

Obedience to the Magisterium

and

Religious Obedience



Community, Corporate, Domestic Obedience

[For private use]

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INTRODUCTION

A Commentary on St. Ignatius' Letter on Obedience

Let us begin with the Conclusion of Letter: ¹ Jesuit scholars have verified an exact agreement between the ideas of this **Letter on Obedience**, and those contained in the [Conclusion of the] **Book of the Spiritual Exercises nn. 352-370** of St. Ignatius. It will not be amiss to show in a **combined view** how the doctrine of obedience has its foundation and finds its most exact explanation in the great ascetical principles of the ***Exercises***.

The **mutual relationship** between obedience and the teaching of the ***Exercises*** may be studied under a double aspect:

- either that of **the role that obedience** develops within the spiritual system of the ***Exercises***;
- or, that of the **influence** these [***Exercises***] have for the perfect practice of that virtue.

[1] **The Role that Obedience develops within the spiritual system of the Exercises**: With regard to the former, it is evidently **a principal means** to attain the purpose of the ***Exercises***, which is to order one's life, or to set it on the road to sanctity, **by the perfect fulfillment of God's will**. In fact, what is solid and true in Christian sanctity consists in conforming our entire lives with the Will of God, our Lord. St. Teresa affirms this very positively, and it may be said that her statement is the expression of the unanimous opinion of Catholic tradition:

*The entire aim, she says, of one who is beginning prayer [and do not forget this as it is very important] must be to endeavor to determine and dispose himself, with all the diligence possible, **to make his will conform with that of God**; and, as I shall say later, be very sure **that in this consists the greatest perfection attainable in the spiritual way**. He who holds this more perfectly will receive more from the Lord, and will advance more in this way.* ²

Now, the ***Exercises*** have no other aim than to teach us how to do the Will of God perfectly, for on the very threshold we are told that they are dedicated **to prepare and dispose the soul ... to seek and find the Will of God in the management**

¹ cf. Espinosa Polit, o.c., pp. 253- 257

² ***Second Mansions***, n. 15.

of one's own life. ³ St. Ignatius wishes the Retreatant to learn to discern the **Divine Good Pleasure**.

The obedient man will find, then, in the **full submission of his own will** to that of the Superior, an effective means of regulating his life according to the ideals of holiness found in the ***Spiritual Exercises***. And this by itself is enough to justify the singular importance given to **obedience in the Ignatian spirituality**, and consequently, **in the life of the Society of Jesus**.

[2] The Influence which the *Exercises* have for the perfect practice of that virtue: It remains now to consider the second aspect of the relation between religious obedience and the teaching of the ***Spiritual Exercises***. There can no room for doubt that the truths contained in the golden little book are excellently suited to move the members of the Society to an effort **to signalize themselves in that which is the characteristic virtue of their order**, that of being in the Company, Society of Jesus.

[a] For, in the first place, the *Exercises* point out with marvelous accuracy the immovable foundation on which the virtue of obedience rests as on a cornerstone. This is the absolute and inalienable dominion of God, our Lord, over man in virtue of the very fact of his **Creation. Obedience to the Divine will** by which man in a practical way recognizes and worships the sovereignty of His Creator, is, then, the logical consequence of his condition as a creature, a **duty of justice and religion** founded in the essential relations that flow from the fact of his participated existence⁴.

[b] But, as true and solid virtues do not grow in the soul except in proportion to the extent that a man overcomes and denies himself, it is evident that the sole way to arrive at **the summit of perfect obedience** is the royal road of **abnegation and sacrifice. The practice of obedience such as St. Ignatius understands it** presupposes a heart so detached from the spirit of pride and ambition that only he who tramples these enemies underfoot will know how to put from himself effectually his own will and judgment so as to will and think the same with the Superior, even in the instances of being bidden to do things that are difficult and repugnant to sensuality.⁵

[c] In the *Exercises* of the 2nd and 3rd Weeks, the Jesuit Founder is intent on teaching us to **wage war** on all that the world vainly esteems and to establish ourselves in the mortification and genuine humility of Christ, with no other thought than that of **imitating and following Him as closely as possible**. The Religious

³ MI, series 1a, I, 682.

⁴ *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 4, a. 7, ad 3^{um}; q. 104, a. 3, ad 1^{um}.

⁵ CSJ, P. III, c. 1, n. 23.

imbued with these ideas esteems himself happy and successful if he loses all to gain Christ; he will experience no difficulty in **renouncing his own judgment and in willing to be ruled entirely by Christ, having no other will and life than His.**

[d] In the last place, the *‘Contemplation for Obtaining Love’* with which the *Exercises* are closed, contains the noblest and most powerful motive possible to arouse a generous will to make daily more effective the **holocaust, the oblation, the obsequium** [cf. Rm12:1, f.] **it offered in the Vow of Obedience.** For, after establishing that the love of friendship demands a reciprocal giving between lovers, St. Ignatius has the exercitant ***dwell with great affection*** [SpEx 234]:

...The First Point, I will call back into my memory the gifts I have received – my creation, redemption, and other gifts particular to myself. I will ponder with deep affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses, and consequently how He, the same Lord, desires to give me His very self, in accordance with His divine design.

Then I will reflect on myself, and consider what I on my part ought in all reason and justice to offer and give to his Divine Majesty, namely, all my possessions, and myself along with them. I will speak as one making an offering [obsequium] of deep affection and say:

Suscipe!

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will – all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to You, O Lord. All of it is Yours. Dispose of it according to Your will. Give me Your love and Your grace, for that is enough for me.

This is how God has complied with this **fundamental law of a loving friendship**, bestowing upon man gifts and blessings which only He Who is substantial and infinite love can bestow. And when the human soul, realizing interiorly all the good the unworthy believer has received, one comes to experience himself in an abyss before the immensity of the love that God has shown, a longing will break forth spontaneously from the innermost source of one’s being and offer and give, in a just interchange, to the Divine Lover, ***all things that are his and himself along with them.***

But, among a person’s possessions, that which is of the greatest value, the most worthy of being offered to the Giver of all good, is one’s **liberty**. For this reason, writes Fr. Casanovas, St. Ignatius places **the surrender of liberty** before every other offering, as the gift which includes all other gifts. Lovers have always looked upon it as the pearl of the Gospel **to offer an entire life to the one who is loved**, glorying in bearing the marks of servitude, for **surrendering one’s liberty is equivalent to surrendering oneself.**

The effective contemplation of the infinite manifestations of Divine love leads, therefore, **by virtue of the law of friendship, to the servitude of perfect obedience.** In fact, the *Suscipe*, springing from a heart that feels itself infinitely loved, seeks to return love for love and ***in all things love and serve His Divine Majesty*** [SpEx # 233] achieves its fullest realization in religious obedience, above all, if to promptness of **execution** there is added the **adherence of the will** and the **humble surrender of one's judgment**. Because only then can it be said with truth that man has **given all for pure love**, without reserving anything at all, **to belong entirely to God**, and to **serve as a docile instrument in the furtherance of His designs.**

Summary

There can be no surprise at the perfect agreement to be seen between the teaching of the **Spiritual Exercises** and the standards and norms of obedience given in the **Constitutions** and in the great **Letter** [of March 1553] which our holy Father wrote on this virtue, seeing that all these writings have been inspired with the same spirit and spring from identical principles. And having forged the ***Exercises*** according to the happy expression of Fr. LaPalma, '**the first Plan and Pattern of the Society of Jesus as a Religious Order**',⁶ it is obvious and natural that they should contain the substance of the teaching on obedience which is so essential a virtue in our Order, and its symbol, so to say, and prerogative.

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⁶ Cammino espiritual, Book 8, c. 2; II, 298.

A. Obedience to God's Word

1. SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND to OBEDIENCE

OT

Gn 22:2,3: *Take your only begotten son, Isaac, whom you love, and go into the land of vision: and there you shall offer him for an holocaust upon one of the mountains which I will show you. So, Abraham rising up in the night, saddled his ass; and took with him two young men, and Isaac, his son; and when he had cut wood for the holocaust, he went his way to the place which God had commanded him...*

1 K 15:22: And Samuel said: Does the Lord desire holocausts and victims, and not rather the voice of the Lord should be obeyed. For obedience is better than sacrifices: and to hearken rather than to offer the fat or rams.

Pr 3:5: Have confidence in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not upon your own prudence ...

NT

Synoptics:

Mt 11:29: *Learn of Me for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls...*

Mt 16:24: *I exhort you, then, to be His disciple, to deny himself... etc.*

Mt 17:5; 23:2:

This is My Son, the Beloved; He enjoys My favor. Listen to Him...

... do not be guided by what the [Pharisees and Scribes] do...

Lk 9:35; 10:16:

... this is My Son, the Chosen One; listen to Him...

...Anyone who listens to you, listens to Me; anyone who rejects you, rejects Me, and those who reject Me, reject the One Who sent Me...

JOHN:

Jn 6:38: *I have not come to do My Own Will...*

Jn 20:21: *... As the Father sent Me, so am I sending you...*

PAUL:

Rm 15:5, f.: ... following the example of Christ Jesus, so that united in mind and voice you may give glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ...

1 Co 1:10: ... for the sake of Our Lord Jesus Christ ... be united again in your belief and practice ...

Ep 6:5 [2 x]: ... Slaves, be obedient to the men who are called your masters in this world, with deep respect and sincere loyalty, as you are obedient to Christ...

Ph 2:2, 8, 18, 3:17: ... if love can persuade at all, or the Spirit we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, then, be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind... He was obedient unto death... My brothers, be united in following my rule of life...

Col 3:23-24: Whatever your work is, put your heart into it as if it were for the Lord and not for men, knowing that the Lord will repeat you by making you his heirs. It is Christ the Lord that you are serving...

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Fr. Espinosa Polit, SJ offers his classical commentary: This last text, from the Letter to the Colossians⁷ shows us once again how conformable to the teachings of revealed truth are the rules and counsels on obedience which the holy Founder of the Society gave to his sons. To poor slaves, frequently the victims of the cruel demands of their heartless masters, the divinely inspired Apostle earnestly recommends an open and generous obedience, and **his exhortation is founded on the motives of consolation offered them by the faith**. Christ is their true Master, and, therefore, when they fulfill their duties, they in reality serve and please our Lord, and thereby make themselves His creditors for those eternal blessings which He reserves for His friends and faithful servants. They should then overlook the vices and the wickedness of their masters and subject themselves to them with a heart expanded with hope, confident that God Who gladly accepts their services will give them in turn the eternal inheritance of sons in glory:

... He who hears you, hears Me, and he who despises you, despises Me [Lk 10:16] – Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as to the Lord and not to man [Col 3:23] ... Obey your prelates and be subject to them... [Heb 13:17] ... And so brothers, your faith has been a great comfort to us in the middle of our own troubles and sorrows; now we can breathe again, as you are still holding firm in the Lord...[2 Th 3:7-9]. ... Do not let people disregard you because you are young, but be an example to all the believers in the way you speak and behave, and in your love, your faith and your purity... [1 Tm 4:12]... Since, as president, he will be God's representative, he must be irrepachable... [Tt 1:7]

⁷ Fr. Manuel Maria Espinosa Polit, SJ, *Perfect Obedience. Commentary on the Letter on Obedience of St. Ignatius of Loyola* [March 26, 1553]. Westminster MD: Newman 1947, pp. 138, f.

St. Peter offers his ideal:

... Now I have something to tell your elders: I am an Elder myself, and a witness, to the sufferings of Christ, and with you I have a share in the glory that is to be revealed. Be the shepherds of the flock of God that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty, but gladly, because God wants it; not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it. Never be a dictator over any group that is put in your charge, but an example that the whole flock can follow. When the chief shepherd appears, you will be given the crown of unfading glory ... [1 P 5: 1-3]

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It would be helpful to consider the motives which the holy Founder of the Jesuits had in **making obedience the honor and glory of his Order**, while giving it a **marked pre-eminence over the other virtues**. Of the reasons set forth in the **Letter** [March 26, 1553], the first, contained in the clause:

... God our Lord gives me the desire to see you most truly eminent in the virtue of obedience; and this not only for the excellent and singular fruits thereof, are proved by many testimonies of Holy Writ, both in the Old and New Testament...

This is based on the great blessings which obedience bring with it, which the Holy Spirit has deigned to point out to us in Holy Writ.

There are many passages, to be sure, in the Sacred Scriptures, as the Jesuit Founder states, in which by word and example the merit and value of obedience is extolled, or where, on the other hand, is weighed the harm and evil caused by disobedience. The Historical Books and the Wisdom Books, especially, contain many admirable sentences and suggestive examples which put **in a clear light the pleasure which our Lord looks upon obedience**, not merely that general obedience to the commands of those who have authority from Him, as well as the severity with which He chastises the disobedient. [See, for example, Ex 16:8; Dt 17:10-13; 1 S 15:22-23; Pr 15:28; 21:28. Also among others, the examples of Isaac (Gn 22:9) and Samuel (1 S 3:5-10) – Patterns of perfect obedience].

Other holy persons of the OT are noted for their **docility and submission** to their Superiors, thus bringing on themselves and their people, the blessings of God. [Take for example: Joseph, Gn 37:14; Jacob, Gn 28:1-5; Ruth Rt 3:5; the Young Tobias, Tb 5:1; Esther, Est 2:20]. On the contrary, the disobedience and revolt against Moses was the cause of the terrible destruction of Core, Dathan and Abiron – Nb 16:1-35. Saul was for his disobedience disowned by God which was the beginning of his aberrations and misfortunes – [1 S 15:23; See also Nb 14:41-45].⁸

⁸ ib, pp. 46, f.

It might be asked: Has this ancient insistence still any objective reality, or is it merely a pious fiction of ancient writ? Are the words of the Gospel: ***Qui vos audit, Me audit*** [Lk 10:16] – anything more than a way of speaking to make concrete in our eyes the authority of the Superior? Let us examine the exact meaning and the true scope of the statement of our Lord, for the matter is too important to be passed over lightly.

In the text: ***He who hears you, hears Me*** [Lk 10:16], the word ***hear*** means **not only docility to teaching**, which is evident, but also **submission and obedience** to the direction of legitimate pastors and reverence for their authority.

We can infer this as the precise meaning of obedience:

- first, from the meaning of the Greek verb, ***akouw***, which means ***obey***, as well as ***to hear***, not only in classical Greek, but in NT Greek [cf. Mt 17:5; Lk 10:167 – texts given by Greek biblical dictionaries];
- in the second place, from the fact that **the authority which Christ communicated** to His Apostles as His representatives and the continuators of His work is **the same as He receive from the Father**: ***As the Father has sent Me, so I send you...*** [Jn 19: 19, f.]

Wherefore, as the divine words of Tabor, ***ipsum audite*** [***listen*** to Him: Mt 17:5; Lk 9:35: addressed to all believers]] must be understood, according to the interpreters, not merely in receiving His teaching, but also in the sense of **doing what He says** [as his words addressed to the Apostles: ***do this in Memory of Me !***]. In like manner, the word in our text must be taken as a synonym of **submission** and **obedience**, for in both the one and the other instance there is question of an acquiescence of the will with one who has the right and power of command.

Then, the words: ***He who hears you, hears Me*** – clearly suppose that the Apostles and disciples to whom they were directed received real authority from Christ to impose laws and precepts, and they, therefore, leave no doubt as to **the real identity between the Person of Him Who sends and him who is sent, between the Divine King to Whom has been given all power in heaven and on earth**⁹, and His ambassadors, **between Christ and His Apostles**. Whoever receives their teachings, whoever submits himself with docility to their direction in the things that pertain to the Kingdom of God, **hears and obeys Christ Himself**. Whoever, on the contrary, rebels against their authority, despises the authority of Christ Himself...¹⁰

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⁹ Suarez, *De Rel. S.I.*, Book IV, c. 15, n. 3 [508].

¹⁰ Espinosa-Polit, o.c., , pp. 60, ff.:

2. The Exemplary Causality of JESUS CHRIST

[cf. also the **Theology of the Eucharist** [faith supplies for the defect of the senses] and **Faith** [oblation of intellect and will – DV 5]]:¹¹

a. We shall speak now of the NT, where **the sublime example of the Son of God sheds its calm light**; there we find the Christian concept of view both by St. Paul and the Prince of the Apostles [read carefully on this point: Rm 13:1-7; Ep 6:5-9; Col 3:23-25; 1 Th 5:12-13; 1 Tm 6:1-12; Tt 2:9, 10; 3:1; Heb 13:17. 1 P 2:13-18]. This principal, or practical norm from which obedience draws all its force and energy, is enunciated by the saint in a phrase of lapidary conciseness:

... they regard not the individual whom they obey, **but in him, Christ our Lord, for Whose love they obey ...**

... For the Superior is not to be obeyed because he is prudent or virtuous, or excels in any other divine gift whatsoever it may be, but for this only that **he is in the place of God**, and has authority from Him, who says: *he that hears you hears Me, and he that despises you, despises Me...*

b. As is seen, for St. Ignatius, **obeying the Superior and obeying God are one and the same thing**. This idea which contains the substance of the teachings of the holy Patriarch on obedience, he inculcates, *importune et opportune*, and it will be worth while to collect together as a sheaf of testimonies, some of his frequent passages in the ***Constitutions***, in his ***Letters***, and ***Instructions***, where we see repeated with various shades of meaning the real thought of the Founder.

In the ***Formula***, or Fundamental Rule of the Institute of the Society, presented to Julius III, and approved by him in the Bull, ***Exposcit Debitum***, there is express mention of this principle as of something of vital importance in the way of life proper to our vocation:

... And all its subjects, as well as for the great fruits resulting from good order, as for the very praiseworthy exercise of continual humility, will be found in all things that pertain to the Institute of the Society, always to obey not only the superior, but **to recognize Christ present in him** and give him becoming reverence ...¹²

To the Candidate who knocks at the door of the Society, the saint explains very properly the same doctrine with clarity and an abundance of detail, which give him

¹¹ [Fr. Manuel Maria Espinosa Polit, SJ, *Perfect Obedience. Commentary on the Letter on Obedience of St. Ignatius of Loyola* [March 26, 1553]. Westminster MD: Newman 1947, pp. 56-59, *passim*.

