

o6. Obedience in Fraternal Charity





Your will, not mine,
be done

Obedient

Latin

obediens

ob – right up against

Audiens - **‘listening’**

Greek

‘υπακουω hypakouô

hypo - under

akouô - **listening**

Hebrew

שָׁמַע shamâ’

listening

heeding

obeying

Jesus' obedience



‘Your will, not mine,
be done.’

‘My food is to do the will of
him who sent me and to
complete his work’ (John 4:34).

‘I seek to do not my own will
but the will of him who sent
me’ (John 5:30).

‘The one who sent me is with
me; he has not left me alone, for
I always do what is pleasing to
him’ (John 8:28-29).

Revelation 3:20

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking;
if you hear my voice and open the door,
I will come in to you
and eat with you, and you with me.

Jesus' obedience

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Mary's obedience



‘Let what You have said be done to me.’

‘Blessed is she who believed that what was spoken to her
by the Lord would be fulfilled.’

‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,”
will enter the kingdom of heaven,
but only the one
who does the will of my Father in heaven’ (Matthew 7:21).

‘Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven
is my brother and sister and mother’ (Matthew 12:49-50).

‘Want only what God wants’ (Teresa Interior Castle II. 1. 7).

‘Prepare yourself with determination and every possible effort to bring your will into conformity with God’s will. The greatest perfection attainable along the spiritual path lies in this conformity. ... In perfect conformity to God’s will lies all our good’ (Teresa Interior Castle II. 1. 8).

‘What does it profit you to give God one thing if he asks of you another? Consider what it is God wants, and then do it. You will as a result satisfy your heart better than with something toward which you yourself are inclined’ (John of the Cross Sayings of light and love 73).

‘The union of love of God is an habitual and loving attentiveness to the will of God’ (John of the Cross Spiritual Canticle 28,10).

‘Now, abandonment alone guides me. I have no other compass!
I can no longer ask for anything with fervour,
except the accomplishment of God's will in my soul,
without any creature being able to set obstacles in the way.’

(Therese of Lisieux)

‘The soul must surrender itself to the Divine will completely,
passionately, so as to will nothing else but what God wills.’

(Elizabeth of the Trinity Heaven in Faith).

‘The soul remains under his touch like a lyre, and all His gifts to it
are like so many strings which vibrate to sing, day and night,
the praise of His glory’ (Elizabeth of the Trinity, Last Retreat).

Pedro Arrupé SJ

‘More than ever, I now find myself in the hands of God.
This is what I have wanted all my life, from my youth.
And this is still what I want.

But now there is a difference:
the initiative is entirely with God.

It is indeed a profound spiritual experience
to know and feel myself so totally in his hands,
in the hands of this God
who has taken hold of me.’

(MSC Constitutions page 18)

Jules Chevalier 1907

‘I am in God’s hands.

God will do with me what God judges fit.

I will drink of the chalice that God gives me.

And I will submit always to God’s most holy and adorable will.’

Listening to others

‘God is so content that the rule and direction of human beings be through other human beings, and that we be governed by human reason, that God definitely does not want us to bestow entire credence upon supernatural communications, or be confirmed in their strength and security, until they pass through the human channel of the mouth of another human being. As often as God reveals something, God confers upon the soul a kind of inclination to manifest this to someone appropriate. Until this is done, we usually go without complete satisfaction, for it is not received from another person like ourselves’ (John of the Cross Ascent II.22.9).

On the road to Damascus, Paul asked Jesus: ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’ (Acts 22;10). Jesus told him to go to Damascus and he would be told.

Religious Obedience : in community

‘The person is not the primordial fact.

What is primordial is the community.

It is within community,

through the inter-subjective relations

that are the life of the community,

that there arises the differentiation of the individual person ...

If persons are the products of community,

if the strongest and best of communities is based on love,

then religious experience

and the emergence of personality

go hand in hand.’

(Lonergan Philosophy of God and theology).

The central importance of community in the exercise of religious obedience

The primary task of community-as-community is the building and maintenance of the community itself. The community may, in some cases, share a common task. In other cases, diverse individuals have diverse tasks. Much can be said about these tasks and about the role of good administration in assisting their proper and efficient realisation. But because of the critical importance of community for the flourishing of mature people, it remains that the primordial task of a community is the nurturing of community.

Religious Obedience : in community

Behind this statement lies the key insight that the goal of maturing is individuation. Each person in the community is unique in his or her gifts, in his or her call, in his or her mission. Differences, therefore, are to be nurtured and celebrated. We are not speaking of individualism. We are not speaking of rivalry, or independence. Using the analogy of the body, Paul speaks of the inter-dependence of mature and graced persons, who, sensitive to each other's gifts, cooperate to build the harmony that befits the body of Christ, each adding his or her own strength to the common mission.

Religious Obedience : in community

Only to the extent that we are maturing as persons can we help build authentic community, and authentic community is the appropriate environment within which maturing persons can blossom.

Attention must primarily go to the nurturing of community.

Far from community being the end of differences,
it is the only safe and nurturing environment
in which creative and inter-dependent differences can flourish.
It should be clear that we are not speaking of conformity,
but of cooperation;
we are not speaking of sinful obduracy
or fearful hesitancy, or of me-first individualism.
We are speaking of a community in which
to be out of step is not necessarily to be wrong,
and to be in step is not necessarily to be right.

Obedience from the heart

God does not want us to obey blindly or automatically, without engaging our heart.

God's will is discovered in the circumstances of our lives, but always invites a response from the heart.

This is what we mean by conscience: an attentive listening to the movements of our heart that are inspired by God.

