶ Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI shows that Christian faith is what gives meaning to human life. “Faith is a human way of taking up a stand in the totality of reality, a way that cannot be reduced to knowledge; it is the bestowal of meaning without which the totality of man would remain homeless.”¹⁷ Man lives by what is proper to him as a human person: word, love and meaning – he does not live by material things alone. By contrast, “meaning is the bread on which man, in the intrinsically human part of his being, subsists.”¹⁸ Without this word, without this meaning, without love, man will find himself in a situation in which he cannot continue to live, even if he had all earthly goods in abundance.¹⁹ Man finds the meaning of his existence in God.²⁰ Meaning cannot be invented or constructed by oneself, because it is based on the relationship of the person with God. “No one can pull himself up out of the bog of uncertainty, of not being able to live, by his own exertions. [...] Meaning, that is,

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2013, no. 2. The Pope teaches further on: “But it is not enough for God that we simply accept his gratuitous love. Not only does he love us, but he wants to draw us to himself, to transform us in such a profound way as to bring us to say with Saint Paul: ‘it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’ (cf. Gal 2:20). When we make room for the love of God, then we become like him, sharing in his own charity. If we open ourselves to his love, we allow him to live in us and to bring us to love with him, in him and like him; only then does our faith become truly ‘active through love’ (Gal 5:6); only then does he abide in us (cf. 1 Jn 4:12)”: Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2013, no. 2.

¹⁶ See Pagacz, “Życie konsekrowane w służbie,” 326–337.

¹⁷ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 72 (*Wprowadzenie*, 62).

¹⁸ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 73 (*Wprowadzenie*, 63).

¹⁹ See Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 73 (*Wprowadzenie*, 63).

²⁰ See Słupek, “Benedykta XVI sensotwórcza,” 99.

the ground on which our existence as a totality can stand and live, cannot be made but only received.”²¹

In this way Joseph Ratzinger presents a Christian view of faith, according to which to believe is to entrust oneself to the sense that keeps man and the whole world in existence. The light of faith is capable of illuminating the whole of human life, together with moments of pain, suffering and death.²² Faith is like safe ground on which one can stand without fear.²³ This attitude is linked to the understanding of one’s own existence as a response to the Word, the Logos, which keeps everything in existence and embraces everything with rational Love.²⁴ Christian faith is personal assent to the fact that a meaning which man cannot give himself – but can only receive – has already been given, so that one needs only to open oneself to it and entrust oneself to it.²⁵ Faith is a personal entrusting oneself to the meaning. From this perspective, it becomes clear that man, when he decides to follow the call to the consecrated life, accepts faith as the foundation of the whole of life, without which the whole of the journey would become meaningless.

2. Strengthening the Faith in Prayer

Benedict XVI does not let consecrated persons forget: “We need a moment of silence and recollection to place ourselves in her school, so that she may teach us how to live from faith, how to grow in faith, how to remain in contact with the mystery of God in the ordinary, everyday events of our lives.”²⁶ The strengthening of the faith and its development, which is indispensable in the consecrated life, cannot, according to the Pope, take place otherwise than in prayer.²⁷ In this context, he writes, addressing consecrated persons: “In the silence of adoration; and thereby reawaken the wish to share – and the joy

²¹ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 73 (*Wprowadzenie*, 63).

²² See Warzeszak, “Wiara i niewiara,” 114.

²³ See Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 73 (*Wprowadzenie*, 63).

²⁴ See Pagacz, “Mathematics as a Way Towards.”

²⁵ See Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 73 (*Wprowadzenie*, 63).

²⁶ Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

²⁷ See Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013; Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

of sharing – in his life, his decisions, the obedience of faith, the blessedness of the poor and the radical nature of love. Starting ever anew from this encounter of love, you leave everything to be with him and like him, to put yourselves at the service of God and your brothers and sisters.”²⁸ Prayer, to which consecrated persons are particularly called, is a fundamental space for strengthening their faith.