¹² Institutum Societatis I, 25.

clearly to understand how seriously he must take it from the rest of his life. Beginning with the humble duties which are usually performed, above all in the time of probation, the holy Jesuit Founder says:

... When anyone goes to the kitchen to help the cook, he must obey him with much humility in all things pertaining to his office, showing him always complete obedience; for if he does not, it is not likely that he will show obedience to any Superior, since **true obedience is not concerned about the person to whom a thing is done, and for whom; but if he does this for our Creator and Lord alone, the same Lord of all is obeyed.** Wherefore, one should not look to see whether it is the cook of the house, or its Superior. Whether he who commands is one or the other, for neither to them, nor for them – [as sound intelligence understands it] is this **obedience shown, but only to God and for God, our Creator and Lord.**

And therefore, it might be better for the cook not to ask his helper to do this or that, but modestly to command him, or say: do this, or that. For if he asks him, he will appear rather to speak as man to man; and it does not seem honorable, or right for a lay cook to ask a priest to wash pots or do anything similar. But if he bids him to do this or that, he will show that he speaks rather as Christ to man, since it is in place of Him that he commands. And so, if he who obeys is to be entirely acceptable to His Divine Majesty, he should reflect and look upon the words that come from the cook, or from the Superior, **as though they came from Christ our Lord...**¹³

The **Novices** who are admitted to probation and the **Scholastics** who, following the Novitiate, and who take their First Vows, are preparing themselves for the apostolate of tomorrow with the two-fold reputation of **learning and virtue**¹⁴, must nourish their spirits with the clear vision of Christ in their Superior and prepare themselves for the sacrifices which holy obedience may demand of them. The **Novices** are exhorted:

... It chiefly conduces to advancement and is very necessary, that all should give themselves to perfect obedience, **acknowledging the Superior, whoever he may be, in place of Christ, our Lord,** and yielding to him **inward reverence** and love ...¹⁵

... and it is very necessary that all should obey not only the Superior of the Society, or house, but also subordinate officials, who have received authority from him.... And they must accustom themselves not to behold who he is whom they obey, but rather **who He is for Whose sake they obey, and for Whom they obey in all, that is Christ, our Lord** ...¹⁶

The second group, the **Scholastics**, are reminded:

¹³ Examen, c. 4, n. 29, 30: CSJ nn. 84, 85.

¹⁴ cf. St. Gaspar Bertoni, Part IV of his *Original Constitutions: De Progressu* - ##47-68.

¹⁵ P. III, c. 1, n. 23: CSJ n. 284.

¹⁶ P. III, c. 1, n. 24: CSJ n. 285.

... that they must hold the Rector in great reverence as one who holds the place of Christ our Lord...¹⁷

Dealing with the more advanced of his sons, and wishing, as he himself says in the beginning of the Sixth Part, to point out to them some more substantial things which will help them:

... more fruitfully to employ themselves according to our Institute in the divine service and help of their neighbor ... that they show great reverence especially towards their Superiors, beholding and reverencing them in Jesus Christ... that in all things to which obedience can with charity extend, we be ready at its voice, as if it came from Christ our Lord, since in His place and for His love and reverence we do it...¹⁸

Those who are *scattered in the vineyard of Christ to work in that part which was entrusted to them*, he bids to:

... leave the free disposal of themselves to the Superior who in the place of Christ our Lord directs them in the way of His greater service and praise...¹⁹

Although the Office of *Collateral* [the Admonitor] has been, and actually is in little use in the Society, some of the instructions given by our Holy Father for the proper discharge of its duties are much to our purpose. One of its principal duties is:

... to harmonize as much as possible the dealings with subjects with their immediate Superior, going among them like an angel of peace, endeavoring to see that their attitude towards the Superior have the proper affection, since he holds the place of Christ our Lord...²⁰

Finally, abridging the end of the 3rd Chapter of Part Nine, concerning the authority which the **General** should hold over the Society:

... and he must be obeyed and reverenced as one who holds the place of Christ our Lord ...

Fr. Espinosa continues²¹:

c. **The Apostles:** But the authority which the Apostles had the right to exercise in the Church in Christ's name was not a purely personal prerogative. Rather, as they must have successors to perpetuate their Mission of transmitting to them the power and authority necessary for good government of the Church. And, consequently, Christian tradition has always understood the words of Christ: **He**

¹⁷ P. IV, c. 10, n. 5: CSJ n. 423.

¹⁸ P. VI, c. 1, nn. 1, 2: CSJ nn. 547; 551

¹⁹ P. VII, c. 1, n. 2; c.2, n. 1: CSJ n. 606; cf. litt. A; I.

²⁰ P. VIII, c. 1, litt. D: CSJ n. 661.

²¹ o.c., pp. 61, 71, f., 93-96.

who hears you, hears Me [Lk 10:16] – not only as said to the Apostles and immediate disciples of the Lord, but also to those who in one for or other, in the course of the ages would inherit their authority. Referring to this text, Fr. Suarez writes:

*... Christ speaks to **the Apostles who must take His place as Pastors**, and in them, to all those who will have the care of souls; but, St. Basil, St. Bernard, the Abbot Antiochus, St. Vincent and others, apply these words in a particular manner to religious superiors ...*²²

... It chiefly conduces to advancement and is very necessary, that all should give themselves to perfect obedience, **acknowledging the Superior whoever he be, in place of Christ our Lord**, and yielding him inward reverence and love ... [CSJ n. 284]

... likewise, let them treat their Superiors with great interior reverence, **beholding Jesus Christ in them and loving them sincerely as fathers in Christ** ... [CSJ n. 451].

Fr. Mersch, who has explained solidly and clearly, the close relation which exists between **the virtue of obedience and the dogma of our incorporation with Christ**, remarks that, according to the axiom *operari sequitur esse*, 'the act of the will in the supernatural order should pattern itself on the supernatural life from which it flows.' Our supernatural life, even before our own, **is of Christ** from Whom we have received it, so that, as the life of the branch depends upon its union with the trunk, and only by means of this union receives the sap which rises from the roots, and as the life of the member depends entirely on its insertion into the body, so, in like manner, our life and activity depend upon our adherence to Christ, on our being engrafted on Him...

d. **'To put on Christ'**, writes Fr. Ferdinand Prat²³ means to be wrapped in that divine atmosphere, made a living member of Christ, placed under the influence of that supernatural force which is called the soul of the Church and which is nothing other than the Holy Spirit. The Apostle delights to speak of **putting on Christ**, or **the Lord Jesus Christ – putting on the new man, putting on immortality, the weapons of light, the armor of God, the helmet of salvation, the breast-plate of faith and charity**: in all these examples the figurative meaning is transparent. **We put on Christ**, less as a mantle which covers our wretchedness than as a vital form which us to participate in His life.

Among the spiritual notes of Fr. Jerome NADAL, St. Ignatius' 'own' theologian for his *Constitutions*, can be found a few paragraphs of particular interest, as they seem to confirm the point of view here advanced. In fact, they permit us to know

²² De Rel. S.I., Book IV, c. 15, n. 3 [508]

²³ Vol. II, p. 311.

how deeply that excellent man, who understood the spirit of our Father as few men did, experienced the **mystery of our incorporation with Christ** and its influence on our spiritual activities. He says: 'Accept and diligently exercise **this union with Christ Jesus** which the spirit of the Lord graciously moves you, so that you will realize in spirit that it is **through His intellect that you understand, through His memory that you recall, through His will that you desire**, and that **you are wholly in Him**, that you live and work not in yourself, but **in Christ**. And this is the height of perfection in this life, a divine virtue, wonderful sweetness.

Our Holy Father begins²⁴, therefore, by recalling **the principal foundation of obedience**, which is to see the Superior as clothed with the divine authority, not as a mere man, but as an instrument, an interpreter, a representative of God, Whose place he takes. This principle is most true, and we can, therefore, without doing the slightest violence to reality, close our eyes to the human qualities and deficiencies of the Superior to see God alone, Who by means of man communicates Himself to man ;to show him His ways and to teach him His paths...' [cf. Ps 24:4].

3. DOCTRINAL REFLECTIONS on the DIVINE WILL

a. Abandonment to the Divine Will: "*Thy Will be done!*"

In the studies of Lk's presentation of Mary, it is noted that her FIAT is much more noted in the 3rd evangelist than it is in Mt – **Jesus' FIAT is a command, Mary's is an optative**. Mt, coming from the rabbinical tradition, seems more interested in God's Will – whereas for Lk, the central concern is the Kingdom. The **Third Petition** of the **LORD'S PRAYER** is that His Will indeed be done. This has a deep OT background:

*... you asked no holocaust or sacrifice for sin; then I said: **HERE I AM! I am coming... to do your will...*** (cf. Ps 40:7, ff.; cited by Heb 10:9). Bless Yahweh, all His angels, heroes mightily to **enforce His word, attentive to His word of command ... servants to enforce His will...** (cf. Ps 103:19, ff.). *... I have fled to you for shelter; **teach me to obey you**, since you are my God: may your good spirit guide me...* (cf. Ps 143:9, f.).

But now give thanks to Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, and **do His will** (cf. Ezc 10:11).

*I am God, unrivalled, God who has no like ... I say: **My purpose shall last** ...* (Ps 46:10)

*... **the Lord's will is sovereign** ...* (cf. Ps 135:6).

²⁴ cf. Fr. Espinosa, p.133.

My beloved *will perform my pleasure* ... (cf. Is 48:13, f.).

Cyrus, my shepherd ... he will fulfill my whole purpose... (cf. Is 44:27; cited by Ac 13:22).

Whatever be the will of God, he will perform it... (cf. 1 M 3:60).

It may be that the Semitic mentality is much clearer in this distinction regarding the "Will of God":

- the subjective sense: the divine faculty of willing;
- the objective sense: the "content", what it is that God wills.

In Jesus Christ, true God and true man, there are two wills: the divine and human. In the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, united in the One Nature, there is only one divine will common to the three. The divine faculty of willing is sometimes referred to as "innards", the deepest interior (the Italian "*reni*"), the divine heart.

In the objective sense, it is not so much the result of some abstract decision: but rather, the more spontaneous and instinctive tendency. The faithful are called upon to give preference in their lives, to seek out the divine good pleasure.

In the **OUR FATHER**, the central concern seems to be not so much the psychological, spiritual power of choice, but much more the concrete object willed by God – that which He desires, loves. The "content" is what is understood by the Greek THELMA.

In most modern languages, the divine will perhaps most commonly means just precisely what it is that God would want in these circumstances. The term: "the divine good pleasure" gives to many a sense of "paternalism", "condescendence", of one putting up with one considered inferior. To find the proper terminology in the discussion is not always easy, nor agreed to by all. There is a divine "Will" that seems clear to a believer: the commandments, duties of one's state in life. Then, there is that very vague and difficult area of "all that happens."

Not very often is the divine will found in the plural – it might respond to the various intentions of one's prayer, but it also seems to leave the door open to caprice, involving a multiplicity of choices. Some have tried to render the "divine good pleasure" by the word "desires". However, for many others, this seems much too weak to apply to God in that it is often contrasted with **HOPE**, which is a future good, difficult, but possible. It is its "difficulty" that separates **HOPE** from desires. These are much more passing, much closer to "velleity", wishful thinking.

Through the centuries, the divine will is not only seen as the object of verbs, such as "to do", "to carry out" – but perhaps even much more is the divine will the

object of verbs such as: “to seek out”, “to choose”. Both QUMRAN and the Ignatian tradition come together on this point – in the spirit of St. Ignatius., “discernment” plays a most important role.²⁵

The **NT** often speaks of the divine will and it is found often in connection with “to do; become”.

The **Synoptics**: praise particularly those who “do” the Father’s Will:

Who are My mother and My brothers?... Here are My mother and My brothers. **Anyone who does the will of God**, that person is My brother and sister and mother ... (cf. Mk 3:45; cf. also Mt 12:50).

It is not those who say to me: ‘Lord, Lord’, who will enter the kingdom of heaven – but **the person who does the will of My Father in heaven** ... (cf. Mt 7:21).

In the **Prayer of Gethsemane**, there are some interesting variations:

But let it be as You, not I, would have it (cf. Mk 14:36).

Nevertheless, let it be as You, not I, would have it... if this cup cannot pass by without My drinking it, **Your will be done!** (cf. Mt 26:39, 42). Father, he said, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, let Your will be done, not Mine... (cf. Lk 22:42).

In a different way, **the 4th Evangelist** insists on the intimate tie between Jesus and the Father’s Will:

My food is to do the will of the One Who sent Me ... (4:34).

My aim is not to do My own will, but the will of Him Who sent Me (5:30). ... I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but to do the will of Him Who sent Me ... (6:38).

... anyone who does the will of God remains forever... (1 Jn 2:17).

The **Epistles** contain similar insights:

... be obedient as to Christ ... (cf. Ep 6:16).

God, here I am! I have COME TO DO YOUR WILL (Ps 40, LXX) ... You will need endurance to do God’s will, and gain what He has promised (cf. Heb 10:6,f., 36).

... may He make you ready to do His will in any kind of good action... (Heb 13:21).

Hence, the NT emphasis seems to emphasize much more the “content” of the divine will:

²⁵ cf. Piet Penning de Vries, Discernment des esprits. Ignace de Loyola. Paris: Beauchesne 1964.

Now the will of Him Who sent Me is that I should lose nothing of all that He has given to Me, and that I should raise it up on the last day. Yes, it is My Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life and that I shall raise him up on the last day ... (cf. Jn 6:39, ff.)

What God wants for you is to be holy (cf. 1 Tm 4:3)... keep away from fornication... it is indeed the will of God that makes people holy ... (cf. Mt 6:10; cf. 2 Th 2:13; Ep 1:4).

Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God, because this is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus ... (cf. 1 Th 5:17,f.).

God wants you to be good citizens ... (cf. 1 P 2:13, ff.).

In synthesis, it seems that **the Will of God for the NT writers** means to keep the commandments – and the will of God for Christ is to lead all to everlasting life. In petitioning that God's Name be hallowed, we pray that we might be led through the divine good works to extend His glory:

... **your light must shine in the light of men so that seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven ...** (cf. Mt 5:16).

In asking for **His Kingdom to come**, we are asking that it might come also for us – in the hope and prayer that the divine will, which the Kingdom is, might find no obstacle, that we might indeed be governed in accord with His will. So, **Thy WILL be done**, is in perfect harmony with the two preceding petitions of the Our Father: **“Hallowed be Thy Name” – “Thy Kingdom come”**: the Will of God simply is that His Kingdom should come ever more fully, and procure all glory for His Name.

As in the earlier petitions, there is no subject to these verbs – and this intended omission allows the Church to make the most broad application possible.

The **intense prayer of the Church** is that the Will of God be done everywhere, always and by all. We do not pray, therefore, simply that creatures carry out the will of the Creator – but we are asking that God Himself carry out His will. .

We are asking God, as in **a Prayer of Abandonment**, to be made docile and obedient in bringing our wills in harmony with His. This is why not a few translators read this passage: that the divine will be carried out, accomplished, fulfilled, realized. Such a translation really is not necessary: the open style of the original implies this already.

The usual translation: **Thy Will be done!** – has the advantage of being more vague, general and universal – and hence, the more easily can it include both aspects, that the divine will be done:

- on the part of God, that He be not impeded;

- and on the part of humanity, by the willing acceptance of human beings.

There is no implicit “fatalism” in the term: in the sense that since God is already omnipotent, and that His will will be done anyway – then: so be it. Such a spirit, however, may not be terribly far from what is related of Judas Maccabaeus:

Whatever be the will of heaven, He will perform it – it is better to die in battle than to watch the ruin of our land (cf. 1 M 3:60).

This is similar in spirit as well to the appeal made to Paul not to go on to Jerusalem:

For my part, I am ready not only to be tied up but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

And so as he would not be persuaded, we gave up the attempt, saying: The Lord's will be done! (cf. Ac 21:14).

Hence, the Petition: Thy Will be done! – is **the prayed HOPE** that the Will of God will be effectively realized. One prays – and almost commands God – that He carry out His will and that each one might collaborate the more to bring this about.

This 3rd Petition simply continues the first: “Hallowed be Thy Name!” And the 2nd Petition (“Thy Kingdom Come!”) also adds a dimension to the first Petition. The coming of the Kingdom means for all **“sanctification”, consecration to the service of God**. This **sanctification transforms** us, elevates us in a fundamental manner – but at the same time, this **being raised up to a new life** gives us the capacity, a certain empowerment, and imposes the obligation, to render an effective service, that each might undertake one's duties with this new spirit of the risen Lord. Hence, this 3rd Petition: Thy Will be done! Adds to the 2nd Petition (“Thy Kingdom come!”) also a commitment. The Kingdom of God is within – it is still coming, and is the ultimate bearer of the divine will. God comes to accomplish His will, which is our sanctification.

In His coming, He offers a superabundance of messianic goods. It is these blessings of the New Covenant which establish one as pertaining to the New Covenant, and which constitute one as pertaining to His Kingdom.

There is required of the believer, however, that each be opened up to this divine coming. Through the Kingdom that is received, the divine will takes full possession of one, leads and draws those who will respond, by its own inner power.

The challenge is to follow this divine impulse through an effective abandonment. This sublime obedience – in imitation of Christ's own relationship with His heavenly Father – is but a prolongation, a lived attitude of inner correspondence through which more and more the divine will becomes a concrete and vibrant reality within the believer. It becomes a truly active presence, as one begins to see Jesus as **A value** – then, grows, intensifies some, to see Him **as an IMPORTANT value**. The ultimate ideal would be achieved when **He is THE value**.

The intimate and close relationship between the 2nd and 3rd Petitions of the OUR FATHER shows the most profound tie between the Kingdom of God (heaven) and the Will of God. For some interpreters, this is why Lk has not reproduced the OUR FATHER in such detail as in Mt, enumerating all these Petitions that are so closely inter-connected: his tendency, "style", is to suppress that which appears superfluous.

For Lk, once one has asked for the Coming of the Lord's Kingdom, one is implicitly asking at the same time for the full realization of the divine will. For the rabbinic tradition, however, it is the Will of God that is tantamount, and which constitutes the essential Prayer for Mt. There are citations that come close to this thought:

Eli said: He is Yahweh: **LET HIM DO WHAT HE THINKS GOOD** (cf. 1 S 3:18). Joab said: Take courage and stand firm for the sake of our people and the towns of our God. And **MAY YAHWEH DO AS HE THINKS RIGHT** ... (cf. 1 Ch 19:13).

Summary: This attitude is part of Mt's rendition of the OUR FATHER – the committed believer wills only the Father's Will. There is involved in this the **OBSEQUIUM** (cf. Rm 12:1; also 1 P 2:4, ff.) **of our own personal will**, and the elimination of all that would be self-centeredness. The effort here is to base our lives on the Will of God. There is in this the firm decision to share in this Will in the fullest possible accord with one's own capacity²⁶.

†††

b. THE LORD'S LIVED EXAMPLE

As all Christian virtues, Holy Abandonment has its source in the Gospel – in the words and deeds, the teachings and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Francis de Sales presents Christ as the **MODEL OF HOLY ABANDONMENT** in the various stages of His mortal life:

²⁶ **NB:** for these pages of these notes, cf. Jean Carmignac, *Recherches sur le Notre Père*. Paris: Letouzey 1969, pp. 103-109, *passim*. Cf. also: R. Guardini, *The Lord's Prayer*. Manchester: SOPHIA: 1932 [re-print]; Lehoudey, *Holy Abandonment*. Rockford: TAN 1934 [re-print 2003]; de Margerie, SJ, *L'Abandon a Dieu*. Paris: Tequi 1997.

- in the Crib (cf. Entretien XXI);
- His infancy (Love of God, book IX, c. 14);
- in the flight into Egypt (cf. Entr., III);
- and above all, during those terrible sufferings that concluded.

His earthly sojourn, particularly in these words: **“Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit!”**²⁷

The **Imitation of Christ** is the great challenge of believers: He Leaches by word and example how to be abandoned to the Will of God in suffering – all believers are thus challenged to repeat the Savior’s own words in the LORD’S PRAYER and in GETHSEMANE: Your Will be done... not Mine ... Not what I will, but as You will it. (cf. Mt 6; 26:39; Lk 22:42).