If we are attentive to our heart and listen to the directions of God that are picked up by our conscience,

and if we humbly and faithfully respond from our heart to these inspirations,

we are promised a special blessedness.

At times I fail to accept the truth of my own woundedness.

I fly the flag of creative action,
but it is my own self-interest, my own impetuosity,
that is really at work.

On the other hand,
my staying at the levels of my own limitations
may be a cowardly fear, fear that I may fail,
may lose control,
or it may be a distrust of the gifts of myself and other people,
an unwillingness to take risks for the kingdom.

I can be too submissive as well as too assertive.

Why Obedience can be difficult

- The cult of the individual
- Relativism
 - Focus on externals
- Seeking immediate gratification
- Setting our hopes on what appears to be for our own benefit
- Wanting to avoid suffering
- Fear of what might threaten our well-being.

‘If we are going to use the word community in a meaningful way we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, and to delight in each other, make other’s conditions our own.’

(Scott Peck The Different Drum).

Peck goes on to give some sound advice about building community.

refrain from generalisations,

speak personally,

allow ourselves to be vulnerable,

listen whole-heartedly,

embrace the painful as well as the pleasant,

commit ourselves not to drop out of the community.

Peck advises us to ask ourselves: What do I have to empty myself of to be open to a possible breakthrough?

- Is it my fixed judgment of an individual?
- Is it my confidence that the way I see things is the only way they will work?
- Is it my inability to face or admit to failure?

He is supported here by a long Christian tradition that holds up before us the kenosis of Christ (Lumen Gentium, n. 42).

We have too the paradoxical statement of Jesus himself:

“He who seeks to save his self will lose it.

It is the one who is willing to lose his self, who will find it”.

Peck makes the point that it is ‘dia-bolic’ to compartmentalise. Our task is to seek for what is ‘sym-bolic’ - the paradox that can break through to an integration and harmonising of the rich diversity that alone builds a creative community.

Read Fratelli Tutti by Pope Francis (October 2020)

‘Without the command of obedience, never take upon yourself any work - apart from the obligations of your state - however good and full of charity it may seem, whether for yourself or for anyone else inside or outside the house ... God wants obedience more than sacrifice [1Samuel 15:22]. The actions of a religious are not his own, but belong to obedience, and if you withdraw them from obedience, you will have to count them as lost’ (John of the Cross, Precautions).

‘Obedience is not primarily within a congregation (that is, obedience to Superiors) but is the congregation and its members following the prophetic and redemptive obedience of Jesus for the sake of the world. Obedience is specific to a congregation in so far as it is the special way (charism) that a congregation follows the prophetic and redemptive obedience of Jesus in the crises and needs of the world/nation/ city ... Obedience is the direction-giver of a congregation, province and individual: it is both a compass pointing the direction and a magnet drawing the group or individual with inner force’ (Frank Fletcher 1989).

‘Understood this way, obedience is primarily about the on-going discernment of mission, and only secondarily about the maintenance of order within the group. Obedience as mission lays its claim on superiors just as it does on other members. Obedience as maintenance or order focuses more on the special role of superiors. However the order (lifestyle, forms of community and government etc) should be in accord with the prophetic and redemptive mission’ (Frank Fletcher 1989).

S. Schneiders, *New Wine-skins*, NY Paulist 1986, 165-167

‘The only object of absolute obedience is the will of God, and the call to absolute obedience is addressed equally to every Christian. By the vow of obedience, made in response to a genuine vocation, the religious situates his or her total commitment to the will of God in a context of mediation comprised of the persons and institutions of the congregation entered ...

‘However to simply equate the human mediation with the will of God is to create an idol ... It is the process of discernment which prevents the alienation of personal authority and responsibility that would turn our obedience into magic...

The mediation which belongs to our vocational context has a privileged place in this discernment but it does not pre-determine the outcome.’

‘The ascetic focuses on a deep struggle within us. My desire to act creatively can, in reality, be a desire to assert myself aggressively, to dominate other people, to make a big name for myself, to compete with others, to get back at those who make me look small, to be popular and so on’ (Fletcher 1989).

‘In these cases I am not accepting the truth of my own woundedness. I am flying the flag of creative action, but it is my own self-interest, my own impetuosity, that is really at work.

On the other hand, my staying at the levels of my own limitations may be a cowardly fear, fear that I may fail, may lose control, or it may be a distrust of the gifts of myself and other people, an unwillingness to take risks for the kingdom. I can be too submissive as well as too assertive’ (Fletcher 1989).

Covenant of Love





MSC Constitutions

‘Jesus became obedient out of love; he even gave his life to accomplish his Father’s will. We profess obedience to share in his spirit of obedience, that we may serve better our brothers and share more deeply in the mission of our Society and the Church’ (n. 38).

‘By professing obedience, we commit ourselves to seek and accept the will of God in the life and mission of the Society’ (n. 39).

MSC Constitutions

‘It is in communion with our brothers that we seek to discover the will of God. We bind ourselves to live and act always within that communion, and to practice obedience in mutual charity. We bring into community whatever gifts nature and grace have given us, and put them at the service of Christ and the People of God’ (n. 40).

‘The community will endeavour, to the best of its ability, to strengthen each member in his response to God’s will for him, both in what he should personally become, and in what he should do for God and for his brothers’ (n. 41).

MSC Formula Instituti 1869

‘Those who enter our Society can readily accept that others may surpass them in learning in mortification, in poverty; but they will not allow themselves to be outdone in obedience and mutual charity.’

Next

07. Consecrated Chastity



Prayer of Abandonment