An issue highlighted by Benedict XVI in his teaching is prayer as a space for learning hope and exercising oneself in it.²⁹ Prayer is the school of hope, and at the same time Christian hope – according to the Pope – is very close to faith. Benedict XVI understands faith in close connection with hope: he not only states that hope must be based on faith, but that faith is hope. He justifies this thesis on the basis of the New Testament and the faith of the early Church. In some texts the words “faith” and “hope” seem to be used interchangeably.³⁰ Faith is the substance of things which the Christian expects; the proof of the existence of those realities which he does not see (see Heb 11:1), but which are already present in an initial way. This is a definition of faith that directly connects this virtue with hope.³¹ Prayer is therefore also a school of faith and trust in God.

Consecrated persons, for whom prayer is a special gift and task, have a real opportunity to develop their faith and witness about it to others. The Pope says to those consecrated to God: “Prayer will produce in you the same effect which once led to the custom of calling priests and consecrated persons simply ‘spirituals’ (*Geistliche*) [...]. More importantly, though, the content of that word should become a part of our lives: namely, that in following the Lord, we become, by the power of the Spirit, ‘spiritual’ men and women.”³² Through the vocation to prayer – including supplicatory, for the whole Church and the world – the identity and mission

²⁸ Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013.

²⁹ See Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, no. 32–34.

³⁰ See Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, no. 2.

³¹ See Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, no. 2; Gardocki, “Christian Hope,” 281–282.

³² Benedict XVI, Address, 9.09.2007.

of consecrated persons is defined, which without deep faith is in danger of being lost.

Under the impact of the clashes in the post-Vatican II era, religious orders have experienced a serious upheaval and a shake-up of their identity. Joseph Ratzinger shares the view that the crisis of the Church today is a crisis experienced by priests and religious orders.³³ One of the manifestations of this phenomenon is the confusion of “renewal” with “comfortable furnishing.” As a result, some religious have begun to view prayer through the prism of purely human criteria. The Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith gives the example of one monastery where nightly vigils and prayers (provided for by the liturgy at the time) were deemed impossible to continue practising (due to an apparent concern for man), and instead watching television at night began.³⁴ The seemingly trivial situation also shows how there is a tendency to distort religious life, caused by the removal of faith and the adoption of merely human ways of arranging life, according to the mentality of contemporary currents and trends. The Cardinal therefore draws attention to the need to recover what is proper to the Christian faith amidst what the world proposes today.

In this perspective, the meaning of Benedict XVI’s words about the role that the consecrated persons are to play can be seen more fully: “By your prayer and intercession, you are the advocates of all who seek God, who are journeying towards God. You bear witness to a hope which, against every form of hopelessness, silent or spoken, points to the fidelity and the loving concern of God. Hence you are on the side of those who are crushed by misfortune and cannot break free of their burdens. You bear witness to that Love which gives itself for humanity and thus conquered death. You are on the side of all who have never known love, and who are no longer able to believe in life.”³⁵ The Pope shows in this way what the prayer of consecrated persons is for all who need it: prayer is an expression of faith and an irreplaceable service to brothers and sisters.

³³ See Ratzinger – Messori, *The Ratzinger Report*, 55 (*Raport o stanie*, 47).

³⁴ See Ratzinger – Messori, *The Ratzinger Report*, 115 (*Raport o stanie*, 98–99).

³⁵ Benedict XVI, Address, 8.09.2007.

Benedict XVI repeatedly tells consecrated persons that if they wish to be faithful to God and to their vocation, they must not give up implementing the words of St Benedict found in the Rule he wrote: “Do not place anything above the service of God.”³⁶ Prayer is not only a space for encountering God and strengthening faith, but moreover, Holy Spirit is the soul of prayer. The Pope strengthens consecrated persons in their experience: when they pray, the Holy Spirit comes to the aid of human weakness – when a person does not know how to pray, He contributes for believers in supplications that cannot be expressed in words (see Rom 8:26).³⁷ By praising and glorifying the Lord God, “a little bit of heaven will become present on earth.”³⁸

According to Benedict XVI, one can also trust that where God is faithfully adored, His blessing will not be lacking. The Pope also stresses the importance of effort in the prayer of consecrated persons, which is an opening up to the grace of faith. In this context, he admonishes them by pointing out that the regular recitation of the breviary requires discipline and sometimes even overcoming oneself, which often brings consolation and removes fatigue or dispiritedness.³⁹ In addition, Benedict XVI mobilises for a persevering meditation with faith on the word of God. Moreover, he calls consecrated life “a living ‘exegesis’ of God’s word.”⁴⁰ Persons totally consecrated to God are called to incorporate the word of God in their lives. For the fundamental connection between the word of God and consecrated life to be unbreakable, a living faith is necessary.