The culminating example of Abandonment is to be sought in Jesus on the Cross. Through the doctrine and the lived experience of the saints, the believers of today – assisted by grace – can imitate the abandonment of Jesus Christ. In the trials of human life, the Lord’s grace can lead the faithful through a variety of levels, or stages of the faith, and eventually come to the offering of the “spiritual sacrifice”, the “oblation” to God’s Mercy.

For many theologians, such a sacrifice asks a correspondence to the call of “costly discipleship”, passing through a variety of “stages of development”, “seasons in a person’s life”: Dark Night, Spiritual Winter. As for the perfection of abandonment, of course, no one could reach it without the special assistance of God. In the supreme level, sacrifice is consummated.

The Lord’s own teaching in this regard may be seen in a special way in episodes that are central to His Person and Mission: the teaching of the OUR FATHER, and the example of GETHSEMANE.

[1]. THE “OUR FATHER”

On Christ’s lips, this invocation’ has a profundity of meaning that it seems the disciples came to understand only with time. With Joachim Jeremias, many believers hold that every time Jesus referred to His Father in direct address, most likely He would have used the affectionate term ABBA²⁸. The original text may be in the Synoptic accounts of Gethsemane, particularly that of Mk:

²⁷ cf. St. Francis de Sales, Love of God, b. IX, c. 15.

²⁸ cf. also Marchel, ***Dieu Père dans le NT***. Paris: du Cerf 1966; Robert Hammerton-Kelly, ***God the Father***. Philadelphia: Fortress 1979

ABBA! (Father), He said. Everything is possible for you. Take this cup away from Me. **But let it be as You, not I**, would have it ... (cf. Mk 14:36).

a. Then, it is found in two Epistles attributed to Paul:

... it is the spirit of sons and it makes us cry out: ABBA. The Spirit and our spirit bear **united witness** that we are the children of God ... (cf. Rm 8:15).

The proof that you are sons is that God has sent **the Spirit of His Son into our hearts – the Spirit that cries ABBA, Father** ... (cf. Ga 4:6).

b. For Christ Himself, this term was the expression of the Mystery of His own divine Filiation within the bosom of the Most Blessed Trinity. The first Christians used this same term to express their own adoptive filiation, that associates them to the person and to the prayer of Jesus Christ.

c. The early Church seems to have been convinced that a prayer of this nature could be formulated only with the help, and by the direct activity of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, for the early Church, the expression: ABBA, Father – had profound theological implications for Trinitarian theology and for the theology of the divine Indwelling, the life of Grace:

- for Christ Himself it meant **His Trinitarian Filiation**;
- for the faithful, it implied our **adoptive filiation**.

Periodically, the question arises – sometimes as an objection – could the LORD'S PRAYER, the OUR FATHER, really have been Jesus' own personal prayer? (*"Videtur quod non..."*). The OUR FATHER is clearly extended in the context in which it is found – of a group of disciples asking to be taught how to pray – to the disciples of all time, to all who would be willing to accept a share in His filiation.

Some have excluded Christ Himself from the prayer, not only because it asks for forgiveness of "sins", but also in the light of His clear distinction made to Mary Magdalen:

He said to her: But go and find the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to MY Father and your Father, to MY God, and your God... (cf. Jn 20:17).

Once more, this kind of language seems to find a parallel in OT discourse:

Ruth said to Naomi: wherever you go, I will go, wherever you live, I will live. Your people shall be my people, and YOUR GOD, MY GOD (cf. Rt 1:16).

However, the context of Jn 20:17 seems to be that Jesus is returning to the One Who is at the same time, HIS Father, and to HIS God: Who is also, through Jesus, our Father and God. Two "distinct" paternities may indeed be noted:

- never before, or elsewhere does Jesus use a formula that would risk confusing His unique filiation, that of His divine person – with the adoptive filiation of His disciples;
- precisely, in Jn 20:27, where God is presented at one and the same time as Christ's Father and the Father of all disciples.

These two distinct "paternities" seem carefully noted in the formula used by Jesus: *MY... your*. This precision seems that it had for its purpose the avoidance of any ambiguity also in the OUR FATHER.

In consulting a concordance, it can be seen that Jesus often distinguishes between "**My**" Father (18 x in Mt; 4 x in Lk; 25/26 x in Jn) – and "your" Father (13 x in Mt; 2 x in Mk; 3 x in Lk 2/3 x in Jn) – without ever bringing together the two formulae in one common "Our" Father. In the case at hand, some have concluded that the OUR FATHER pronounced by the disciples brings them together, all in one collective, ecclesial invocation to their common Father – but, does not include Christ in it. In addition to this, it is evident that the Petition including the pardoning of sin, could not apply to Jesus. Thus, many interpreters have concluded that the LORD'S PRAYER was not truly His "own" – it was merely one that He taught to the Church for its usage, but was not so much His own personal prayer.

BUT (Sed contra....!): this conclusion is far from the majority view. The "us" of the OUR FATHER is not limited to the disciples, it does not exclude Jesus: He also is associated with the lowest dregs of society, us sinners [cf. Ga 3:14; 2 Co 5:21 – cf. Dt 21:23]. For Him, God is His Father; at the same time, **the Father of all disciples**. This is proven by a great number of the variants of certain texts (cf. Mt 18:14) concerning the divine paternity. This permits the conclusion that the conscience of the early Christian had absolutely no hesitation in affirming that the OUR FATHER was the Prayer: both of the disciples, as well as the special prayer of the Lord Himself, addressed to their common Father.

The LORD'S PRAYER may not be reduced, then, to some kind of collective prayer of Christians, worked out by the early Church. It is the echo of **the very personal Prayer that Jesus would offer** throughout His mortal life. By His Mission, He made **this personal Prayer of His** into **the very personal Prayer of each and every disciple for as long as time lasts**. He has taught this personally to His "**own**", whom He loved to the very end.

a. Most would seem to see the OUR FATHER in this light: it is the Lord's own Prayer, **the echo of His personal Prayer**, and He has made it the personal Prayer of all who would ever accept to follow Him. The Prayer has distinct ecclesial characteristics.

b. The gospel precision that carefully clarifies the distinction between **Jesus' unique filiation – and the “adoptive” filiation** for everyone else, needs not also to be insisted on here in the OUR FATHER. As Jesus shared in our humanity, our **adoptive filiation** is indeed **a share** in Jesus' own natural filiation, **in His “essential” Filiation**. In like manner, we can say that our **filial prayer** is an analogous participation in the Trinitarian prayer of Jesus. This seems to be behind St. Paul's words: the proof that you are children is that God has sent His Spirit, the spirit of His Son, into our hearts – it is the Spirit that cries ABBA! (cf. Ga 6:4).

c. All the Fathers of the Church and early commentators have insisted on an evident consequence of this common divine Paternity. Since all have the same Father, that all human beings are really brothers and sisters, who are divinely called to love one another, and to treat each other as such. This is the fundamental principle that inspires all of the morality and the spirituality of Christianity. The gospel states this explicitly:

... you are all brothers... since you have only one Father, and He is in heaven ... (cf. Mt 23:8, ff.).

This theme has been eloquently and repeatedly developed down through the years – with evident implications for the theology of charity.

A further difficulty: was this prayer meant to be something reserved only to believers, to the faithful – is the divine paternity limited to them? Is God the Father of the sinner?

a. With **GS 22**, that in some way, **Jesus is united in some way to every single human being**. There is always need, therefore, to clarify the more the true nature of divine paternity and the broader amplitude of this human fraternity. Some questions do need reflection:

- God is indeed Our Father because He has created us;
- even more so, He is Father in redeeming, sanctifying us.

b. The divine paternity is the more fully extended to those who do accept God as Father, and model their lives on that of His Son. Creation does indeed constitute the divine paternity, and makes of all human beings truly brothers and sisters. This is already clear in the gospel:

But I say this to you: love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you – in this way, you will be the sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes the sun to rise on the bad as well as on the good... (cf. Mt 5:44, ff.).

c. There is a problem in an overly restrictive reading of the context for the OUR FATHER in Lk's presentation. It does seem to be addressed just to the followers of Christ, perhaps in some contrast even with those who followed John the Baptist: ***"Lord teach US to pray, just as John taught his disciples ... (cf. Lk 11:2). Even in Mt's rendition (cf. Mt 6:7,ff.), another precision is offered: *"In your prayers, do not babble as the pagans do – for they think that by using many words they will be heard."**** Some interpreters read this in an exclusive sense – that therefore, the LORD'S PRAYER is meant exclusively for the close followers of Christ.

Nonetheless, all Christian prayer is essentially **a share in the life and mission of Jesus Himself** – all become sisters and brothers in what Christ has accomplished for the world. This is so in a particular manner, when one prays motivated by faith, hope and love – the OUR FATHER, as Christ prayed this.

a. There are various "extensions" that have been suggested over the years:

- primarily restricted to those who share the same faith – at least in Jesus Christ as Savior and Son of God;
- an exclusive reading would be to see this prayer limited solely to those in the state of grace;
- others see this as the special prayer of those who sincerely seek the truth, honestly do good, seek integral justice: ***"facienti quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam."*** (St. Thomas wrote: when one is said to do what is in him to do, this is said to be in his power, **according as he is moved by God.**" (cf. I-II, q. 109, a. 6, ad 2um).

b. There is a particular value, of course, in sharing in Christ's own life of filiation – adoption is transmitted to us by Christ Himself. There is already a natural fraternity among human beings – Pope John XXIII also called "socialization" (the gathering of human beings for various motives, as culture, sports, business) – as one of the very promising signs of our time. So, there is no attempt to deny the natural bonds of fraternity that need to be encouraged among human beings – or, to make membership in the Church a kind of exclusive saving "Noah's Ark" for the storms of our times.

c. Perhaps a solution to a possible difficulty would be to extend the Our of the OUR FATHER as far as neighbor in the commandment, to include every "other", all human beings are called by Jesus to come follow Him, to become members of His household, partners with His disciples, to listen and to put into practice His Beatitudes.

d. Indeed, already “blessed” are the “pure of heart”, the “poor in spirit”, “those who mourn”, those “who suffer for justice’s sake.”²⁹ Certain “levels”, stages in the divine Paternity, and its corresponding “filiation”. There is, first of all, the unique “natural” Filiation of Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity. There follows then, a “**share in His nature**” (cf. 2 P 1:4), those who willingly accept and live the life of grace. The matter was often discussed in various ways through the centuries.

e. The early Church included in its baptismal liturgy as well as in its Eucharistic liturgy – the LORD’S PRAYER, and this from the very beginning. This is surely because the newly baptized are plunged deeply into the mystery of Christ through the re-generation afforded by baptism. Surely, the baptized, those who specifically follow Jesus Christ have a special right/obligation/challenge to pray and to live the Lord’s own Prayer. With immersion into the Paschal Mystery of Christ (cf. Rm 6), and with Christ present in the Eucharist, Christians can surely echo in a more resounding way, uniting their voices to the very Person of Christ, present in a most special manner in the Eucharist, present “in a way that surpasses all other ‘presences’” [cf. Paul VI, ***Mysterium Fidei***, Sept. 1965].

f. Periodically this view emerges anew under various forms (pertaining either to the mystery of grace, or to the Church), ‘would restrict the right to the OUR FATHER especially to the “saints”’. For this view, espoused also by many of the Fathers of the Church, the LORD’S PRAYER should be reserved to those who are sincerely trying to conduct their lives as sharing in Christ’s own filiation. Around the year 250, Cyprian wrote that the new Christian ‘person’, regenerated and given over to God by the grace of baptism, can now indeed say ‘Our Father.’ The reason is because such a person has just become son/ daughter. In appealing to God as Father in heaven, such a person attests in his/her first stuttering utterances that he/she has surrendered earthly relationships in favor of the heavenly.

1.) St. Augustine (around 410) repeated this view in other terms: one could not pray the OUR FATHER if he/she were not yet “born”. In his Sermon 59, he stated that the OUR FATHER is not yet the prayer of the catechumens – but will become so after their baptism.

2.) Much closer to our own time, Karl Barth wrote that the OUR FATHER is not just any ordinary prayer: there is much emphasis also to be given to the “our” and to “us.” He is indeed “our” Father in a particular manner: by bestowing this privilege, He has made some demands. It is through the mediation of Jesus that we indeed have become His children, and He has become “ours”. It all depends on

²⁹ (cf. Jacques Deupont, OSB, ***Les Beattitudes***

whether or not we will follow in His footsteps, living His own life. This prayer implies communion with Jesus, that we enter into His discipleship, that we undertake His Mission. It is Jesus Who invites us, permits us, commands us, enables us – to come and follow Him. Only He can give us the ability to use His very own Prayer in addressing His very own Father. This prayer does indeed invite us to adore Him, to pray to God as His children – to make the Words of His only-begotten, most beloved Son – our own.

g. Yet, through the centuries the Church has defended strongly against an overly “exclusivist” understanding of being the “children” of God. Different forms of Jansenism have been rejected through the years:

- the Constitution “*Auctorem Fidei*” (1794) rejected a number of propositions of a Synod which met at Pistoia in Tuscany (1786);
- there were also condemned many rigorist positions: the conception of a Church comprised solely of the saints (cf. D-S 2615) – or that all grace needs to be mediated through the Church was rejected by Clement XI in 1713 (cf. D-S 242.9)

Surely, in a most unique manner, the Father is Jesus’ “own” – Jesus is His unique, most-beloved Son, the “first-born.” Only through adoption does the follower of Christ receive His Father. God becomes the Father of those who become the disciples of His Son, imitate His way of life, who truly want to follow after Him, to see where “He lives.” In this sense, one needs to accept the “total Christ”, be a vital, living part of the community He has founded.

h. To modern hearts, rightly attuned to socialization, ecumenism – it might seem excessive to limit the OUR FATHER in this way.

1.) Because of creation, in some way God is indeed the Father of all, in that He gives life, nourishment, up-bringing. Humanity does seem to be the glorious crown of the universe, at least in some of its conceptions – even in its infinitesimal insignificance. Already, the divine “paternity” includes all that has been created, as a first stage.

2.) Further, this created universe is already (passively) open toward – has a natural, passive obediential capacity – also for Christ. There are levels, then, of divine paternity, depending upon the extent that one would accept adoptive filiation. In this sense, we are not children of God by nature alone – but are called to enter into a more intimate relationship with the Father through grace, a unique share in the Filiation of His own Son.

i. Should anyone reject His extended hand, try to establish one's own personal relationship unassisted with the Father, this is condemned from the outset to failure. Jesus has made a special gift of His own relationship with the Father to each and everyone who will agree to come and follow Him.

j. With all that is said: Jesus' own personal Prayer to the Father remains a Mystery. This will never be penetrated in comprehensive manner, even when we pray His own prayer, and express ourselves in terms of His own natural Filiation.

SUMMARY: surely, Christians and non-Christians alike, saints and sinners: none are excluded totally from the divine paternity. Nonetheless, in order to become the adopted children of the Heavenly Father in the full sense, it is necessary to become truly His adopted children, by accepting His grace, acting upon it, by taking up the Cross of Jesus Christ every day, and to follow Him. The challenge is to live the full density of the OUR FATHER – a certain “composite picture”, pattern, paradigm evolves in any careful reading of Scripture:

- the Son is one with the Father (cf. Jn 10:30; 17:21);
- the Son's prayer is one of adoration for the Father's glory (cf. Mk 14:36; Jn 17:4);

Jesus has come on earth specifically to give to human beings the power to become the children of God (cf. Jn 1:12);

- He has come to gather the dispersed children of the Most High (cf. Jn 11:52);
- Jesus' coming has made all brothers and sisters, and in a more intense, elevated manner (cf. 3n 20:17);
- the OUR FATHER is a formula that expresses the new relationship uniting human beings to God;
- by the Incarnation, God the Creator offers to all the possibility of re-birth to a new life (cf. Jn 3:5-16; 10:10).

While it is true that the formula: OUR FATHER can be in common with anyone who thinks of God as Creator – on Jesus' lips it also expresses His own unique relationship, which is offered to anyone who will accept it, as a participation in it.

Therefore, the fullest meaning of the OUR FATHER is to live HIS WILL, to share in some way, already now, within the life of the Most Blessed Trinity³⁰.

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2.] GETHSEMANE (cf. Mk 14:32-42; Mt 26:36-46; Lk 22:39-46)

While some of the dogmatic questions associated with the OUR FATHER lead to **Trinitarian** reflections and also to some thoughts on the Nature of **Grace** and the Divine Indwelling, the Agony of Gethsemane leads to a consideration of the “wills” in Jesus Christ, and the old teaching called Monothelitism.

A Bit of History:

a. The eternal Son of God, “**one of the Trinity**”, became man in order to save the world. The mystery of the Word Incarnate has been approached throughout the Christian Tradition from two opposite directions, using as their starting points:

- the humanity of Christ – as largely followed by the School of Antioch;
- the divinity of the Son of God – as espoused by the School of Alexandria.

Both schools had the problem of showing that Jesus Christ is **truly God** and **truly man**, and that He is One.

b. This led to a variety of errors:

- Arianism: denied the divinity of Christ;
- Nestorianism denied the unity of His Person;
- Monophysitism rejected the duality of natures after union. (For all practical purposes, this last mentioned, rejected the humanity of Christ).

The great Christological Councils of the 5th century were faced with the task of expressing in clear terms the mysterious union of the two natures in one person.

c. Later it became also necessary to explicate the same mystery on the level of Christ's actions – against the Monothelitist tendency, the Church explained that the two wills and actions, the divine and the human, remain distinct in the one person of the God-man. Except for the exclusion of the error of the AGNOETES (who

³⁰ NB: for these pages of these notes, cf. Jean Carmignac, *Recherches sur le Notre Père*. Paris: Letouzey 1969, pp. 63-69, *passim*.

held that in Christ there was ignorance), the Church's reflection on the mysterious union of the divine and human knowledge was reserved for a later period.³¹ Thus, the mystery of Christ, a mystery of unity in duality, has been through the centuries the object of a deep reflection; in recent years this reflection has taken on a new dimension with the problem of the psychological unity of the God-man³².

3.] A FEW DEFINITIONS OF THE CHURCH:

a. The Council of Lateran (649):

If anyone does not, according to the holy Fathers, confess truly and properly two wills, the divine and the human, intimately united in one and the same Christ God, since it is one and the same Who by each of His two natures has willed our salvation, let him be condemned (D-S 51d; The Christian Faith, 11 627/10 – p. 167).

If anyone does not, according to the holy Fathers, confess truly and properly two actions (ENERGEIA), the divine and the human, intimately united in one and the same Christ God, since it is one and the same Who by each of His two natures has worked out our salvation, let him be condemned. (cf. D-S 511; The Christian Faith, 627/11).

If anyone, following the infamous heretics, confesses only one nature or one will, or one action of divinity and humanity in the Christ God, destroying thereby what the holy Fathers confess and denying the mystery of the Incarnation of our Savior, let him be condemned (cf. D-S 512; The Christian faith, // 627/12).

If, in the Christ God in Whom, as has been taught by our holy Fathers, the two wills and the two actions, the divine and the human, are essentially preserved in their unity, anyone, following the infamous heretics, confesses against the doctrine of the holy Fathers one will only and only one action, let him be condemned (cf. D-S 513; The Christian Faith, // 627/13).

