

Instruction on the Vows by the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites: Fr. Philip Sainz de Baranda, OCD

(Slightly modified to conform to OCDS Constitutions, June 16, 2003)
(Text can be found in the *Book of Documents*, pp. 328-330 under “Rituals”)

7. Anytime after a year from the definitive promise, a member may ask, as a personal option, to be admitted by the council to the profession of the vows of chastity and obedience for life. While the Promise was made before God to the Superiors and members of the Order, the vows are made directly to God, for vows are acts of religious worship. Thus, the vows add the merit of the virtue of religion to the observance of chastity and obedience. They constitute a more complete self-offering and therefore entail a greater moral responsibility. The binding force of these vows, freely made, renders more visible the bond of love and commitment that exists between Christ and His Bride, the Church.

8. Since the vows confer a new “cultic” or “worshiping” dimension upon the observance of the evangelical counsels, chastity according to one’s state and obedience to superiors become attitudes and acts of divine worship. This new context converts them into cultic expressions of one’s baptismal consecration. Thus they witness to a more generous response and interior offering of the whole person to the Father who loved us in Christ.

9. The vows are intrinsically linked to the Eucharist as well as to Baptism, for the Eucharist is Christian prayer and worship “par excellence.” The vows of chastity and obedience associate the Secular Carmelite by a new title with the mystery of Christ in His prayer of oblation and thanksgiving. Furthermore, in the face of human inconstancy, the vows aim at stability of purpose for the present and the future in conformity with Christ’s constancy in His obedient, sacrificial offering of self to the Father.

10. While, in their intimate association with Baptism and the Eucharist, the vows offer God a more intensified dedication and worship, they also assume other ecclesial and eschatological dimensions. The graced freedom, which the vows confer, renders the Secular Carmelite more disposed to serve the needs of the ecclesial community at home and at large. And together with a zealous apostolate, the concrete testimony of the evangelical counsels serves as a sign that the Kingdom of God is in our midst, while the world and its values are passing away.

11. The fact that Secular Carmelites may add vows of obedience and chastity to their promise does not devalue poverty, which is not formalized by vow. Christian baptism itself entails the cultivation of the spirit of poverty, great attention to the needs of the poor, and the living in this world as though possessing nothing. For pastoral reasons poverty is not vowed, for its concrete object and material limits are not easily determined by general principle. Rather, living the beatitude of poverty is a matter of ongoing personal discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, it is clear that, by making one’s definitive commitment in the Secular Order, a member explicitly promises to tend, for the whole of one’s life, towards evangelical perfection in the spirit of the evangelical counsel of poverty as well as of chastity and obedience. This holds true with, or without, a vow.

Given at Rome: October 15, 1990