3. Imitating Christ in the Spirit of Faith

The evangelical foundations of the consecrated life are found in the relationship that Jesus established with some of his disciples,

³⁶ See, e.g., Benedict XVI, Address, 9.09.2007.

³⁷ See Benedict XVI, Address, 9.09.2007.

³⁸ Benedict XVI, Address, 9.09.2007.

³⁹ See Benedict XVI, Address, 9.09.2007; see also Pagacz, “Modlitwa,” 152–165.

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 83; see Kiejkowski – Pagacz, *Europa – humanizm*, 114–127.

calling them to welcome the kingdom of God in their lives, to place their existence at the service of this cause and, abandoning everything, to imitate Christ's way of life.⁴¹ Benedict XVI emphasises that it was because of their faith that the Apostles left everything to follow the Teacher (see Matt 10:28): "They believed the words with which he proclaimed the Kingdom of God present and fulfilled in his person."⁴²

So, the Pope points out that consecrated life is first and foremost to be a life of faith and trust in the Almighty, which finds expression in the profession of the evangelical counsels. Faith in God is abiding by Him, by which a person achieves a firm foothold in life; it is taking a firm stand, confidently standing on the ground of the word of God. Consecrated persons not only live by faith, but it is faith and total trust in God that constitute the essence of their existence – without this perspective, the life of religious would be meaningless. Religious vows can only become a real way of life in the light of deep faith, in the dynamic of seeking the Face of the Lord.⁴³ The practice of chastity, poverty and obedience, which belongs to the essence of the consecrated life and is decisive for its evangelical quality, cannot be understood or treated in the light of human logic alone. Addressing consecrated persons, the Pope emphasises the fundamental importance of the evangelical counsels and the necessity of living them in faith, since only faith makes it possible to put them into practice properly. Consecrated persons who wish to be faithful to the commitments they have made are called by the Pope to reflect more deeply on the importance of faith in living their religious vows (or promises).⁴⁴

Through faith, man freely entrusts himself entirely to God, and seeks to recognise and carry out His will in every circumstance of life.⁴⁵ Benedict XVI points out that the existence of those who belong wholly to Christ is intimately connected precisely with

⁴¹ See John Paul II, *Vita consecrata*, no. 14.

⁴² Benedict XVI, *Porta fidei*, no. 13.

⁴³ See, e.g., Benedict XVI, Address, 9.09.2007.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

⁴⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1814.

faith; it is faith that makes their life penetrated by the power of God himself; for faith opens the person to a living relationship with the Trinity. “When we abandon ourselves to the living God, when in humility of mind we have recourse to him, a kind of hidden stream of divine life pervades us. How important it is to believe in the power of faith, in its capacity to establish a close bond with the living God! We must give great attention to the development of our faith, so that it truly pervades all our attitudes, thoughts, actions and intentions”⁴⁶ – the Pope reassures the consecrated persons.

The teaching of Benedict XVI clearly implies that persevering faith is the condition for the authenticity and meaningfulness of the life of consecrated persons and the foundation of the works undertaken. Faith makes it possible to accept God’s designs and to surrender to His guidance beyond human limitations; it gives peace of heart flowing from the certainty that it is the Holy Spirit, in His wisdom, who knows better the path by which He leads the person who surrenders to His Love. Through faith, the consecrated person trusts God and places himself/herself, his/her talents, his/her limitations and his/her entire future completely at God’s disposal, which happens by virtue of the evangelical counsels he/she has accepted.⁴⁷

The Pope points out to those practising the evangelical counsels: “Model your lives daily on the Lord’s own loving self-oblation in obedience to the will of the Father.”⁴⁸ The obedience of consecrated persons only makes sense in a spirit of faith. It aims at submitting reason and will not to man – who in religious life has the function of representing God, being the legal superior of the community – but to God himself. Obedience is practised out of love for Jesus Christ, who came to do the will of the Father (cf. John 4:34; 5:30; Heb 10:7; Ps 39:9) and, “having taken the form of a servant” (Phil 2:7), learned obedience from what he suffered (Heb 5:8).⁴⁹ According

⁴⁶ Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

⁴⁷ See Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

⁴⁸ Benedict XVI, Homily, 19.07.2008.