If anyone, following the impious heretics, confesses their impious doctrine of one will and one action in the Christ God, and denies and rejects the two wills and two actions, the divine and the human, 'physically' preserved in their unity in the Christ God, as is professed about Him by the holy Fathers according to orthodox doctrine, let him be condemned. (cf. D-S 514; The Christian faith, # 515). – for these texts, cf. id., pp. 167, f.).

³¹ cf. Jacques Maritain, *On the Grace and Humanity of Jesus*. Herder & Herder 1969; Betrand de Margerie, SJ, *The Human Knowledge of Christ*. Boston: St. Paul 1980

³² cf. Pietro Parente, *L'io di Cristo*. Rovigo: Padano 1981; cf. also *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*. rev. ed. by N. Neuner, SJ - J. Dupuis, SJ. Staten Island, NY: Alba 1982.

b. The IIIrd General Council of Constantinople (681):

We likewise proclaim in Him, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, two natural volitions, or wills, and two natural actions, without division, without change, without separation, without confusion.

The two natural wills are not – by no means – opposed to each other, as the impious heretics assert; but His human will is compliant, it does not resist or oppose, but rather submits to His divine and almighty will. For as the wise Athanasias says it was necessary that the will of the flesh move itself, but also that it be submitted to the divine will; because just as His flesh is said to be and is the flesh of God the Word, so, too, the natural will of His flesh is said to be and is God the Word's very own, as He Himself declares: 'I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.' (Jn 6:38). He calls the will of His flesh His own will, because the flesh also has become His own. For just as His most Holy and immaculate flesh, animated by His soul, has not been destroyed by being divinized but remained in its own state and kind, so also His human will has not been destroyed by being divinized. It has rather been preserved, according to the words of Gregory the theologian: 'For His will – referring to that of the savior – being fully divinized, is not opposed to God. (D-S 556; The Christian Faith, It 635 – pp. 172, f.)

Therefore, preserving entirely what is neither fused nor divided, we proclaim the entire matter in this concise utterance: believing that one of the Holy Trinity, who after the incarnation is our Lord Jesus Christ, is our true God, we say that His two natures shine forth in His one hypostasis. In it, throughout His entire human existence in the flesh, he made manifest His miracles and His sufferings, not in mere appearance, but in reality. The difference of two natures in that same and unique hypostasis is recognized by the fact that each of the two wills and performs what is proper to it in communion with the other... (D-S 537; The Christian Faith, I1636, p.173).

4.] A THEOLOGY OF HOLY ABANDONMENT TO THE DIVINE WILL

a.] THE MEANING OF THE WORD: generally, the following distinction is made:

- passive: one can have the experience of having been abandoned by God (the "Dark Night", "Spiritual Winter": Why have you abandoned Me? (Ps 22).
- active when one really abandons him/herself to God.

"Passive" Abandonment is generally considered as a part of the spiritual life, and is considered under the headings of: ARIDITY, DESOLATION, DERELICTION, PURIFICATIONS.

Of particular interest here would be the reflection that is needed on Active Abandonment to the divine will. This was defined in classical theology as: a conformity to the divine good pleasure. It is a **“conformity” that springs from love**, and is brought to an elevated degree. In some manuals, the Latin equivalent was often considered to be *resignatio*, used by the author of the classic *Imitation of Christ*, and by others in the *Devotio Moderna* school.

b.] ITS FIELD: the spiritual life is a work accomplished by two, the accomplishment of two wills: divine and human, the second being that of the believer. The Will of God has infinite power, and in a certain sense, is considered by many to exercise the principal role. It is the divine will that takes the initiative, offers the means. It is the role of the human will to cede, to accede, to the divine in the work of cooperation: our will is **called to be in conformity with the divine will**, to depend on it more and more. St. Alphonsus is quoted to refer to this process as bringing the human will into **uniformity** to that of God. This is the summit of perfection. (Scripture does offer a few “models” from every day life of how baptism makes us one with Jesus Christ: Peter’s “Living Stones”, resting on the Risen Corner Stone; the vine and the branches with the same life; putting on the garment of Christ; the nuptial theme; the Mystical Body).

For St. Vincent de Paul, perfection consists in so uniting our will to that of God that His and ours are properly speaking, but one and the same – both in willing, as in non-willing. Whoever excels the more in this, is the more perfect. A meditation that dates from the Middle Ages on the Lord’s Prayer, and attributed to St. Anselm, proceeds thus:

This is the joy of the Angels, the celestial desire to be able to offer yourself totally for the reward of heaven, to accept all for this, to conform your will to it fully... (“... ***tibi totaliter obsequendum***...”).

c.] DISTINCTIONS: the “Will of God” may be considered as follows:

1.] **The “Signified Divine Will”:** this is what is already known in advance, manifested clearly and explicitly by the commandments of God, the precepts of the Church, counsels, inspirations, rules, and constitutions (cf. St. Francis de Sales, Treatise on the Love of God, Book 8, c. 3, & 5-9) – the vows and the orders of superiors.

2.] **The Divine Will of Good Pleasure:** under this difficult title, the committed believer is called to accept all the events of life, over which there is no control. This includes all those things that happen: sickness, deaths, affliction, consolations – adverse, as well as prosperous realities, all that have not been foreseen, planned, “programmed.”

To submit to the SIGNIFIED DIVINE WILL, technically, is not “Abandonment” – it is **obedience**, which when coupled with love, is the normal means of achieving perfection. The broad area of the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE is the specific field of Holy Abandonment.

One could imagine situations when the SIGNIFIED DIVINE WILL would call for Abandonment, as in the instance of one giving truly dedicated effort constantly to the duties of one's state in life for the success of some endeavor, that also depends on many other factors. Some of the efforts that may indeed be judged to be “the will of God” call upon Abandonment particularly when the results do not seem in proportion to the effort that went into it all (cf. St. Francis de Sales, Divine Love, book 9, c. 6).

- a.] There can never any real conflict between the “Divine Will of Good Pleasure” and the “Signified Divine Will” – of necessity, being the same Will of God, they are in agreement. Should there ever be an apparent conflict, the SIGNIFIED DIVINE WILL takes precedence, and gives ultimate meaning to the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE. St. Francis de Sales taught that in doubt, obedience should predominate.
- b.] Not all submission to the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE merits the name “Abandonment”, even when it is in conformity to God's Will. “To resign oneself”, in the present meaning of the word, is not always “Abandonment.” In order to be genuine “Abandonment”, one would need **a more generous self-giving** – not one that is forced. Abandonment is never a quiescent restraint that may imply hesitation and deliberation. St. Bernard indicated three levels of submission to the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE:
 - that initiated by fear, sustaining the Cross of Christ patiently;
 - those more proficient, may carry the Cross out of hope, willingly;
 - those consummate in charity, embrace it even ardently.

Conformity to the Divine Will that proceeds from Fear is simple resignation; that conformity which comes from ardent love is surely Abandonment.

- 1.] Some of the earlier discussion centered on whether in the act of perfect abandonment, there could be mixed in any elements of HOPE - and there were theologians who would eliminate hope from the practice of authentic abandonment.

- 2.] For others, though, there is a specific exercise of ABANDONMENT, expressed as **perfect Hope in God**. Such Abandonment demands an act of confidence in the goodness of God – it rejects not only all worrying solicitude, but remains committed; it would never be accompanied by uncontrolled restlessness, concern. It disposes us to a total oblation of oneself to God. Such abandonment that realizes these conditions will lead virtually to the act of charity. It will soon and easily become a pure love of God. However, it is necessary to make clear that the Virtue of Abandonment is already constituted by these elements, and not merely by confident Hope in God.
- 3.] Other interpreters see it differently: for them, conformity through hope is not yet that complete detachment, which would ask for a more complete detachment, indifference, to the remission of one's will wholly into the hands of Providence. Abandonment cannot be partial conformity with the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE – it is rather an entire conformity, a complete reconciliation to His Will, in order to embrace that of God. This special character of abandonment necessarily requires the exercise of charity. Conformity through the exercise of hope is an abandonment in potency – or, rather, an initial abandonment: it will only be achieved when love is added to it.
- 4.] Most authors do speak of **Abandonment** only in connection with **Charity**. However, Fr. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, maintains that **heroic hope is the eminent degree of Abandonment**. It makes one tend more and more toward God, relying on the help promised to all. The formal motive of theological hope is helpful Omnipotence, Mercy! Heroic Hope is characterized by invincible firmness and trusting abandonment.
- a.] The Council of Trent (D-S 1541, *De munere perseverantiae*) teaches that all should have a most firm hope in the help of God, for if we do not resist His grace, as He has begun the work of salvation in us, He will finish it, working in us both to will and to accomplish (cf. Ph 1:6; 2:13).
- b.] The invincible firmness of hope appears in the passive purifications, when the Lord permits every human hope to

disappear. The tried person, in the “**School of God**” of suffering, obtains a clearer view of his/her own need. In times of illness, strong temptations and in discouragement, the call is to hope heroically and theologically against every human hope.

- c.] When trials are courageously endured, hope grows stronger and is increased. Like all theological virtues, which are infused, Hope, too, is infused “like an acquired virtue”, and therefore – with the concomitant help of Grace – it needs to be exercised. The Christian hopes increasingly for salvation with a certitude of tendency. The firmness in tending toward eternal life should be invincible, because of the formal motive on which it rests. In spite of rebuffs, contradictions, the sight of our own wretchedness and our sins, we are called to have hope in God, Who has promised His help:

Ask and it shall be given to you – seek, and you shall find – knock, and it shall be opened to you... (Lk 11:9-13).

If God is for us, who is against us: Even if one were the greatest sinner on earth, there is still no reason not to have any less trust in God – for hope does not rest on human innocence, but on God’s omnipotence as mercy (St. Therese).

- 5.] With St. Paul, we can almost rejoice in our infirmities, so that the power of Christ might indeed dwell in us. **For when we are weak, then it is that we are truly strong** (cf. 2 Co 12:7, ff.). Often one is crushed to grow, in order to be the more configured to Him. Isaiah speaks of Him as “**He was wounded for our iniquities... by His Wounds, our are healed...**” (cf. Is 53:5).
- 6.] Heroic Hope manifests itself not only in firmness, but by **trusting abandonment to divine Providence** and to **the omnipotent goodness of God**. Perfect abandonment differs from Quietism because it is accompanied by Hope and unwavering fidelity to duty. Such unwavering fidelity to the SIGNIFIED WILL OF GOD, made known in the present responsibilities, prepares one to abandon oneself with full confidence to the as yet unrevealed DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE.
- 7.] Heroic Hope rests more and more on the infinite merits of our Savior, on the value of the Precious Blood that He shed for us. No

matter what happens, all are called to hope in the divine Good Shepherd, Who gave His life for the sheep – and in good, the Father, Who after having handed over His Son, cannot refuse to come to the aid of those who have recourse to Him – and in the Holy Spirit, who breathes where He wills, overshadows us, to bring forth Christ, as He did Mary.

- 8.] The Church professes this heroic hope, trusts also in Mary, universal Mediatrix. At the foot of the Cross, she stood, and there made her great act of Hope when all seemed lost. She merits to be called: Mary, Help of Christians, Comforter of the Afflicted, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, “our life, our sweetness and our **hope!**”. In her own FIAT, and her message to the servants of Cana: DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU – she has left this heritage for the Church of every generation.
- 9.] Heroic Hope, then, is never separated from Charity – just as Paul’s “**obedience of faith**” (cf. DV 5) means includes the entire theological life of faith, hope and charity. Hope also is united to the **KENOSIS** – its best climate is the **Beatitude of Poverty, and the Gift of Fear of the Holy Spirit** – in St. Thomas’ synthesis (cf. II-II, q. 19). Hope, therefore, is not “selfish”, self-seeking: it does not seek eternal life solely “for us”, but for the glory of God. Faith keeps hope from being merely political, as it must be based on an “integral” reading of God’s word. And charity keeps hope from being solely for oneself: it must include God and neighbor. Its scope has been considerably broadened in recent reflection (cf. e.g. GS 39).

5.] ABANDONMENT AND INDIFFERENCE:

a. Very frequently in the Rule of St. Ignatius, there is insistence on “being content”, being “indifferent.” This kind of attitude seems to be one of the goals of his **Spiritual Exercises**. “Indifference”, classically was considered to be a “negative virtue”, a kind of “pre-requisite to “full-fledged” abandonment. As it is described in the fundamental meditation of the **Spiritual Exercises** of St. Ignatius, it is a preliminary disposition to the fuller living of Abandonment. Holy Abandonment supposes the human will exists in a loving expectancy, a waiting upon God’s Will, ready to proceed into act once this DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE is known. “Indifference”, then, would seem to have no further reason for being once the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE is clear.

b. Nonetheless, the two are intimately bound together in that St. Francis de Sales may confuse the two: he often refers to “Holy Abandonment” as a “Holy Indifference.” He defines Holy Abandonment as a kind of perfect Indifference to receive, accept all kinds of happenings that take place through Divine Providence – affliction as well as consolation, sickness as well as health, poverty as well as wealth, rejection as well as honors, shame as well as glory.

c. In Book 9 of the Love of God, the saint treats of the love of submission by which the human will is united to the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE, and hardly seems to distinguish between resignation and indifference.

d. Perhaps coming from his soldier's training, St. Ignatius of Loyola insists very much on abandonment, as obsequium to the Roman Pontiff in matters of the Apostolic Mission. This seems to be the area of the “Fourth Vow”.³³ The matter of Holy Abandonment is treated in the well-known classic by Jean-Pierre de Caussade³⁴.

6.] SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS BASED ON THE GOSPEL: this is not some kind of sublime spirituality unknown to the flock. It has deep biblical roots:

That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body, and how you are to clothe it. Surely life means more than food, and the body more than clothing! Look at the birds in the sky ... yet, your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they are? ... Think of the flowers growing in the fields ... they never have to work, or spin. Yet, I assure you that not even Solomon in all his regalia was robed like one of these...Now, if that is the way God clothes the grass in the field, which is there today and gone tomorrow, thrown into the furnace, will he not much more look after you, you men of little faith!...So, do not worry... Your heavenly Father knows your needs. So set your hearts on His kingdom first, and on His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you...So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own... (cf. Mt 6:25-34).

There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom... (cf. Lk 12:22-31).

St. Peter teaches his own brand of abandonment when he encourages the followers of Christ to put all their care on the Lord, because He will take care of them:

Bow down, then, before the power of God now, and He will raise you up on the appointed day; unload your worries on to Him, since He is looking after you ... (cf. 1 P 5:7, ff.).

³³ cf. Albert Chapelle, La quatrième vœu de la Compagnie. Rome: CIS 1978.

³⁴ Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence. Collins, Fontana Library 1959.

7.] DIVINE PROVIDENCE: ³⁵The scholars who have studied Abandonment see it founded on a variety of dogmatic truths, that offer the solid basis on which to entrust ourselves totally to God. The principal dogma would be Divine Providence, particularly in these aspects:

a. THE SOVEREIGN DIVINE WILL:

1.) All that happens on earth flows out from the sovereign will of God. St. Augustine remarked in his *Enchiridion* (n. 24) that nothing happens that is not willed by divine omnipotence: either by permitting it, or by positively bridling it about. All that a human being endures against his/her will – in the last analysis, really cannot be limited to the choices of human beings – rather, all that happens is to be attributed to the Will of the One Who gives power to all wills (cf. *De Civ. Dei.*, 1. V, c. 10, n. 1).

2.) In effect, God holds in His own hand all the created wills and even when they act contrary to the divine will, even when they seem to go contrary to His designs: through his omnipotence, he can make them tend toward the goals that He has established in advance. St. Augustine stated (*De Civ. Dei*, 1. XXII, c. 2) that much is done by the devil, even contrary to the Will of God – but, such is His wisdom, such is His power and virtue that He is able to direct all to those purposes, or goals, that He knew beforehand; even what seems for the time adverse, in some way, tends to His purposes. God even accomplishes His designs that are, in the long run, beneficent – even by making use of ill will. Even the sacrilegious death of Jesus Christ is turned by the omnipotent mercy and wisdom of God to the redemption of the world.

3.) Since the divine wisdom and power govern and direct all, as St. Augustine deeply believed, he was able to draw this conclusion: in our lives, nothing happens by chance – all that seems to go against our choices, can only come through the will of God, from His Providence, from that order that He has personally established, from that consent that He bestows and from the laws that He has drawn up (cf. *En in Ps 118*, v. 12).

4.) Behind the secondary causes that affect us directly, we are called upon to see the hand of God – to see God, in all that happens. All that humanity undergoes, despite free will (the afflictions, the chagrin, travail, humiliation) – all, is attributed to the just will of God (cf. *En. In Ps 32*, II, n. 24, 26).

³⁵ cf. St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*. The Classics of Western Spirituality. NY / Ramsey/ Toronto: Paulist 1980.

b. THIS DIVINE WILL IS INFINITELY BENEFICENT:

1.) The divine choices, decisions, all are good: in their source, in their goal, in their forms – good even without the mixture of evil, good in all aspects and always! St. Augustine commented on this basic principle of his: God is so good that even evil serves His purposes. He would never allow evil just to happen, if He did not have some plan to utilize this by His sovereign will (*Opus imperf. Contra Julianum*, V, n. 60 – PL 45, 1495).

2.) The glory of God, in which all the divine actions coincide fully with the ultimate good of each one, may not seem in accord with apparent good – but, beyond doubt, this leads (in the final analysis) to each and everyone's eternal good. Cassian pointed out that really no one could say in the depths of one's own being these words of the LORD'S PRAYER: 'Thy Will be done!' – except one who would believe that everything: adversity, as well as prosperity – is dispensed in our regard by God, for the ultimate and final good. God's only purpose is for the salvation and well-being of the faithful. For this, He is more attentive and more caring than anyone could be in his/her own regard (Cassian, Conference IX. On Prayer, c. 20)

3.) A line from St. Paul that is often quoted in this regard is: ***We know that by turning everything to their good God cooperates with all those who love Him, with all those that He has called according to His purpose*** (cf. Rm 8:28).

4.) The Will of God is the sole rule for the devout. In all that occurs, the devout, the truly faithful, will only that, and are attached to only that. Those who respond to this grace see the divine blessings in it; become content with their lot in life – and desire only that God's will be accomplished. The graced believer is convinced that God would will nothing, allow nothing, that He could not turn to the advantage of those whom He infinitely loves. **All that happens, flows from His hand** – all, but sin. All events can become blessings – all occasions, can become opportunities. The crosses that come into every life lead one to resemble ever more the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, and Model of all spirituality.

5.) For a committed believer, dedicated on making this world more humane, nothing would be more reasonable than entrusting the entire endeavor more and more to the Word of God (cf. DV 5). The exercise of this abandonment leads of its very nature to convert all that happens into virtue, blessing. If indeed, one believes that God is the sovereign Master, Lord of the universe, His will indeed is accomplished in all things.

