



Paweł Sieradzki

Between Poland and Rome

The activity of Fr. Anzelm Gądek OCD (1884-1969)
at home and abroad

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Lublin 2016

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Introduction

While analysing history of the Catholic Church between the First and the Second Vatican Council, it is possible to notice that it was a period in which Catholics had to face, with so far unprecedented intensity, civilizational experiments directly violating personal dignity of a man. First, there was economic liberalism, lacking any restrictions and following the development of industry, reducing a man to the role of an "element" multiplying income of an employer. Then, the communist utopia as a conglomerate of atheism, materialism and a permanent class struggle. Finally, National Socialism which put anti-Christian, Nietzschean dialectics into effect, causing the greatest hecatomb in the 20th century. In these circumstances the testimony of a human life, in the centre of which is evangelical message of love, carried out in the spirit of holy indications given by Teresa Benedicta of the Cross and John of the Cross, is particularly worthy of recognition, refers to the life of Father Anzelm of St. Andrew Corsini OCD¹.

Childhood and school years

Maciej Józef Gądek – for he is the subject of this work – was born on the 24th of February 1884 in a village of Marszowice, near Bochnia, which belonged to the Parish Church in Niegowić². He was the second son of an impoverished married couple³, Antoni⁴ and Salomea from the family of Kowalscy⁵. He was baptised one day after his birth by the parish priest of the Parish Church in Niegowić, Father Jan Popławski⁶. Giving the middle name to the child – Joseph, was linked to the fact of the existence in the Niegowić Parish of a well-established cult of St. Joseph, a tangible sign of which was to venerate his image in the Parish Church with particular care⁷.

The boy's father, even though he did not run his own farm, skilfully fulfilled the function of an administrator of three manor farms. With this work he supported his family. The mother was taking care of the children's upbringing and was running the household. Apart from guaranteeing a proper psychophysical growth of her son, it was Salomea Gądek who, with a particular attention, addressed the spiritual development of small Maciej. The main element of this motherly and devotional pedagogy was a fervent worship of the Mother of God and a systematic instilling of the truths of the Catholic faith. After

Formation and priesthood

In 1901 he graduated at the age of 17 from the secondary school and he applied for an admission to the Order of the Discalced Carmelite Fathers¹². The formal application from the 1st of August 1901 was preceded by the submission of written reference letters about him, the authors of which were the then priest of his home parish, Father Stanisław Pilchowski¹³, Prior of the monastery in Wadowice, Father Bartholomew of St. Teresa (Diaz de Cerio)¹⁴, and Prince-Cardinal Jan Puzyna¹⁵.

Seventeen days later in Czerna he received his monastic habit and his previous name was replaced with the name of Anzelm, together with adding the predicate "of St. Andrew Corsini"¹⁶. Exactly one year later, on the 17th of August 1902, he took his first religious vows¹⁷ and then after the completion of the so-called profesat, and finishing cursory education in the area of philosophy, the young monk, by the decision of his superiors who had noticed his intellectual abilities, was sent to study theology in Rome, at the Gregorian University. After nearly five year period of monastic and intellectual growth in the Eternal City, and after previous receiving of lower holy orders¹⁸ as well as sub-deaconate¹⁹ and deaconate²⁰, on the 25th of July 1907 Father Anzelm Gądek was ordained at the hands of Archbishop

Rector of the International Collegium and a Chair of the Faculty of Theology

After finishing provincial term in 1924 – Father Anzelm went to Rome in April next year as the first socius of the Polish province²⁷ in order to take part in the General Chapter of the Order. He also participated in the canonization ceremony of blessed Teresa of the Infant Jesus. He gave account of this event to sisters in Sosnowiec²⁸. At that time he did not know that his stay in Rome was going to last much longer. Having been elected as a member of *pro correctione Constitutionum*²⁹ commission (in accordance with the *Code of Canon Law* from 1917), he had to stay in Rome for another few months.

Having completed his work, a new General – Father Wilhelm of Saint Albert (Lechner) – ordered him, after a few unsuccessful attempts made by the Order and plans being present in the Order already from the turn of the 19th and the 20th century³⁰, to perform an uneasy task of organising an International Collegium of the Discalced Carmelites by the General House on Corso d'Italia 39.³¹

Father Anzelm very much wanted to return to his homeland in order to personally serve the Polish province and, above all, the young Congregation of Carmelite Sisters of the Infant Jesus, which

Return to the post-war Poland

Father Anzelm's appraisal by the circles in the Roman Curia was so serious that towards the end of 1944 he began to be taken into consideration as a candidate for a bishop in the dioceses of northern Poland, affected by severe losses amongst the clergy. Monsignor Domenico Tardini⁶⁸, a member of the Vatican Secretariat of the State, who was examining the case, received from the then prefect of the Congregation for Seminaries and Universities, Cardinal Giuseppe Pizzardo⁶⁹, a comprehensive dossier on Father Anzelm with a clear indication that: "he is highly regarded by us", and, moreover, he stated that he considered him to be "a friar of a very good spirit, very thoughtful, sensible, characterised by an acute, serene stability of judgements"⁷⁰. Apostolic Nuncio to Poland from before the war, Archbishop Filippo Cortesi,⁷¹ directly suggested that Fr. Anzelm should take the bishopric of Włocławek⁷². On the other hand, Bishop Józef Gawlina, proposed that he should take the bishopric of Chełmno and at the same time, keeping in mind the harmful echoes about a visitation made by him in Poland before the war, he stated that it would have been unfortunate to appoint him archbishop of Warsaw⁷³. In the end, Fr. Anzelm did not take any of the bishoprics and after his previous