⁴⁹ See Vaticanum II, *Perfectae caritatis*, no. 14; Ziemann, “Wiara w życiu,” 143–144.

to Benedict XVI, consecrated persons living the vow of obedience place their self-fulfilment in the hands of God.⁵⁰ This attitude can only be exercised in the light of faith; the Pope emphasises that listening to God and being obedient to Him has nothing to do with external compulsion.⁵¹ A consecrated person can grow in his/her vocation to the extent that he/she discovers the value of a vowed obedience united to a living faith, binding him/her to the Lord God, modelled on the obedience of Abraham, the father in faith, and even more on the obedience of Christ, doing the will of Love.⁵²

Referring to the evangelical counsels, Benedict XVI clearly states that “by faith, men and women have consecrated their lives to Christ, leaving all things behind so as to live obedience, poverty and chastity with Gospel simplicity, concrete signs of waiting for the Lord who comes without delay.”⁵³ The Pope therefore points out that a life of virginity for the kingdom of God constitutes an “intense relationship” which, above all, is a bond in the Holy Spirit with the living Christ and, at the same time, a bond with the heavenly Father.⁵⁴ The meaning of the vow of chastity can only be discovered through faith, relying entirely on God, looking to Jesus, penetrating His affections, His life in full communion with the living God and in pure, fraternal communion with men.⁵⁵ The Pope instructs consecrated persons to live in virginity with a hope that leaves to God the task of realisation, believing that He will fulfil it.⁵⁶ He writes: “Consecrated virginity cannot be inscribed in the framework of worldly logic; it is the most ‘nonsensical’ of Christian paradoxes and it is not given to all to understand and to live it (cf. Matt 19:11–12).”⁵⁷ Abiding in virginity for the sake of the kingdom of God is incomprehensible to many contemporaries who do not accept

⁵⁰ See Benedict XVI, Address, 10.12.2005.

⁵¹ See Benedict XVI, Address, 8.09.2007.

⁵² See Benedict XVI, Address, 22.05.2006; see also Pagacz, “Wolność osób,” 87–103.

⁵³ Benedict XVI, *Porta fidei*, no. 13.

⁵⁴ See Benedict XVI, Address, 8.09.2007.

⁵⁵ See Benedict XVI, Address, 8.09.2007.

⁵⁶ See Benedict XVI, Address, 8.09.2007.

⁵⁷ Benedict XVI, Address, 22.05.2006.

the eschatological order flowing from the primacy of faith in the words of Jesus and following him. Therefore, Benedict XVI leaves no doubt about the irreplaceable importance of the Christian faith, especially in today's context, when many times man is unable to realise what total belonging to the Lord, Creator and Redeemer is.

The Pope speaks similarly of the vow of poverty, reminding those who have taken it of its deepest Christocentric meaning, which can only be penetrated by faith: Christ, being rich in all the riches of God, became poor.⁵⁸ The vow of poverty, in accordance with the Gospel Beatitudes, reveals the essence of true personal happiness and the freedom that comes from trusting in God. The Beatitudes are to be for religious the guiding thought of their lives. The Pope writes: "May yours be a life that is focused on the Beatitudes, that contradicts human logic to express unconditional trust in God, who wants human beings to be happy [...]. May you bear fruits of genuine faith, writing with your life and your witness trajectories of hope, writing them with the actions suggested by 'creativity in charity'."⁵⁹ Poverty lived in faith must be combined with an attitude of charity, which is an opening of the heart to others, since faith without works is dead (see Jas 2:17).

4. Faith Recognising the Wisdom of Weakness

Benedict XVI explicitly asks those who have consecrated themselves to God to cultivate the faith that is capable of recognising the wisdom of weakness.⁶⁰ He states unequivocally that the mystery of the cross, which can only be accepted in faith, is inseparable from the mystery of consecrated life.⁶¹ He points out that Christ does not

⁵⁸ See Benedict XVI, Address, 8.09.2007.

⁵⁹ Benedict XVI, Address, 3.02.2007; see Kiejkowski – Pagacz, *Europa – humanizm*, 100–114.

⁶⁰ See Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013.