6.) **Christian abandonment is far superior to Stoic resignation.** As with Aristotle, and his brilliant insight into the spirituality of the soul, there is also an admirable preparation for truly "Christian" abandonment in Epictetus. He once wrote

that he was trying to become instructed to learn how to will those things that did happen! One has to come to ponder the One who has regulated it all (cf. his "Contentment of Spirit"). It does seem that the Stoics made a concerted effort to balance perfectly human activities with the divine interventions in their lives. They readily understood the basic distinction between what did truly depend on human choices, and all that was above these. Particularly regarding these latter, this system of thought strove seriously to teach a perfect submission to those things that God indeed had chosen. Epictetus taught never to disobey God, never to reproach Him, never to complain about those things He asked us to share – never to be discontent in doing, or in suffering, what indeed was inevitable.

7.) All of life offers repeated opportunities to put oneself in conformity with the Will of God: this is that sublime capacity to turn to gold whatever one touches! The contribution of the old Stoic school, in this regard, is indeed considerable: with the revealed sense now of "God is love" (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16), and with the assistance of grace – this doctrine may be lived to a most sublime degree.

8.) Abandonment goes hand in hand with a deeper appreciation through faith in Divine Providence. In the school of St. Francis de Sales, St. Jeanne de Chantal practiced abandonment to God's love to a sublime degree. Hers was a sublime devotion to Divine Providence. Her abandonment was indeed entire and genuine – her love for divine providence was both real and solid. Any reflection on this mystery for her was a blessing. Her synthesis of sacred Scripture was that saying: Eternal Father, Your Providence governs all things! Under such government, the offer is peace of soul. In success, as well as in the harsh events of life, in all fatigue – the ideal faith is to unite divine Providence with the free divine Will, moved by Mercy toward humanity in all of His interventions.

8.] ELEMENTS AND EFFECTS OF ABANDONMENT: different theologians over the years have pondered the nature of Holy Abandonment and offered their own "list" of elements, or virtues that go to make it up. High on this list would be these following that recur so often: detachment, faith, confidence, love, hope.

- for Bossuet, abandonment is the sum total of **all the Christian virtues**: the most perfect faith, the most complete hope, and the most fervent and faithful love.
- for de Caussade in his Spiritual Instructions, he chose to follow this doctrine, for the most part. For him, the state of abandonment is a **certain mixture of faith, hope and charity**, in one and the same act, which unites one's heart with God and to His activity (cf. Book II, c. 1, II 3).

- Piny understood the way of abandonment as that alone which one exercises the most vivid faith – and where one practices **supreme hope** – while being at the same time, the path of **true love**. It is where one practices the more, the virtue of **justice** and the virtue of **patience**. Abandonment, then, is the most penitent and crucifying way to follow the Lord.

In summary, then: for most of the classical interpreters, Abandonment is a synthesis of all the theological and all the moral virtues. The following are its absolutely essential elements:

a. **RESIGNATION**: in it, one surrenders his/her own self, own will, one's own interests, to be occupied solely with God's will and His love. To be abandoned TO God, one has to depart FROM much that pertains to self. There could be no wonder in noting that all the classical descriptions of Abandonment are much colored by "abnegation."

1.) The "resignatio" of the Imitation of Christ seems to occupy the mid-way point between abnegation and the gift of self – or, rather, a combination of both of these (cf. Book III, c. 37). In order to obtain freedom of heart, there is necessary a pure and integral resignation of self. Abandonment, as presented by St. Francis de Sales, coincides with "abnegation", and the "handing of oneself over to God."

2.) In order to abandon oneself, and to set aside one's own interests, this will always mean "surrender", to be detached from one's own will, in order to surrender oneself totally to God. In the sublime ideals of St. Francis de Sales, this means: to ask for nothing for oneself; but not to refuse anything, either. It involves committing oneself to the arms of Divine Providence, without being diverted, or side-tracked by any personal desire. In the final analysis – with all the efforts to describe it – it comes down simply to will what God wills for us. In order to be attached to God, means not being riveted to anything else. To live this state, there is required that the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE needs to be discerned and become the ultimate principle, the rule of life. It is in this attitude that all are invited to formulate all of prayer.

3.) Abandonment is a "**cession**", a handing over of self to God. It has to be a totally free choice on the part of a committed believer. It involves one's whole being: body and soul, thoughts and desires, intellect and will – past and future: to remit oneself to God according to His sublime ideals. It is presupposed that one will believe in the infinite and omnipotent Goodness, Love and mercy of God. It asks for a complete self-surrender to these divine attributes. It is to trust in the infinite power and grace of God, to make all this possible.

b. **LOVE:** detachment, faith and hope in divine Providence are just the “dispositions”, the “pre-requisites” for genuine abandonment. In order that this state be integral, complete, to be handed over to God unreservedly, LOVE is necessary.

1.) Abandonment to God in the midst of adversity calls necessarily upon a filial affection. It is in trials and tribulations where it can be seen whether one is a slave / servant, or trusting child. When adversity threatens, when it really does come – the hired-hand flees. The child, on the contrary, remains indefectibly attached to the parent in the difficulties as well as in the good times (Tauler).

2.) St. Francis de Sales writes with great insight in this regard: to entrust oneself to God in sweetness and peace, when times are good, is possible for all. But, to commit oneself to Him in the times of storm and tempest, this is proper only to His children. My view is that we are called to commit ourselves to Him with a total abandonment (Letter of January 7, 1611).

3.) It is from its real purpose, which is that of uniting the believer to God – that one is able to distinguish authentic abandonment from that which is useless, or perhaps an exercise in Stoic vanity. **Love remains the distinguishing mark.** Abandonment leads to the perfection of holy love, while all the while, permitting one to experience this love. It can truly be said: in order to be abandoned to God, one must love Him; and it is only in loving God, that one could ever even begin to be abandoned to Him. In this sense, abandonment is the most integral expression of perfect love for God.

4.) Throughout the history of spirituality, most praise has been heaped on the Way of Holy Abandonment. St. Paul of the Cross called it “the most perfect way, the treasure of all treasures.” St. Francis de Sales offers the most frequent praise of it, as it permeates so much of his work on divine love: “Abandonment is the virtue of virtues: it is the chrism of charity, the odor of humility, merit of patience, and the FIAT of perseverance: great is this virtue and only worthy to be practiced by the most beloved children of God.” Surin, a classical spiritual writer, placed the Love of Abandonment among the points of perfection that lead the believer to great holiness.

9.] **ITS SCOPE:**

a. There is perhaps no other reality as extended as is Abandonment. It is extended to everything: to the past, the present, to the future. It involves the body and all the states it passes through – to the soul, and all its miseries, as well as to its considerable qualities – to good as well as to evil; it includes the benevolence of others, as well as their malice. It involves the vicissitudes of the material world: death, time, eternity.

b. In brief, it has the same extension as Divine Providence does. From this, nothing is excluded, escapes. The saints were “abandoned” to God regarding their own physical well being. It may be noted that the truly “faithful”, with a most sure conscience, can be fully committed in everything, to the divinity. Each should rejoice without knowing in advance what it is that God may ask. Perfection resides, then, in committing oneself to the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE.

c. This level of abandonment involves the spiritual life as well. St. Francis de Sales wrote (Jan. 16, 1603): I supplicate you... that you repeat often with the Psalmist: ‘I am Yours – save me!’. Or, be like Mary Magdeline who so trusted Jesus Christ who called her by name, to sanctify His Name.

10.] LIMITS TO HOLY ABANDONMENT:

a. To pray for suffering, reverses: this would seem to go beyond the usual state of Holy Abandonment. One can indeed offer heroic service to God, give witness, without asking for suffering – while yet remaining willing to accept it should it come. The specific prayer for suffering, the offering of oneself as a “victim”, surpasses the limits of Holy Abandonment. This manner of the spiritual life can only be entered upon with great discretion, counsel – and only by those persons who are indeed called to it by God.

1.) St. Therese of the Child Jesus, despite her desires for suffering, and even though she offered herself as a “victim” to the merciful love – in order not to leave behind the way of abandonment, did not ask for any sufferings beyond those which God destined her to have. “I would be afraid of being presumptuous, and these sufferings would then be unbearable to me, and I might be obliged to carry them alone. I would never be able to do that, all alone.” (cf. History of a Soul, c. 12).

2.) Yet, even here, there is nothing outside the way of abandonment in striving to endure those sufferings that God might send, also in the spirit of “victim”. Thus, we should never limit the ways of Providence. Even heroic individuals may not be called specifically to pray explicitly for sufferings – the way of Holy Abandonment only asks that those that do come, be accepted. Only the truly exceptional could rightfully ask for suffering – for most, the ideal would be to accept as “crucified joy”, those that do come:

... This is a cause of great joy for you, even though you may for a short time have to bear being plagued by all sorts of trials... (1 P 1:6).

... you, too, the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stones for the spiritual house... (2:5, f.) think of what Christ suffered in this life, and arm yourselves with the same resolution that He had...

... Think of God's mercy ... offer your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God... (cf. Rm 12:1, ff.).

3.) It might also be well to recall the Eucharistic Doctrine of Pius XII and Paul VI:

“To shed further light on the mystery of the Church, it helps us to realize that it is nothing less than the whole Church which, **in union with Christ in his role as Priest and Victim**, offers the sacrifice of the Mass and is offered in it... the summit of sanctity which is nothing else **than the total offering of oneself to service of the divine majesty**.” (cf. Mediator Dei 19k7; Mysterium Fidei, 1965, notes nn. 25; LG 11).

b. Energetic Performance of Duties: the way of Abandonment will never dispense one from carrying out positive duties. Between the SIGNIFIED DIVINE WILL, and the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE, there is never any opposition. Whatever the Signified Divine Will calls for, must be carried out.

1.] Authentic abandonment will never exclude prudence – but presupposes it. There is a general care of body, soul, mind and will that must be taken: Holiness also means “wholeness / health”: sana mens, sanum corpus. Such care is already demanded by the SIGNIFIED DIVINE WILL. Hence, abandonment could never reach the extreme that it would demand the absolute sacrifice of one's salvation: there simply could not be any state in this life that could ever consent to the eternal damnation, and to make the surrender of eternal life. St. Thomas offers a commentary on this:

To will one's own eternal damnation would not be in conformity with the divine will, but only to the will of sin (cf. De Ver., q. 23, a. 8, ad)

2.] In the writings of the saints, one might occasionally come across such sentiments expressed in **bursts of ardor** – but, these must be taken “with a grain of salt”. All the saints sincere(y and ardently yearned for their beatitude, without ever wishing to renounce that sovereign possession of God, to which all are called. One cannot take expressions that seem to oppose this, in the rigorous meaning of the terms expressed. There is need to bring to such ardent expressions the broadest possible interpretation. One has to enter into the “spirit” behind such expressions – as Moses, St. Paul and the Little Flower are often quoted here:

a.) Moses:

And yet, if it pleased you to forgive this sin of theirs ... But if not, then blot me out from the book that you have written ... (cf. Ex 32:32).

b.) St. Paul:

I would willingly be condemned and be cut off from Christ if it could help my brothers of Israel, my own flesh and blood ... (cf. RM 9:3).

c.) St. Francis de Sales:

He held that a person might indeed become so heroically indifferent, preferring perhaps even hell, with God's Will, over Paradise without God's Will. Should such a hypothesis be simply unrealistic – what he was implying with the unusual expression is that all he wanted to do in life was the will of God – in everything (cf. Love of God, 1. IX, c. k).

d.) The Little Flower:

"... I said to God that to please Him I would consent to see myself plunged into hell so that He would be loved eternally in that place of blasphemy..." (Story of a Soul, c. 5. Washington: ICS 1972, p. 112).

3.) In these "impossible hypotheses", the emphasis is the grandeur, the vehemence, the ardor of their charity. But, all of the above are infinitely distant from the crass indifference in possessing God, or losing Him eternally: as though it was of equal value to be loved eternally by God – or, by hating Him eternally. These fervent saints willed that they would most willing to do anything so that the divine will might be achieved. They would endure all the struggles of time, and even the pains similar to those of hell – without, of course, ever sinning, which is the only way in which the pains of hell might be inflicted. They so love God that they are most desirous of pleasing only Him, and they are most willing to do all that within them lies to glorify Him, and to bring souls to Him.

11. CONDITIONS:

a. Active: Abandonment must be exercised, lived: there does not really exist "passive virtue" (cf. Leo XIII, Testem Benevolentiae, Jan. 22, 1899). God Who has indeed created us without us, does not redeem us without us! The state of Holy Abandonment does not dispense one from concerted effort. Our sanctification must always be the work of God's grace and free human cooperation, collaboration. It is not without repeated and costly effort that one will ever come in practice to the state of a holy indifference.

1.] Before the event, the believer is called to remit him / herself into the merciful hands of God, by a simple and general sense of expectancy, awaiting. However, this is not passive, and it is not without real effort of collaboration with grace as one "waits" in this way. Abandonment presupposes that the believer follows

through on all the movements of grace. There needs to be a balance between expectancy and activity: otherwise, one could tempt God.

2.] To abandon oneself to God without pulling one's share, this is "laxity", nonchalance in the worst sense. Authentic and venerable abandonment is that which is accompanied by that which God is asking from each. It is contained in a number of expressions that are well known in various traditions, all flowing from the central injunction in this regard from Christ Himself:

- Watch and pray!
- ***ora et labora;***
- ***contemplata aliis tradere;***
- to pray as though all depended on God; to work as though it all depended on oneself.

3.] Abandonment is an attitude that is accompanied by the recognition of our need, and a healthy mistrust of self – it is a matter of recourse to God through prayer, accompanied by a firm confidence in Him. It is the real commitment to attention to God and the proper consideration of oneself. It involves the firm resolution of fighting temptations and of working out all that Providence will present us to do, and to suffer, should this occur.

4.] St. Francis de Sales recommended to his spiritual daughter, St. Jane de Chantal, a kind of "sweet repose" in the arms of the Savior (cf. Ps 131), and adds: Remain in tranquil resignation, to commit yourself to the hands of our Lord, without ever ceasing to cooperate dedicatedly with His holy grace by the exercise of the virtues and the occasions that present themselves. One who is truly committed, abandoned into the hands of God ... only seeks to remain with Our Lord, without caring for anything else, whether for one's body or soul. It will always be necessary, of course, to think of those things to which we are obliged, each according to one's own responsibilities.

5.] It is most apparent, then, that in the unfolding of Holy Abandonment, it is necessary to give the proper place, time, to human activity. One who is committed to this way in the spiritual life has no other concern than to remain within the arms of the Lord, not unlike the biblical image of spiritual childhood. The child accepts being put down, and lifted up again. The infant does not give much thought to where he/she is going, but so often allows the parent to lead (cf. Ho 11). A believer committed to this spirit, seeks only the Will of God, the will of DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE. In all of the events of life, the believer allows the unfolding of the divine plan – and seeks to do everything possible to cooperate with the SIGNIFIED DIVINE WILL.

6.] It is only right in general terms to say that our active piety corresponds to the “Signified Divine Will” – and that our “passive piety” has for its area of concern, the “divine Will of Good Pleasure.” To maintain oneself in this loving and confident submission to God, it is necessary to give very active effort to the endeavor: to hold on under fire, is not an easy task!

7.] To strive to enter into the way of Holy Abandonment will not eliminate the natural repugnance which is never separated from the most difficult inner struggles. Abandonment in no way will dull, or lessen suffering. Abandonment resides in the “upper part of the soul”: keeping in mind that desires that are contrary to God’s will can exist simultaneously in the same person. Abandonment is one of those virtues that have their roots in the “superior” part of one’s nature. St. Paul noted that within him, there was often a kind of terrible “battle” going on:

... I am unspiritual... I cannot understand my own behavior... I have a self that acknowledges that the Law is good ... there is nothing good living in my unspiritual self ... What a wretched man I am...! (cf. Rm. 7: 14, ff.)

8.] Some interpreters, perhaps combating Quietism, state that abandonment to God is the most perfect, the surest way of reaching heaven. While it does allow full sway to God, it is never that passive in the acceptance of the divine will that there is hardly anything one has to do on his/her own, whether interiorly, or exteriorly, in all that pertains to one’s duties. However, it must be kept in mind that while it is true that the divine will is but the First Cause in our regard – it will never exclude, but will make intensifying demands on the believer, as a secondary cause: collaboration, in the application to all that He wills and orders. Whether the endeavor succeeds, or not – must be left up to the DIVINE GOOD PLEASURE.

9.] In the way of Holy Abandonment in the spiritual life, there has to be a certain balance maintained between abandonment to God and personal effort – this synthesis has been admirably expressed by a number of the saints, but perhaps particularly well by St. Ignatius – whose Part VII of the Constitutions Company of Jesus speaks so sublimely about the Mission (s) carried out in response to the directives of the Roman Pontiff: the Latin term that the most often recurs is obsequium: so much discussed in Vatican II (cf. LG 25), the religious submission to the Magisterium required of the entire Church.

b. UNIVERSAL: the way of Holy Abandonment cannot exclude any other virtue – all the virtues are inter-connected. Holy Abandonment must accompany them, and can never take their place.

1.) Abandonment is not the only way, nor does it offer a complete treatise of Christian reflection. The emphasis rightfully given to it is merely to show

its immense value. No one, however, has ever taught that this "way" is the only way to reach holiness.

2.) The way of Holy Abandonment is often recommended, particularly in the writings of St. Francis de Sales. Some reading his writings receive the impression that for the Bishop of Geneva it has almost an absolute value.

CONCLUSION

The way of Holy Abandonment and the "Little Way" of St. Therese come together in some of their essential points. She described her "Way" as the way of confidence and total abandonment. In itself, it presents few complications – but, it does suppose uncommon detachment, extraordinary humility, outstanding obedience, and on-going mortification. It is clearly biblically inspired – and may reach its culmination in the spirituality of St. Therese of Lisieux³⁶.

†††

A PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT

Charles de Foucauld + Dec. 1, 1916

FATHER,

I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.

Whatever you do, I thank you. I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let Your will only be done to me, and in all Your creatures.

I wish for no more than this, O Lord.

Into Your hands I commend my soul.

I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself, into Your hands with boundless confidence,

for you are my

FATHER!

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³⁶ **NB:** for these pages of these notes, cf. **M. Viller, "Abandon", in: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. Paris: Beauchesne, 1937, Vol. I, col. 1-25.** [cf. also Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Il Modello di sant' abbandono*. An English translation of this may be found under 'LIFE & SPIRITUALITY': www.st-bertoni.com].

4. St. Ignatius' Principles: based on the Person of Jesus Christ³⁷

As early as 1569, St. Francis Borgia wrote these remarkable words in a letter to the whole Society, entitled: 'On the Means of Preserving the Spirit of the Society and of Our Vocation':

'... As to **the virtue of obedience which is the purpose and guide of the Society** and its tower of defense, although I might call attention to some things, I shall rather refer you **to the excellent and admirable Letter [of March 26, 1853]** which our Father Ignatius, of happy memory, has written on that virtue; he has said all, and left nothing more to be said: *Hoc fac, et vives* [Lk 10:28]; I hope in the Lord that if we do what is there set down, **we shall be true sons of obedience....**'

The same thought is repeated by Fathers General Aquaviva, Mutius Vitelleschi, and later by Father Lawrence Ricci on the eve of the catastrophe to which the Society succumbed. After the restoration in 1814, Fr. Peter Beeckx expressed himself in identical terms in his letter of April 15, 1855, 'On the Observance of the Vows.' Nearer our own day, Fr. Louis Martin in turn made the thought of his predecessors his own in his well-known letter: 'On Some Dangers of Our Times', speaking of obedience says:

... Concerning this virtue, which can be called **the soul which informs the Society and governs its movements**, and ought to be, according to St. Ignatius, **the distinguishing mark of her character**, it seemed little to him surely to have dictated such wise laws in his Constitutions, but he also wrote **that admirable Letter [of March 26, 1553]**, which is in my judgment, the most perfect and complete pronouncement on obedience that could be made...