⁶¹ "Faith, as gift and response, causes us to know the truth of Christ as Love incarnate and crucified, as full and perfect obedience to the Father's will and infinite divine mercy towards neighbour; faith implants in hearts and minds the firm conviction that only this Love is able to conquer evil and death": Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2013, no. 4.

free man from what is difficult, but helps him to mature in his sufferings. The believer is invited to open his or her soul to the Lord so that He can dwell in the weakness and fragile humanity of people totally dedicated to God.⁶²

Moreover, the Pope uncovers the eschatological meaning of evangelical counsels: “In the joys and afflictions of the present time, when the harshness and weight of the cross make themselves felt, do not doubt that the *kenosis* of Christ is already a paschal victory.”⁶³ Without the mystery of the cross and the paschal journey of Jesus, it is not possible to understand the Person of the Saviour, His mission, His love, and therefore it is not possible to authentically follow in His footsteps.

On the other hand, modern man – according to Benedict XVI – is strongly tempted to feel so self-sufficient as to close himself off to God and to the mysterious (beyond human comprehension) plan God has for him.⁶⁴ The Pope notes that in a world where the temptation and danger for man is to trust in the efficacy and power of human means, the task of believers is to discover and bear witness to the power of God.⁶⁵

For this reason, Benedict XVI touches on the paschal dimension of sacrifice contained in the life of the evangelical counsels, stating that it is precisely with human limitations and human weakness that people are called to live in imitation of Christ.⁶⁶ This is a necessary perspective of faith that those consecrated to God must not forget if they want their lives to be truly evangelical.⁶⁷ Such a life, in turn, makes the consecrated a sign of the “minority” and the weakness of the little ones, empathising with those who are on God’s side

⁶² See Benedict XVI, General Audience, 13.06.2012.

⁶³ Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013.

⁶⁴ See Benedict XVI, Message, 7.05.2006.

⁶⁵ See Benedict XVI, General Audience, 13.06.2012.

⁶⁶ See Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013.

⁶⁷ “Faith, which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross, gives rise to love. Love is the light – and in the end, the only light – that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working”: Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 39.

but who have no socially significant voice.⁶⁸ The Pope points out that if someone follows Christ in consecrated life, it is not because he himself has sought this path, but because Jesus has called him to a deeper union with Him in the present.⁶⁹ People consecrated to God are called to live by faith in order to accompany the Saviour on His way,⁷⁰ leading through the cross to the Resurrection. They strive, therefore, to live that love which will be fully manifested in heaven.

Benedict XVI, addressing those who have entrusted themselves completely to God, emphasises that, as in their lives, so in the life of Our Lady, joy is inevitably linked to sharing in the cross of Christ. The Pope states: “Hers is the suffering of the heart that is one with the Heart of the Son of God, pierced by love. From this wound God’s light flows and also from the suffering, sacrifice and self-giving of consecrated people who live through their love for God and for others, that shines the very light that evangelizes nations.”⁷¹ Therefore – according to Benedict XVI, the test of the authenticity of the faith and mission of consecrated people should be the reference to the faith of Mary.⁷² “Mirror yourselves in her heart. Remain in her school!”⁷³ – urges the Pope.

Benedict XVI observes that “faith has a place, not only in our state of soul and religious experiences, but above all in thought and action, in everyday work, in the struggle against ourselves, in community life and in the apostolate.”⁷⁴ Faith makes the life of the consecrated – marked by human weakness and limitations – be permeated by the power of God himself. “The consecrated life, lived in faith, unites you closely to God, calls forth charisms and confers an extraordinary fruitfulness to your service”⁷⁵ – the Pope assures. At the same time, he emphasises the need to enter into

⁶⁸ See Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013.

⁶⁹ See Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

⁷⁰ See Benedict XVI, Homily, 11.09.2006.

⁷¹ Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013.

⁷² See Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

⁷³ Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

⁷⁴ Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

⁷⁵ Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

the logic of losing one's (selfish) life in love for God and in service to the brothers, which is only possible in faith. "Faith can always bring us back to God even when our sin leads us astray,"⁷⁶ Benedict XVI strengthens consecrated persons. Only faith gives access to the mystery of God.⁷⁷ Only the perspective of faith allows one to truly see the full reality, accepting both weakness and power in the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Benedict XVI expects consecrated persons to live a profound faith, an intense and living personal relationship with Christ, in a dynamic of constant search for the Face of the Lord, and the renewal of the life of consecrated persons depends on the concrete realisation of these attitudes. He emphasises that only a consecrated life lived in faith does not diverge from its essence.

It is worth noting that Benedict XVI's perspective on these issues coincides with what the document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *New Wine in New Wineskins*, points out, stating that the main cause of people leaving religious life is weakening of the vision of faith.⁷⁸

The analysis of the papal thought presented here allows us to draw an important conclusion that when consecrated persons look in the light of deep faith at the current difficulties facing consecrated life (the shrinking number of persons and communities of consecrated life, the significant increase in the average age of religious, the lack of vocations, the economic, organisational and difficulties associated with globalisation, the dangers of relativism, marginalisation and lack of social relevance⁷⁹), we find that these

⁷⁶ Benedict XVI, Address, 26.05.2006.

⁷⁷ "Access to the Mystery of God is by faith alone, nothing else. There is no other path to God. Neither magic, nor pure rationalism, nor gnosis, nor atheism leads to Him and the truth about Him. We are left with the twilight of faith and its humility. This is no small thing": Szymik, "Przyszłość i zadania," 129.

⁷⁸ See Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *New Wine in New Wineskins*, no. 24.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Francis, Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People, no. I, 3.

problems become not so much dramas or sad, inevitable phenomena, but can be opportunities for greater adherence to Christ, for total trust in Him and the possibility of allowing God to purify the faith of those dedicated to Him as His possession.

It is precisely from the perspective of faith that one can fully understand why the Pope exhorts consecrated persons not to join the “prophets of misfortune” who proclaim the end or futility of consecrated life in the Church of today, but to clothe themselves in Jesus Christ and put on the spiritual armour of light – as St Paul calls for (see Rom 13:11–14).⁸⁰ Moreover, given the profound crisis of faith affecting many people today – as the Pope openly states⁸¹ – Benedict XVI’s call to consecrated persons to renew and strengthen their faith takes on particular significance for the whole Church and the modern world.

Wiara podstawą odnowy życia osób konsekrowanych w świetle myśli Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI

Abstrakt: Artykuł podejmuje zagadnienie wiary w życiu osób konsekrowanych. Jego celem jest stwierdzenie, w jakim sensie – w świetle myśli Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI – wiara jest podstawą odnowy życia osób poświęconych na własność Bogu. Artykuł wskazuje, że ich zadanie to umacnianie wiary, oraz wyjaśnia, jakie konsekwencje niesie ze sobą to posłannictwo. Benedykt XVI podkreśla, że życie konsekrowane nie różni się ze swoją istotą jedynie wtedy, gdy jest przeżywane w wierze. Oczekuje od osób całkowicie oddanych Bogu, by żyły głęboką wiarą, intensywną i żywą więzią osobową z Chrystusem, w dynamice ciągłego poszukiwania Oblicza Pana, a od konkretnej realizacji tych postaw uzależniona jest odnowa ich życia. Analiza papieskiej myśli pozwala wyciągnąć ważne wnioski wyznaczające kierunek wyjścia z kryzysowej sytuacji, w której współcześnie znajduje się życie konsekrowane.

Słowa kluczowe: wiara, życie konsekrowane, Benedykt XVI, duchowość chrześcijańska

⁸⁰ See Benedict XVI, Homily, 2.02.2013.

⁸¹ See Benedict XVI, *Porta fidei*, no. 2.

Bibliography

- Babiński, J., "Interpretacje ratyżbońskiego przemówienia Benedykta XVI," *Studia Gdańskie* 24 (2009) 85–95.
- Bachanek, G., "Racjonalność wiary – Romano Guardini a Joseph Ratzinger," *Collectanea Theologica* 90/1 (2020) 105–118. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2020.90.1.04>.
- Benedict XVI, Address by the Holy Father: Encounter with Men and Women Religious, Seminarians and Representatives of Ecclesial Movements (Częstochowa, 26.05.2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060526_jasna-gora.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Superiors General of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (22.05.2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060522_vita-consacrata.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Men and Women Religious, Members of Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life of the Rome Diocese (10.12.2005), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051210_religious-rome-diocese.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the International Symposium of Secular Institutes (3.02.2007), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070203_istituti-secolari.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI: Vespers with Priests, Religious, Deacons and Seminarians (Mariazell, 8.09.2007), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070908_vespri-mariazell.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI: Visit to Heiligenkreuz Abbey (9.09.2007), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070909_heiligenkreuz.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2010).
- Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta fidei* (2011).
- Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est* (2005).
- Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi* (2007).
- Benedict XVI, General Audience (13.06.2012), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120613.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI: Eucharistic Celebration with Bishops, Seminarians and Novices (Sydney, 19.07.2008), <https://>