The **Letter on Obedience** deals not with the Vow, but with the virtue, more accurately still, with the perfect practice of the virtue... And truly though I wish you to be perfect in all spiritual gifts and ornaments, yet **especially do I desire** [as you have understand of me heretofore] **to see you most eminent in the virtue of obedience**. The idea that **perfect obedience must be the essential law of the Society and the distinctive mark**, as it were, by which its true sons may be recognized, was for our holy Father something like **a fixed idea**. He takes it for granted that the Fathers and Brothers of Portugal, to whom the **Letter** is addressed, already know, having heard it on other occasions, how much he has at heart to see them all really signalize themselves in this virtue and excel all others in its practice. It is, therefore, quite natural that this idea should be found scattered throughout the other writings of the saint. And beginning with the **Constitutions**, there are many passages in them,

³⁷ Fr. Manuel Maria Espinosa Polit, SJ, *Perfect Obedience. Commentary on the Letter on Obedience of St. Ignatius of Loyola* [March 26, 1553]. Westminster MD: Newman 1947, pp. 31, f.;38-40, *passim*.

says Fr. Aicardo, in which **the necessity of obedience** in the Society is stressed, from the *Examen* where the candidate receives **his first instructions in obedience**, even to the eldest in the House³⁸:

- in the formation of Novices special stress must be given to obedience³⁹;
- and it is recommended especially to those in their studies, not only in the observance of the discipline of the house, but also in the order, method, and time of study⁴⁰;
- obedience must take precedence in the duties of those admitted to profession, or otherwise incorporated into the Society⁴¹;
- and by obedience must be strengthened the bonds of union throughout the whole body of the Society.⁴²

Two texts merit special attention, for they recommend briefly, but weightily, the hearty eagerness which all of ours should feel **to signalize themselves in the practice of religious obedience**. They are:

... It chiefly conduces to advancement and is very necessary, that all should give themselves to perfect obedience, acknowledging the Superior, whoever he be, in place of Christ the Lord.⁴³

...All must be especially sturdy to observe obedience and to excel in it, at the mere sign of the Superior's will, though he should give no express command ...⁴⁴

This doctrine is **intended for all**, and far from exempting from the law of obedience even partially those who are outstanding in authority, in prestige, or any other merit, they are exhorted so to exert themselves as to serve as models for the rest, and by their example to contribute to its preservation in the Society in all its freshness and vigor. The Jesuit Founder legislated:

... and let even the foremost in the Society give good example in this matter [of obedience] to the others, maintaining a close union with their Superior, and devoutly and humbly obeying him ...⁴⁵

³⁸ *Examen*, c. 4, n. 29: CSJ, n. 84; 32: CSJ n. 89

³⁹ P. III, c. 1, n. 23, 24, V: CSJ nn. 284-286.

⁴⁰ P. IV, c. 6, n. 2: CSJ n. 361; c. 10, n. 5, 8: CSJ nn. 424; 434.

⁴¹ P. VI, c.1,n. 1, 2: CSJ nn. 547; 551.

⁴² P. VIII, c. 1,n. 3: CSJ n. 659; X, n. 9: CSJ n. 821.

⁴³ P. III, c. 1, n. 23: CSJ n. 284.

⁴⁴ P. VI, c. 1, n. 1: CSJ n. 547.

⁴⁵ P. VIII, c. 1, n. 3: CSJ n. 659.

... And ordinarily those who being in charge of others, and having to exact obedience of them, should give them the example of obedience by practicing this virtue towards those who are the **Superiors, in place of Christ, the Lord...**⁴⁶

It is understood, then, why the holy Patriarch desired so earnestly that his sons excel in this virtue, persuaded as he was, that if it **flourished**, the Society would appear in the divine presence, always *without spot or wrinkle, holy and immaculate...* [Ep 5:27: spouse], adorned with those solid and perfect virtues which will help it better to correspond fully with the providential designs of her King, Christ Jesus, in raising her up in His Church.⁴⁷

After merely referring to **the example of Jesus Christ made obedient to death, even the death of the Cross [Ph 2:8]**, St. Ignatius adds, by way of corollary, another reason for the pre-eminence of this virtue, i.e., that **perfect obedience** ought to make up in the Society for greater austerity and other praiseworthy practices which other Institutes piously observe, and which for just reasons are not practiced among us. Let us hear the words of the Saint:

... More easily may we suffer ourselves to be surpassed by other Religious Orders in fasting, watching, and other severities in diet and apparel, which according to their Institute and rule everyone does piously practice. But in true and perfect obedience, and in the abnegation of our will and judgment, I greatly desire, most dear Brothers, that those who serve God in this Society, should be conspicuous, and that the true and genuine progeny of the same should as it were be distinguished by this mark...⁴⁸

Fr. Suarez thinks that in this passage there is question not only of pointing out the pre-eminence which the virtue of obedience ought to have in the Society, but also of insisting that the **pre-eminence in the practice of this virtue is one of the proper and specific means** which St. Ignatius points out for attaining the particular perfection of our Order⁴⁹.

This virtue is more necessary [according to St. Robert Bellarmine] for us than for all others. For, without it, I do not see what we can do in the divine service; other religious have frequent fasts, their apparel is poor, they make frequent use of the discipline, wear haircloth, keep strict silence, remain continually shut up in their houses and rise, nearly all, at night, to chant the divine praises. But we eat well, dress well, sleep well, we are not bound to a rigorous silence, we are frequently out of the house, and have no regular practice in the matter of disciplines and haircloths. And what is more, some of us live more comfortably than we have lived in our own

⁴⁶ P. IV, c. 10, n. 8: CSJ n. 820.

⁴⁷ Espinosa, pp. 50, ff.

⁴⁸ Letter to Fr. Andres de Orviedo.

⁴⁹ De Rel. S.I., Book I, c. 2., n. 11 [25]

homes. If, then, in spirit of this, we fail to obey; if, dedicated with all our strength to one thing, we do another, what reward can we look for? I am afraid, indeed, that we should be deserving rather of chastisement than recompense, for what answer shall we give when God asks us what good we have done? But, if we keep this virtue with great care, there is no reason why we should envy another Religious Order, because it is impossible to practice obedience except at the cost of great sacrifice, and, on the other hand, God take much delight in it.

Our Holy Father wishes his sons **to practice obedience with the highest perfection** ... It is a matter of **capital importance for us** to have clear and accurate ideas on the fundamental principle of obedience. This will permit us to understand why **St. Ignatius lays so much stress on it**, and does so whenever he speaks of this virtue...⁵⁰

Fr. Espinosa presents the challenging matter of 'Blind Obedience':⁵¹ ... In the light of this, one can do no less than wonder when Fr. Pedro de Ribadeneira undertakes to give a restricted and softened sense to the word *blind*. He takes his stand on Ignatius' words [cf. **CSJ n. 547**] ***caeca quadam obedientia*** which are found in the Latin translation of the Constitutions as if the intention of the holy Founder had been to soften with that indefinite adjective ***quadam***, what might be absolute and too inflexible in the word ***blind***. But, what is stranger still, seeing that the adjective ***quadam*** is not found in the original text, is that this unusual interpretation has been adopted by authors of note, even in our own day⁵².

However, Fr. Nadal, in his ***Scholia* [120]**, commenting on the words ***caeca quadam obedientia***, says nothing that might be interpreted as a thinning down, a diluting of the meaning - a clear proof that he did not think that the sense was changed in the least by the addition of the indefinite ***quadam***... We have three texts from which to determine with exact fidelity the real thought of St. Ignatius on **blind obedience** in all its shades of meaning:

[1] The Letter of March 1553:

...is to determine within yourself whatsoever the Superior commands to be the commandment and Will of Almighty God Himself; and as to believe what the Catholic faith proposes, you at once bend all the forces of your mind to consent thereunto; so in doing that which your Superior commands, you must be carried with a kind of blind impulse of your will desirous to obey ...

⁵⁰ Espinosa, p. 56.

⁵¹ Espinosa, c. 7, pp. 148-186: CSJ n. 547: Blind Obedience – a very long text in the Constitutions.

⁵² Suarez, Lib. 4, c. 15, n. 26 (531)...

[2] CSJ n. 547:

... persuading ourselves that everything is just, denying with a blind obedience every contrary judgment or opinion of our own in everything that the Superior commands, where [as has been said] we cannot discern any kind of sin, realizing that they who live under obedience must suffer themselves to be carried and ruled by Divine Providence in their superiors, as if they were a dead body which suffers itself to be borne to any place or treated in any manner whatever; or, like an old man's staff which serves him who holds it in his hand where and in any manner whatsoever [quacumque] he pleases; for thus the obedient man should employ himself cheerfully in whatever way the Superior should wish to use him for the good of the whole body of the Order, holding it for certain that he is thus fulfilling the Divine will more than he would in any other way of his own choosing by following his own will and judgment...

[3] Letter to Fr Juan Felipe Vito:

...I should not belong to myself but to Him Who created me, and to him who holds His place, so that he may direct and govern me [just as a piece of wax receives the impression of the smallest object] and be ready either to write or study to speak with some persons rather than with others, and find all my devotion in doing as I am bidden

I should be like a dead body which has neither will nor understanding; or like a little crucifix which, without difficulty, allows itself to be moved from one side to another; or, finally, I should be like a staff in an old man's hand who may put me where he pleases and where I can be of most help to him. Thus, I must be ready to help and serve my Order in any way I shall be directed ...

†††

5. Theological Reflections on the Letter

a. In General [A Virtue] ⁵³

Special obedience, or obedience properly so called, may be defined: a habit of virtue which inclines us to fulfill what a legitimate Superior enjoins for the very reason that he has commanded it. Obedience, so understood, is a moral virtue allied to justice. Its object extends to all acts enjoined by the Superior within the limits of his authority, once he makes known his wish in a clearly expressed precept, or is satisfied with making it known some other way, by means of counsel, exhortation or suggestion.⁵⁴ ... The Superior complies with the obligations he is under to correct and

⁵³ Espinosa, pp. 36, f.

⁵⁴ Suarez, *De Religione* ...Tr.X, Book 4, c. 14, 11 – 492.

direct his subjects in keeping with the End of the Institute, no merely by explicit orders and commands, but also in a milder and kindlier manner by the prudent and discreet manifestation of his will.

Hence there arises another important division of the virtue of obedience, namely, necessary and perfect obedience. The first, according to St. Thomas, occurs when one submits his will to an express command of the superior, and it is clear that in this case he cannot fail to comply with it without sin. Perfect obedience is that by which the subject is brought to conform his will with the will of the Superior, even in that which is not commanded, the superior merely advising or showing his inclination. The field of this Obedience is very broad ... it is likewise the subject of the **Letter** [March 1556] of our Holy Father.

Finally, we only need to recall that obedience may be considered under two aspects, as a moral virtue, and as a religious vow. As a virtue, it inclines a man to reverence the will of God and submit himself to it whether it is manifested directly, or whether it is transmitted, as usually happens, through the agency of another man in whom resides the authority derived from God. By the vow of obedience, which is one of those essential to the religious state, the subject, besides the obligation of justice which binds him to the Superior arising out of the surrender he has made of himself to the religious order, contracts a fresh obligation attached to the virtue of religion, by which he engages himself to god to obey in all that his legitimate superior enjoins, provided it be possible, licit, and in keeping with the rules and constitutions of the Order...

b. Its special nature.⁵⁵

The expression of St. Augustine is well known; it has all the brevity and luminosity of an aphorism: *In a certain sense, this virtue of obedience in the rational creature is the mother and guardian of all the virtues...*⁵⁶ Similar is the thought of St. Catherine of Siena: *Oh, how sweet and glorious is this virtue of obedience, in which all the others are included!*⁵⁷ Theologians state that obedience is the most direct way to sanctity in the spiritual life, because if we possess it, we possess in a wonderful manner all the other virtues; we traverse in a short time all the ways of the true life, and we quickly approach eternal life, which is the goal of all our desires and our perfection. We can understand how obedience plants and preserves the other virtues in the soul in two ways showing the connection and dependence that these have with obedience:

⁵⁵ *ib.*, pp. 48, ff.

⁵⁶ *City of God*. Book 14, c. 12.

⁵⁷ *Dialogue*. Tr. 5, c. 2.

- either the acts of the moral virtues depend directly on obedience in so far as they are the objects of a divine command;
- or, also because obedience, inclining a person to conform himself in all things with the Divine Will and Pleasure, disposes him to exercise the acts of any virtue which he recognized as agreeable to God.⁵⁸

All of our rules and all the tasks that we are enjoined are an exercise of virtue... Another reason why **obedience may be called the mother of the virtues** is that it wonderfully prepares the soul for the practice of all that is good and perfect. For, any act of obedience, as St. Thomas has just shown us, is by its intrinsic nature a real recognition of the supreme domination of God our Lord. It is clear, therefore, that the daily exercise of this virtue will tend by repeated acts to strengthen the conviction of one's own dependence, and consequently the determination of belonging entirely to God, and of serving Him with the reverence and perfect which are his due. Now, this disposition which St. Ignatius points out as the principle and foundation of sanctity, has, in the opinion of the Angelic Doctor, a marvelous efficacy for inclining the will to the habitual exercise of all the virtues. For when a man seeks and desires only the greater praise and service of God our Lord, aspiring only to know always and fulfill perfectly the divine pleasure, his will be not less disposed to keep the moral order sanctioned by God, not merely in one particular thing, but in all things without distinction. The acts of the various virtues, even the most sublime and difficult, will then gush forth, as from their own foundation, from this will, which is determined to see nothing else in life that **to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things** [SpEx 233].

c. The 'subject' of obedience – where it 'resides':⁵⁹

The power of jurisdiction is not the sole power to which religious are subject. In many cases, perhaps in the larger number, they submit their will by the Vow of Obedience to the **power called dominative**, which results from the **surrender** [**obsequium**] which the religious makes to the Order, when he professes in it a determined rule, with the promise and obligation of obedience according to it. In virtue of this **surrender**, says Fr. Suarez [Tr. 8, Bk 3, c. 18.], the Order and its Superiors acquire the right of commanding the religious and of profiting from his labor as they shall judge proper. The **dominative power**, as far as the religious is concerned, according to the same *Doctor Eximius*, does not descend from Christ by special communication, such as He has made to the Church; rather, its origin is to be sought

⁵⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, II-II. q. 104, a. 3, ad 2 um.

⁵⁹ ib., p. 69

in the will of him who professes the Rule, and makes the **surrender** of himself to the Order, as has been said.

1.] Obedience of the Execution, Will⁶⁰:

Dom Columba Marmion states: the humble soul knowing the sovereignty and the rights of God which flow from the fullness of His being and the infinity of His perfections and being aware of its own nothingness and dependence, does not seek to find in itself the motives for its life and its activity; it looks for them in the Will of God and for that reason **it sacrifices its own will** to the Divine Will...; consenting to what God grants it to know through the voice of a man as His good pleasure... [***Christ, the Ideal of the Monk***]...

After having firmly established the fundamental principle on which religious obedience rests, as on an immovable base, our holy Father goes on at once to expound **its perfect practice**. For the understanding of the teaching he is going to give us, he presupposes the distinction, as simple as it is natural, of **the three classes**, or degrees of obedience, namely of execution, of will and of understanding. Among the manifold divisions of obedience proposed in their treatises by doctors and ascetical writers, that adopted by St. Ignatius has the advantage of being based on the very nature of the act of obedience: for as Suarez [Bk 4, c. 13, n. 2 (478)] well observes, three elements concur in the obeying of any law, or precept:

- the execution of what is commanded;
- the will to fulfill the precept;
- and the judgment of the understanding which points to the conformity of will and then the execution of the act.

In the Constitutions the holy Founder clearly points out the nature of these degrees when he says:

... There is obedience of execution, when the thing enjoined is done: there is obedience of the will, when he who obeys has the same will as he who commands; there is obedience of the understanding when he thinks the same, judging good what is commanded ... [CSJ n. 550.]

Here we see that the classical division into obedience of **execution**, of **will** and of **understanding** does not refer to the faculty which produces the act, but to the act itself that is commanded, considered purely in its material realization, or in its realization accompanied by the assent of the will, or finally, when to this will there is still added the conformity of one's own judgment with that of the Superior.

⁶⁰ Espinosa, pp. 75-99, *passim*

[a] **The first degree, that of execution**, St. Ignatius dismisses with this brief remark: 'Moreover, I desire that this should be thoroughly understood and deeply imprinted in your minds, that it is but a base and very imperfect kind of obedience which consists in the natural execution only of that which is commanded; and that it is not worthy of the name of this virtue, unless I pass to a further degree, making the will of the Superior our will, and so agreeing with the same that there is not only external fulfillment of the command, but also agreement of will; that so both may be of the one mind in willing and not willing the same.'

Obedience in an action that is merely external is empty of all spiritual value. The will, it is true, intervenes to require of the external powers the action necessary to realize the command, but this influence is so low and faint that, although it is enough to satisfy, and in fact, does satisfy, the obligation of the vow [Suarez, Bk 4, c. 13, n. 3 [479]; c. 14, n. 78, 499.] it is in no way sufficient to assure the exercise of the virtue, and much less its perfection.

Now the Jesuit Founder in his Constitutions considers obedience of execution as united with that of the will and the judgment and vivified by the influx of these faculties, because it is his intention to present in a kind of ensemble the perfection of obedience such as he wishes to see practiced in the Society.

[b] Our Holy Father invites us to consider the supernatural excellence of **perfect obedience of the will**. This is founded precisely in the magnitude of the sacrifice which the obedient man imposes on himself to make the will of the Superior in act his own. And for this, the Saint begins by examining the intrinsic worth of the obligation by which a man abdicates his own will into the hands of the Superior who takes the place of God in his regard.

Let us first transcribe the words in which he declares his thought on this point: 'And for this reason it is said in Holy Writ, ***'obedience is better than sacrifices.'*** [1 S 15:22] For as St. **Gregory** teaches, **in victims, the flesh of another, but in obedience our own will is killed**. And because this part of the soul is so excellent, hence, it is that the offering of it to our Lord and Creator through obedience is of great price and value.

After recalling the two classical texts in this matter, that of **1 S** and that of **St. Gregory**, which exalt the merit and value of obedience, praising it as **the most exalted of all sacrifices, since it immolates the most precious possession of man, his free will**, St. Ignatius proceeds to the very heart of the question, and points out with admirable precision the intrinsic reason of this worth.