- www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20080719_cathedral.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI: Holy Mass with Members of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (2.02.2013), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20130202_vita-consacrata.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Homily of the Holy Father: Marian Vespers with the Religious and Seminarians of Bavaria (11.09.2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20060911_vespers-altotting.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Message His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/lent/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20121015_lent-2013.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 43rd World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 7.05.2006, *Vocation in the mystery of the Church*, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/vocations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20060305_xliiii-vocations.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Benedict XVI, Message of the Holy Father for the 50th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 21.04.2013, *Vocations as a sign of hope founded in faith*, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/vocations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20121006_1-vocations.html (access 22.07.2023).
- Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.; Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2020).
- Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *New Wine in New Wineskins* (2017), <https://www.vitaconsacrata.va/content/dam/vitaconsacrata/LibriPPDF/Inglese/New%20Wine%20in%20new%20Wineskins.pdf> (access 30.08.2023).
- Francis, Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (2014).
- Gardocki, D., “Christian Hope as Seen by J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI,” *Verbum Vitae* 41 (2023) 271–290. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.14581>.
- John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* (1996).
- Kiejkowski, P. – Pagacz, M., *Europa – humanizm – życie konsekrowane. Wokół myśli J. Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* (Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza 2021).
- Pagacz, M., “Mathematics as a Way Towards the Creative Logos: Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI’s Understanding of Scientificity,” *Collectanea Theologica* 92/2 (2022) 107–130. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2022.92.2.05>.

- Pagacz, M., "Modlitwa szkołą nadziei w życiu osób konsekrowanych według Benedykta XVI," *Polonia Sacra* 25/2 (2021) 151–168. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15633/ps.3986>.
- Pagacz, M., "Wolność osób konsekrowanych w ujęciu Benedykta XVI," *Dylematy wolności we współczesnym Kościele oraz Europie* (ed. P. Kiejkowski; Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza 2021) 87–103.
- Pagacz, M., "Życie konsekrowane w służbie poszukiwania sensu według Benedykta XVI," *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 29/1 (2021) 323–344. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34839/wpt.2021.29.1.323-344>.
- Pagacz, M., *Życie konsekrowane znakiem nadziei dla współczesnego świata w nauczaniu Kościoła od Soboru Watykańskiego II* (Kraków: Salwator 2019).
- Ratzinger, J., *Introduction to Christianity* (trans. J.R. Foster – M.J. Miller; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 2004); Polish ed.: Ratzinger, J., *Wprowadzenie w chrześcijaństwo* (tłum. Z. Włodkowa; Kraków: Znak 1996).
- Ratzinger, J. – Messori, V., *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (trans. S. Attanasio – G. Harrison; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 1985); Polish ed.: Ratzinger, J. – Messori, V., *Raport o stanie wiary. Z Ks. Kardynałem Josephem Ratzingerem rozmawia Vittorio Messori* (trans. Z. Orszyn; Kraków – Warszawa: Michalineum 1986).
- Słupek, R., "Benedykta XVI sensotwórcza apologia wiary jako odpowiedź na postmodernistyczny kryzys sensu i wartości," *Biblioteka Teologii Fundamentalnej* 8 (2013) 87–106.
- Szymik, J., "Przyszłość i zadania teologii," *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 30/2 (2017) 128–140.
- Vaticanum II, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae caritatis* (1965).
- Warzeszak, J., "Wiara i niewiara. Dialektyka wiary i niewiary w nauczaniu Benedykta XVI," *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 27/2 (2014) 111–136.
- Ziemann, E., "Wiara w życiu duchowym osoby konsekrowanej," *Symposium* 17/2 (2013) 139–151.