According to the common thought of men, a sacrifice must be esteemed in the direct ratio with the greatness of what is sacrificed and the difficulty one has in

dispossessing himself of it. Now, there is no doubt that according to this standard, the sacrifice that is made in obedience is not surpassed in merit and dignity by any other except martyrdom [St. Thomas, II-II, q. 124, a. 3, ad 2^{um}]. Because if we regard what the religious renounces is placing himself under obedience, we see that it is just that which a man most prizes after his own life, that is, his own liberty of disposing of himself independently by means of the free exercise of a will that is *sui iuris*. According to the graphic expression of St. Robert Bellarmine, the will which is the source and principal cause of man's actions is converted by obedience into a living instrument in the hands of another.

In this way, we can understand how it is that in perfect obedience we offer to God **the supreme sacrifice of ourselves**, a sacrifice which under a number of aspects resembles that of **martyrdom**, and for that reason shares in the inestimable worth of martyrdom. With reason, does St. Gregory assert: **To make little of, and abandon external possessions is perhaps an achievement, but to abandon oneself is something very hard and difficult. It is not much to renounce what one has, but it is very much to renounce what one is.** [Hom. 32, in Evang.]

This is what St. Ignatius says in the Letter to Gandia, already quoted: 'This way of life [under obedience] is likewise of singular merit for those who know how to take advantage of it, since **it is a martyrdom** which continually cuts the head off one's own judgment and will, placing in its place that of Christ our Lord, made known to us by His minister.

The greater merit of obedience will more than compensate for what should have been acquired in the work that was omitted. This doctrine is in complete conformity with the teaching of the Angelic Doctor. When he explains why the vow of obedience is the most excellence of the three vows of religion, he expressly states: **All that is done through obedience is more acceptable to God than what is done by one's own will, and thus fasting does not please God when it proceeds from its own will** [II-II, q. 186, a. 8, c.].

And elsewhere, after demonstrating the primacy of obedience over the other moral virtues, for the reason that it **sacrifices not any possession whatever**, but the greatest and most prized of all man's possessions, he continues: Wherefore all the works of the other virtues are meritorious in God's sight because they are done in obedience to His Will. Because should one suffer martyrdom or distribute all one's goods to the poor with some other purpose distinct from fulfilling the Divine Will, which fulfilling pertains directly to obedience, all these acts would fail to be meritorious ... [II-II, q. 104, a. 3, c.].

Obedience indeed is a **kenosis** [cf. Ph 2:5, ff.]...In fact, what is proper and peculiar to true obedience is, as has been said, **the complete and unrestricted**

surrender of our will to God, our Lord, into the hands of the man who holds His place, absolutely and without reserve. By obedience, the religious empties himself of his own will to be possessed by the Divine Will, accepting it in advance for the supreme norm and the unique motive of his actions.

Obedience is also an *obsequium voluntatis* [cf. Rm 12:1, f.; DV 5; LG 25] ...St. Ignatius adduces, therefore, two reasons to prove his assertion: the first, that by this complete surrender of his will to God in the hands of His legitimate representative, man makes the most noble use of his personal liberty; the second, that this surrender is in every way conformable to reason.

Obedience indeed merits the term *Suscipe* [SpEx n. 234]: ...The **oblation** which takes place in obedience succeeds, then, in satisfying one of the most public and generous aspirations of the Christian heart, that of returning to God practical love for practical love, **the will of self-surrender for the will with which the Lord Himself desires to give me Himself in so far as He can according to His divine ordination ...**

2.] Obedience of the Understanding⁶¹:

The obedience of the will is perfect obedience: that of the understanding is most perfect. And for this reason, our Father delays over his study of it with visible pleasure, devoting more than half of the Letter to this point. What this obedience of the understanding of the saint sufficiently sets for as follows: ... **But he that will wholly sacrifice himself to God, besides his will, must offer up his understanding [which is the third and highest degree of obedience], that he may not only will, but also think the self-same with his Superior; and submit his own judgment unto him, so far as a devout will can bend the understanding ...**

Obedience, says Fr. Meschler, is a virtue of the will; the act of obedience embraces the exterior execution of the command imposed and the interior conformity of the will with this command. The operation of the understanding should precede and accompany the action of the will, because of this, considered in itself, is a blind faculty and has need of light and direction of the understanding. It is the part of the understanding to point out to the will what must be done, why and how it should obey. In so far as it is a speculative faculty, it must determine whether the command is in every respect licit and honorable, and, in so far as it is the practical reason, it must propose to the will the means and the motive for carrying into execution the order received.

In what, then, does this obedience of the understanding consist exactly? In a passage of the Constitutions, already quoted, St. Ignatius defines it thus: **It is**

⁶¹ Espinosa, pp. 100-125, *passim*

obedience of the understanding, when he who obeys thinks the same as he who commands, when what is commanded appears good to him... [CSJ n. 550].

It only remains to remark with Fr. Nadal that for this perfect obedience it is not enough to suspend a judgment that is opposed to the judgment of the Superior, but that it is necessary, moreover, to approve as good what which he commands . In fact, every command of a legitimately appointed Superior is in reality a means ordained to a double end: to a proximate and particular end intended by the Superior, and to the ultimate supernatural end intended by God.

Let us hear the Angel of the Schools: Sometimes the understanding cannot be determined to one or other of conflicting statements, not seeing at once the precise force of the terms, as it does in first principles, nor deducing the truth by reasoning, as happens in the conclusions of a proof. But, it is determined by the activity of the will which resolves to attach itself to one of two statements to the exclusion of the other, by a motive which, if not sufficient to move the intellect, is sufficient to sway the will, in the sense that the assent of the intellect seems good and proper; and this is the disposition of the believer who admits the assertions of another on the grounds that they seem good and reasonable ... [De Ver. q. 14, a. 1].

Example of the **Heavenly Constellations**: Inanimate and irrational beings are ruled in their movements and operations by natural powers and properties, which are only so many other instruments which God makes use of to move them properly to their ends. In exactly the same manner God directs the actions of rational creatures to their ends in a way in keeping with their nature, by setting their understanding and will in motion by means of precepts and counsels [St. Thomas, I-II, q. 6, a. 1, ad 3um; II-II, q. 104, a. 1, c.]... thus in the **sidereal universe** from which our holy Father takes the point of comparison for his argument, the planets, the comets, and their satellites will never be able to revolve in their respective orbits if they are not found in those **spheres of influence** of the **Star towards which they turn and gravitate**.⁶²

Moreover, unless we have this obedience of our understanding, it is impossible that either the consent of the will, or the execution, will be such as it ought to be: for nature itself has so ordained, that the concupiscible powers of the soul must follow the apprehensive, and the will, without violence, cannot long obey against the understanding. And if there be any who for some time obey, induced by that common apprehension, that obey they must through commandment amiss; yet doubtless this cannot be firm and constant, and so perseverance fails, or at least the

⁶² cf. von Balthasar's **Christological Constellation**: 'The Real Christ in His Constellation', in: **The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church**. Ignatius 1986. pp. 131, ff. [cf. St. Gaspar, Parish Sermon, Epiphany 1806 –MssB ## 1211-1240.]

perfection of obedience, which consists in obeying promptly and with alacrity; for there can be no alacrity and diligence, where there is discord of minds and opinions. There perishes that zeal and speed in performing, when we doubt whether it be expedient or not, to do what we are commanded: there perishes that renowned simplicity of blind obedience, when we call in question the justice of the command, and perhaps even we condemn the Superior, because he bids us do such things as are not very pleasing unto us; there fails humility; for although on the one hand we obey; yet, on the other, we prefer ourselves before our Superior; there fails fortitude in difficult enterprises, and [to conclude in brief]. The whole force and dignity of this virtue is lost...

3.] A possible fourth level: 'blind' obedience⁶³:

Fr. Suarez, after a careful examination of the principal testimonies of the Fathers and Doctors, does not hesitate to affirm that the Saint either borrowed the teaching on blind obedience [cf. **CSJ. n. 547: *omnem sententiam ac iudicium nostrum contrarium caeca quadam obedientia abnegando ...***] from them, or at least spoke with the same spirit as they [Lib. 4, c. 15, n. 4; n. 26.].

It is not easy to determine just exactly what those authors who have written on the subject thought of the specific value of blind obedience. Even those who follow St. Ignatius as their master and guide do not always use in their writings the precision and clearness which one might desire. Some in particular, seem to speak of blind obedience **as though it were a new division of this virtue, something like a fourth degree, distinct from obedience of the understanding.** Fr. Ignatius - wrote Fr. Acquaviva - in speaking of **blind obedience**, stating that he wished to designate with this name only an obedience that is pure, perfect, simple, which does not discuss the command, nor its reasons, being satisfied with knowing that it is commanded.

4.] Loving Imitation of Jesus⁶⁴: Parallel in Faith with the Eucharist [*sensuum defectui*]:

As may be seen, in all the texts cited, it is taken for granted that there is a *practical* identity [in faith] between God and the Superior, in virtue of which every command of holy obedience is clothed for us with the character and dignity of a divine command. Taking his stand here, our holy Father insists on the necessity of prescinding from the gifts and talents that may adorn the man who has been given us for Superior, and fixing the gaze of the soul on the titles and credentials which accredit him as **a vicar of Christ**, and the **visible substitute** of the invisible God, **something similar** to what we see in **the mystery of the Eucharist** [*sensuum*

⁶³ Espinosa, Chapter VII, pp. 148-186. [cf. e.g., **CSJ, n. 547**: only occurrence: **CF ## 149, 150, *passim*??**]

⁶⁴ ib, pp. 60-63.

defectui], when we forget the white wafer of the accidents, and hurry straightway **on the wings of faith and love** to the adorable **Person of the Savior Who** is hiding beneath them.

Seeing Christ, then, in the Superior is equivalent to ignoring the exterior accidents which make an immediate impression on our senses; it is rather to go at once to **the divine reality hidden beneath those accidents**, which is the **most holy will of Christ our Lord** made known to us by means of the Superior. Hence, it is that for the truly obedient man it is not talent nor goodness nor the moral prestige of him who commands that constitutes the ultimate reason for his obedience; and though these motives are not without some power to move him to conform his will with that of the Superior, they remain, finally, merely human and consequently, contingent, passing, frail, totally insufficient to serve as a foundation in difficult circumstances for the exercise of perfect obedience. A motive of incomparably greater excellence, nay, a motive of divine excellence is that offered by faith, when it teaches that the command of the Superior is not in reality the command of a man, but the command of God Himself, who avails Himself of man as a conscious instrument for the transmission of His will.

‘When we gaze at the ‘Sacred Host’, beautifully writes Dom Columba Marmion, ‘our senses exclaim: ‘That is not Christ: it is nothing but bread.’ We see, though, and taste only bread. But as Christ has told us: ***Hoc est corpus meum: this is My body***, setting aside the testimony of our senses, we say to Christ: ‘You have spoken – I believe, ***credo***; and to give exterior expression to our faith, we fall on our knees before Christ, really and substantially present under the species, we adore Him, and we surrender ourselves to Him to fulfill His Holy Will.

In the same way, Christ conceals Himself from us in our Superiors. In spite of his imperfection, **the Abbot is for us the representative of Christ**; Christ hides beneath the weakness and the imperfections of the man, just as He conceals Himself beneath **the Sacramental species**. Just because the Superior is placed in such faith, as it were, *supra candelabrum*, the daily exchanges which we have with him may betray his deficiencies; wherefore, we feel tempted to exclaim: ‘This man is not Christ’ his poor judgment is not infallible, he can make mistakes, in fact he does; he can compromise my plans; he allows himself to be guided by this or that preference. But, faith answers: ***Abbas Christi in vices Christi creditur***. Whether Christ gives us a Solomon to take His place, or a man without talent, to the eyes of faith, it is **always Christ Whom this man represents**. Faith discovers Christ, and touches Him, so to say, **behind** the imperfections of the man. And if I have faith, I will say: *Credo, I believe*. I obey this man whoever he may be, because in obeying him, **I obey Christ**, and I remain united with Him: ***qui vos audit, Me audit*** [Marmion, *Christ the Ideal of the Monk*, pp. 267-268].

5.] This is an Oblation of the Intellect⁶⁵:

According to what we have said, religious obedience is essentially a **sacrifice a holocaust**; it is the **total oblation of self** as an act of supreme homage to God our Creator and Lord in recognition of His sovereign dominion over creatures. The Fathers and theological writers, alluding to the most perfect sacrifice of the Old Law, call it a **holocaust**, in which the victim was burned and totally consumed by fire, **nothing at all being reserved** even for other holy uses. The comparison is certainly suggestive and corresponds to reality with sufficient exactitude. As a matter of fact, **obedience in its truest sense means an unconditional and absolute surrender** by which **man strips himself [*kenosis*] of what is most his own, to belong henceforth only to God**, leaving in His hands **the entire disposal of himself and of all his actions**. In this **surrender**, then, is verified literally and in the loftiest and noblest sense that **destruction and annihilation** characteristic of the ancient holocausts.

This concept of **totality** which excludes all limitation in the sacrifice we have already considered when dealing with the obedience of the will, and from it we deduced precisely the excellence and extraordinary merit of religious obedience, seeing that it embraces **the complete offering** made to God of one's own will and liberty. But even though the **total renunciation** of the will constitutes a most excellent sacrifice, there yet remains to man something which can be **offered in sacrifice, of much greater value, which marks him out specifically as man – his reason and judgment**. Now if this sacrifice must be consumed by the fire of charity, that is, if it must reach the ultimate consequences attainable by a generous love, if obedience must be entire and perfect, and properly merit the name of **holocaust**, to the sacrifice of the will must be added **the sacrifice of the understanding**, so that the judgment of the inferior remain completely subject to the reason and judgment of the Superior.

But, let us hear these ideas from the very lips of the Jesuit Founder:

... For obedience being a holocaust, in which the whole man, nothing at all excepted, is offered unto his Creator and Lord in the fire of charity, through the hands of his substitute, and as it is a full renunciation to which a religious man freely yields up all his own rights to dedicate and bind himself to God, to be possessed and governed by His Divine Providence by means of his Superior; it cannot be denied that obedience comprehends not only the execution, so that the person do that which is commanded, and the will, so that he do it willingly, but also the judgment, so that whatsoever the Superior commands and thinks good seems just and reasonable to the inferior, so far, as I have said as the will by its force and vigor can bend the understanding.

⁶⁵ ib, pp. 107, ff.

The obedience then, which reaches to the subjection of the understanding appears to St. Ignatius as the greatest and most generous **sacrifice** which man, short of his own life, can offer to his Creator and Lord; and, for the same reason, he felt that there was hardly another more worthy of being sought by a heart on fire with desire to **serve** the Divine Majesty in all things. Indeed, **the renunciation of one's own will and judgment** represents the **total gift**, the **complete offering**, the **perfect sacrifice** which a rational creature can make of itself; for then it not only **immolates** its most valued and prized possessions with which the liberality of its Creator has enriched it, but, as the saint reflects, all that becomes **a living holocaust** most grateful to His Divine Majesty, keeping nothing whatever to himself.

Obedience, writes Fr. Oswald in his Commentary, is the noblest and most excellent **sacrifice** by which we can offer to the sovereign Majesty of God the worship and the honor that are His due. Because in obeying, our will asserts a deliberate desire to belong completely to God, as right reason demands; and in proof of it, it **subjects and surrenders** to Him the supreme and absolute Master of all things, that which only the free will has the power of disposing of, namely, understanding and will, with the one desire that He accept and dispose of those faculties according to His good pleasure. Thus, that **sacrifice** of annihilation is consummated by which we cease to be masters of ourselves, and begin to be the property and possession of God.

Fr. Roupain notes: Obedience surely supposes a **renunciation** and a **sacrifice**, since we cannot obey without suffering diminution in something. But the highest interests will be compromised the moment this kind of obedience ceases to be regarded in the Church with the appreciation and esteem it deserves. To refuse God the **sacrifice** of that which we most love, of that which **we look upon as most our own**, our convictions, namely, our opinions, our preferences would be equivalent to making little of that fundamental axiom of the Gospel: **He who does not renounce all that He possesses, cannot be My disciple** [Lk 14:33]. And the **greatest sacrifice** which a soul anxious to practice the virtue of religion with the greatest perfection, can make to God is the **renunciation** of its own ideas, submitting them to the direction of a Superior in whom it recognizes God as ruling and governing it.

The sacrifice, it is true, is immense, but as **St. Gregory** well observes: *For a man to give up his possessions is perhaps a thing easily done, but for a man to give up himself is a work of great difficulty; for if it costs little to renounce what he has, it costs very much more to renounce what he is.* [Hom. 32, in Evang.].

This is indeed an **obsequium**⁶⁶ - as Fr. Mersch affirms, emphasizing the necessity of perfect obedience in spite of the errors and shortcomings of Superiors: ...

⁶⁶ ib, pp. 136,ff.

we have not engaged ourselves to obey Superiors, or men, but Christ. Our Lord has the power and the wisdom to make all things redound to our greater good. This is the great principle and definitive truth on obedience. We have **surrendered ourselves** to the direction of Christ in the manner in which He wishes and approves. We need not know more to be certain that He will not abandon us, and that in the measure of our faith and love, He will manage things in such a way that we shall not come to love Him less for having exerted to love Him more, as He Himself teaches us.

This last observation naturally leads us to examine the other reason proposed by our holy Father for reposing confidently in obedience; the certainty, namely, that the divine fidelity has, so to say, undertaken to stand by us in all difficulties, provided we **surrender ourselves** into the hands of the Superior and through him, into the hands of God, rather than trust to our own judgment. He says: And because you are conscious within yourselves that you have undergone this yoke of obedience for the love of God, to the end that you might, in following the Superior's will, more assuredly follow the Divine Will; doubt not but the most faithful charity of our Lord continually directs you and leads you the right way by the hands of those whom he has given you for Superiors.

Fr. Aicardo has a masterly development of the idea set forth in the text of our Father that the vow of obedience has the force of a **bilateral contract**, in this, that, on the one hand, the religious surrenders himself to his Superiors to be guided by them in the way of sanctification, and on the other, that God in a certain sense promises not to permit in His minister so serious a misapprehension as invincibly to lead the subject to error. This obedience, he says, is like all the life of perfection, a free and spontaneous **offering and oblation** which the religious makes, taking another person as Superior and father to be directed in the service of God by the means which He has chosen. By a principle of faith that all authority comes from God, and that everything happens in the world, aside from the malice of sin, is of divine ordination, the religious sees in the Superior, freely chosen by him and to whom he has submitted, an instrument of God for his own sanctification, an interpreter of the Divine will. From this motive, then, he obeys him and all those to whom the Superior delegates his authority, that is to say, wherever clearly appears the formal and supreme principle of obedience, which is the fulfilling of the will of God....Therefore, obedience looks upon the Superior as **God's instrument**, and not as this or that person, or this or that man, but only inasmuch as he is invested with his office, applying to him what our Lord said to His Apostles: ***He that hears you, hears Me!***

6.] A Distant Comparison to Theological Faith⁶⁷:

The essence of blind obedience apparently consists in prescinding completely from every consideration inspired by natural prudence alone to take refuge in principles of faith... Our Holy Father adds that taking such a position before the difficulties of this obedience of the understanding must be in a **manner similar to that which takes place in matters of faith.**

He is quite right in using the word ***similar*** which denotes a certain community of traits, more or less integral and perfect, rather than a complete identity. In fact, there is **an essential difference** between the act of **blind obedience** and the **act of faith**. Because, while the believer subjects his understanding to the truths of faith by relying on their absolute certainty, a certainty derived from **the infallible authority of God**, the religious who with **blind obedience** subjects his judgment to the opinion of his Superiors relies on the **practical certainty** he has of finding y this means the Will of God, a **certainty derived from the Superior's power of commanding, always supposing that what he commands is lawful** [Suarez, Book 4, c. 15, n. 31.].

In fact, just as the Christian in being presented with a mystery of faith does **not give his assent on intrinsic reasons** that convince him of the truth of the mystery, but by means of **the infused habit of faith**, submits to the **revealed truth** on a motive that is entirely **extrinsic**, the authority of God, from Whom the revelation comes: so, **in like manner**, the religious to whom the Superior gives a command, the reasonableness, or unreasonableness of which does not evidently appear, once he has discarded the possibility of sin, does **not bother about the intrinsic reasons** which might move him to subject his understanding and conform it with that of the Superior, but is solely concerned, because of the strength of the **virtuous habit of obedience**. With the **extrinsic motive, which is the Will of God**, manifested in the command he has received.

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⁶⁷ Espinosa, pp. 154, ff.

B. Religious Obedience

The Following of the Obedient Christ in Today's World

"... One day He was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of the disciples asked Him: 'Lord, teach us to pray!'" (cf. Lk 11:1, ff.).

"In the beginning was the Word; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God... (The Word was with God [turning toward God??])..." (cf. Jn 1:1, ff.).

INTRODUCTION

The Expression of the Inherent Trinitarian Relationship

[1] There is always a challenge for the biblical expert and the theologian to translate and interpret: "the Word was with God..." The expression seems to connote a certain dynamism - the Word is turning toward the Father, eternally, His unique Personal relationship to the Father is mirrored meekly in our own: "...f his fullness, we all have a share - love following upon love." (cf. v. 16).

[2] His is the glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with an enduring love. (cf. v. 14). Whatever/whoever comes to be in Him, finds life - a life for the light of men (cf. v. 4). The inherent mystery of the Trinity - both in the Three Persons within Themselves ("immanent"), as well as in us, by participation ("economic"): "...We have become sharers in the divine nature..." (cf. 2 P 1:4).

[3] He reminds us that in seeing Him in the flesh, we also see the Father:

"... Whoever sees Me, sees the One Who sent Me..." (cf. Jn 12:45).

"... Jesus is the IKON of the Invisible God..." (cf. Col 1:15). In becoming incarnate, Jesus Christ lived this same eternal infinite relationship in a human way. It is this relationship of unique Filiation in which we are called to share. All of our lives on earth, are a journey toward God.

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a. A Quest For a Definition

1. A. Tanquary: (cf. nn. 500, ff.) in this old spiritual classic, there are given the usual 'traditional' descriptions/attempts at a definition, associated with the names who perhaps originated them:

- St John Damascene: an elevation of the soul (mind and heart) to God;
- St. Augustine: the soul's affectionate quest for God;
- St. Gregory of Nyssa: a familiar conversation with God;
- General Description: the asking of seemingly things from God.

2. With this varied approach, spiritual theologians offer this definition: "*An elevation of our soul (mind and heart) to God, to offer Him our homage and ask for His favors, in order to grow in holiness for His glory.*" This is explained through the terms used:

- elevation: an on-going effort to be detached in order to fix our thoughts on God;
- colloquy: prayer needs personal contact with God - this implies some sort of a conversation with, a reaching out toward Him;
- religious homage: this is our first move in conversing with God;
- glory of God: this is the ultimate reason for it all.

3. Prayer will always remain something of a "mystery" (cf. A Furioli, *La Preghiera. Riflessione di teologia spirituale*, Torino: Marietti 1981, pp. 7, ff.). Whatever definition/description of prayer that may be used, it is basically an "encounter"/ a meeting with God - it is meant to be an exchange of increasing/intensifying love between persons who are sublimely important to each other - much like the relationship of a loving parent/child, husband wife - friend. With all of the different forms of prayer that are imaginable (e.g., vocal, mental, meditation, contemplation, "centering", transcendental) the deepest reason for prayer is always love. It is the hope-filled expression of a human being who truly wants to "find", to meet and to share with God.

4. It truly is a matter of mutual love - a continuing striving for a building of friendship - a frequent attempt at a truly personal exchange with God, regarding those matters that are of the deepest interest and concern to the one offering the prayer, and to those who are loved. It can never be simply one trying to "get" something from another. It is a human being's response to a loving Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier - Who is infinitely/eternally interested in the outcome of every single human life.

5. Recent Interest in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: on the Feast of St. Teresa of Avila, great "Doctoress of Prayer", October 15, 1989, the Vatican

issued a very important Letter, as a guide, to the Bishops of the Catholic Church, *"On Some Aspects of Christian Meditation."*

[a] Many of our contemporaries are looking frantically for inner peace, and perhaps psychic balance, in a bewildering array of movements and techniques. A good number of these "techniques" are more imbued with eastern forms of prayer and introspection. Some of the new "self-help" methods are almost totally "impersonal" and overly self-preoccupied.

[b] Authentic "Christian" prayer follows the path of the revealed Word of God - it must always take the form of a personal, intimate, profound dialogue between a human being and God. The Council teaches that in Divine Revelation God speaks to human beings as His "friends" (cf. DV 2). All of Scripture leads to/flows from, Jesus Christ.

[c] Among the many movements of a spiritual nature, the Church exercises guidance through her teaching: there is no spiritual movement that would make one group of believers superior to another, either through knowledge, or special insights. Another modern manifestation is the effort to have some kind of a psychological experience of the divine. Christian meditation will always strive to ponder the mystery of God's word - and prayer begins with the Incarnation, reflections on the Paschal Mystery. True prayer leads to asceticism, personal, on-going conversion.

[d] To reach truly "Christian" Prayer, it is necessary to ponder Christ's own example, His use of time, of the Scriptures. His entire Mission was one of self-giving in obedience to the Father's Will. In some way, we share in the divine life - we participate in Christ's own filiation.

[e] While we are gifted with a Divine Indwelling, God totally transcends us - we are "divinized", while remaining creatures. Some theologians present three ages of the Interior Life: Purification, Illumination, Union - but caution is needed in applying these stages and in understanding them. There may be the exceptional, the extraordinary - but, "God must have loved the common people, as He made most of us that way!" (A. Lincoln). The extraordinary can never be sought for its own sake.

[f] Particular - and, at times, excessive attention is given today to the psycho-physical and corporal methods. While bodily position may have some influence on recollection. There is always needed the caution that the psycho-physical be not allowed to degenerate into a cult of the body, of self. The Christian challenge is 'to pray without ceasing', and that it extend, permeate one's daily activity, mind and heart.

[g] Christian prayer is Trinitarian: Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life - and each one needs to be directed by the Spirit, leading to the Father. Subjective experiences are not an infallible indication of the presence of God, nor of the making of authentic progress. In times of trial, as well as happiness, each one needs to concentrate the more on Jesus Christ. No one possesses, comprehends, or knows the only genuine method - in Christianity, there is no “*mono-mania*”, the making a “mania” out of any one movement, practice. Mary is blessed with extraordinary intimacy with God because the Lord Himself “looked on her lowliness and raised her on high” - in her contemplation of His Mercy, treasuring in her heart.

6. There is no genuine contact with God unless one is striving to enter into the divine mystery. Our concern has to be with Christian Prayer, i.e., the prayer that Jesus Himself lived and taught.

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b. Trinitarian and Christological Dimensions

“... Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God. The spirit you received is not the spirit of slaves bringing fear into your lives again; it is the spirit of sons, and it makes us cry out: ABBA, Father! The Spirit Himself and our Spirit bear united witness that we are children of God...” (cf. Rm 8: 14,ff.).

“... The Spirit, too, comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit Himself expresses himself our plea in a way that could never be put into words, and God who knows everything in our hearts knows perfectly well what He means, and that the pleas of the saints expressed by the Spirit are according to the mind of God...” (cf. Rm. 8:26, f. +).

1. On November 1, 1970, Pope Paul VI issued an Apostolic Constitution, promulgating the Divine Office, accompanied by a General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours, entitled *Laudis Canticum*. In this beautiful document, there is much emphasis on the Prayer of Jesus Christ.

[a] The “Hymn of Praise” that is sung through all the ages in the heavenly places was brought by the High Priest, Jesus Christ, into this land of exile. When Jesus came to give humanity a share in God’s own life, He also taught His followers how to pray.

[b] The work of His every day - from the early morning, until the late hours - in His Father’s house, at the appointed time, as well as in the deserted places and on the mountain sides -so much of His earthly sojourn is consecrated to prayer.

[c] To the very end of His life - at the Last Supper, in His Agony of Gethsemane, on the Cross: "in the days of his life on earth, he offered up prayers and entreaties with loud cries and tears to the one who could deliver him out of death - his prayer was heard (cf. Heb 5:7,f.).

2. In accord with the expressed desire of the Divine Master, Christian prayer does not address God only as omnipotent Creator, King of the universe - but also as "Father", *ABBA* !

[a] Jesus' own Prayer opens with the word "Father" - which in a sense, synthesizes the entire Gospel. Tertullian referred to the Lord's Prayer as the "Breviary" of the NT- some see it as Jesus' personal archives, His "Summa", His own synopsis of all that He was about - this prayer of eschatological hope for the People of God. This is how Jesus revealed to His disciples His own divine filiation, and also made known to them their own adoptive filiation, and share in the divine nature.

[b] Of its nature, prayer communicates a sense of filial love and trust. By being empowered, capacitated to use Jesus' own prayer, we come to understand that He is the vine, and we are the in-grafted branches. We participate in His very life: we become by adoption what He is indeed by nature:

"... With me in them, and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world may know that it was you who sent me and that I loved them as much as you loved me Father, I want those you have given me to be where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me... so that the love with which you loved me may be in them and so I may be with them..." (cf. Jn 17: 23, ff.)

[c] It is the Holy Spirit of God, with the Risen Christ, Who enables this real Filiation. The life of God Himself is communicated to all through the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit:

"... all that came to be had life in him ... Indeed from his fullness, we have all received - yes, grace in return for grace... grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ..." (cf. Jn I, passim).

3. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has written an insightful book (*Behold the Pierced One*, San Francisco: Ignatius 1986) in which he presents Christology also from the aspect of Jesus' Prayer:

[a] In the Trinity everything is one and the same where there is not the opposition of relationship - is an old principle (from St. Anselm?) defined by the Council of Lyons (in 1442) in its Decree for the Jacobites (cf. D-S 1330; *The Catholic Faith*, n. 325). In a certain sense, Jesus' "personality" is established, made manifest, in his constant communication with His heavenly Father. Of all of Jesus' titles, those

which seem to predominate are: the Christ, the Lord, and "Son". Jesus' most intimate communion and distinction with/from the Father are clear in His constant "going aside" to pray in solitude, in public. The Church imitates this in her praying the Creed - the confession of faith is not merely a "shopping list" of articles of faith, but a genuine prayer of adoration, praise and hope. Jesus' "Person" is contained in His prayer.

[b] Jesus died - praying: His death was the ultimate commendation of His soul, His existence, unto the Father - by breathing forth His holy spirit. Jesus' last words are eloquent testimony of His devotion, infinite trust, love, for the Father. He had previously groaned: *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?* But, He concludes His earthly sojourn by commending all of His work, life, Self, to the Father. (cf. Rm 12:1, ff., I P 2:4,f.).

[c] By his divine power, he has given us all the things we need for life and for true devotion, bringing us to know God Himself... In making these gifts, he has given us the guarantee of something very great and wonderful to come: through all this, we share in the divine nature (cf. 2 P 1:3,ff.). Agreeing, then, that the core of Jesus' own Person is His prayer, the expression, revelation of His relationship to His Father - we need to share in His prayer. There is no other way to be one with Him. All knowledge is a certain union between the knower and the known. The fundamental response of the religious person is always prayer. Christian prayer, though, is unique in that it is entirely based on the Father's Will: ultimately, it is the act of self-giving, surrender to God.

[d] Jesus' own summary of Prayer opens with "OUR" Father - sharing in this prayer will always demand communion with all those He loves: forgive US; give US; lead US not into temptation: deliver US from evil. We are in-grafted INTO the body of Christ (cf. Rm 6:1,ff.). It is in prayer that the past is future and the present is simultaneously tradition and hope, preparing us for eternity. History becomes prophecy and presence becomes promise based on sacred memories of the wonders of God extended to His People. We become one with the Trinity in Whom all time is NOW. Jesus' Plan is simply to carry out the Father's Plan for a New Creation, a new heavens and a new earth (cf. Is 51:16; 65:17; 66:12; Rm 8:19 +; Mt 19:28| Rv. 21:1,ff.). In establishing the Church, Christ intends to renew the People of God.

[e] In order for faith to develop in the Church, we need to heed the words of the Council:

"... The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through:

- the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts (cf. Lk 2:19, 51);

- it comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience;

- and it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth.

Thus, as the centuries go by, the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her (cf. DV 8).

[f] The heart of the teaching of the Church is that “Jesus is Lord!” He is the true Son of God, and is truly man - Jesus is of Nazareth, of Galilee - the Lord of heaven and earth in the catharsis of the Paschal Mystery. This has become known to the Church which was “let in on” the messianic secret, enabled to listen in on the eternal conversation of the Father and the Son, with the Holy Spirit.

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c. Suggested Forms of Prayer

There are countless forms of prayer: liturgical - vocal/mental - meditation (“transcendental”), oration, contemplation - personal/spontaneous / shared/charismatic. There are, furthermore, various “schools” of Prayer: Ignatian, Carmelite, Alphonsian, to mention but a few. However, in the light of the IInd Vatican Council and our “re-discovery of Sacred Scripture”, here there are two suggestions - that might indeed be considered as one: ***Quaerere Deum*** and ***Lectio Divina***.

[1] **Quaerere Deum:** the great theme of Divine Revelation is not so much that human beings seek the Lord - but, rather that He is seeking each and everyone He has created. It would not do much violence to John’s Gospel (1:35, f.) to note that when Andrew almost triumphalistically declared: “We have found the Messiah!” - in greater truth, it was that He had found them! Similarly, the “Rabbi”, the “Teacher” par excellence - went rather in search of disciples, rather than waiting for them to find Him.

[a] Nevertheless, the pages of Sacred Scripture from beginning to end are full of stories of people seeking the Lord - the challenge is placed before the believer by the Historical, Prophetic as well as the Wisdom books.

[b] To seek the Lord historically meant to be in touch with the God of History, the Redeemer and Creator. The ‘cultic’ quest for the Lord meant to consult the Lord, particularly in His Sanctuary, in its ceremonies, festivals, in His House of Prayer. For the Prophets, ‘to seek the Lord’ meant to be converted, to return to the

God of the Everlasting, ever-New Covenant. For the Deuteronomist, it meant to “recollect”, to remember, not to forget - that the Covenant was being offered today, this very day. For the Sages, it meant to ponder the Wisdom of the centuries. This will all eventually peak in Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of the Father.

[c] The challenge is not unlike that given to Ezechiel (3:1,ff.):

“... You, son of man, listen to the words that I say; do not rebel like that rebellious set. Open your mouth and eat what I am about to give to you.’ I looked: there was a hand there, stretching out to me and holding a scroll. He unrolled it in front of me; it was written on back and front; ...He said: ‘Son of Man, eat what is given to you; eat this scroll and then go and speak to the House of Israel.’ I opened my mouth; he gave me the scroll to eat, and said: ‘Son of Man, feed and be satisfied by the scroll I am giving you,’ I ate it and it tasted sweet as honey...”

[d] John 6 and its Bread of Life might be seen in a somewhat similar vein: this is the Chapter of the Great Feeding in the proximity of the Passover. It might lead our thoughts to the Eucharist- and can also be the Wisdom of Jesus Christ - that needs to be pondered, digested, assimilated. The ancient manna traditions do not seem to be far from the author’s heart in these accounts. The TORAH is genuine Wisdom and is often called that Bread from Heaven that feeds God’s People. Jesus appeals for all to come to Him - and those who eat of Him, will hunger and thirst for more, almost quoting Pr 9:5. Catholics have often read Jn 6 both eucharistically as well as sapientially.

[e] St. Paul will encourage us:

“... and indeed, everything that was written long ago in the scriptures was meant to teach us something about hope from the examples scripture gives of how people who did not give up were helped by God. And may he who helps us when we refuse to give up, help you all to be tolerant with each other, following the example of Christ Jesus, so that united in mind and voice you may give glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (cf. Rm 15:4,ff.).

[2] **Lectio [Lectura] Divina [Sacra]:** this is made up of four steps: *Reading - Meditation - Prayer - Contemplation*. This was often compared to the process of enjoying a good meal:

- the initial Reading was compared to placing a delectable morsel in one’s mouth. (This would be the application of one’s spirit, mind and heart to the sacred page).

- the concomitant Meditation was compared to the grinding of the material so that it might pass into the heart, and be digested, assimilated; this is a challenge to both mind and heart, intellect and will;

- Prayer would be the savoring of the taste, the enjoyment of the delights, as it was being transformed into energy;

- as in digestion, nature takes over - so that what is eaten, or what one drinks, would be assimilated into strength and vitality - in prayer, the Holy Spirit takes over, and plays the major role in the realm of Contemplation. This is not so much the conscious effort on the part of the one praying - as the willingness to be moved by the Holy Spirit, perhaps much in harmony with Psalm 131:

"... Yahweh, my heart has no lofty ambitions, my eyes do not look too high. I am not concerned with great affairs, or marvels beyond my scope. Enough for me to keep my soul tranquil and quiet, like a child in its mother's arms, as content as a child that has been weaned. Israel, rely on Yahweh, now and for always!"

"... I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And so the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven..." (cf. Mt 18:3,f.).

"... But Jesus called his disciples to him and said: 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them off hungry, lest they might collapse on the way. (cf. Mt 15:32,f.).

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1. The Gospel Meaning of Obedience

a. Human Obedience: there may be a human characteristic present in every act of obeying. And this is so for two reasons:

- first of all, because one of the greatest concerns of the Council Fathers on this matter was that of justifying and promoting a truly adult religious obedience, one that would be free and responsible;

- furthermore and more radically, since on the human level of ordinary human relationships, if the virtue of obedience runs into so many difficulties in order to make itself esteemed, this is because it is often confounded with attitudes that may be a real caricature and even its ultimate negation.

For the greater part of persons, obedience is proper to babies. For some, this virtue should not even be recommended to adults! The entire social and political movement is geared more toward the re-vindication of *rights*, and of liberty, rather than toward dialogue and towards multilateral agreement. Who would have the courage, then or the simplicity to recommend to adults the practice of obedience to laws, or to legitimate authorities?

Now the act of obeying, far from relying on some immature psychology, is an act that is eminently free that cannot really be offered unless one has indeed a developed and mature psychology. To obey, in the real sense of the term, is a virtue that can only be proper to a reasonable adult. And it is toward this kind of responsible obedience that young people must be trained.

Some memories of those older among us, might remember the caricature of a parent of a family who was exasperated - or of teachers, in times past, who would raise their hands, and the threat was how one would be 'taught' how to obey. The end result of such 'training' might have been quite different from what was hoped. To 'obey' is indeed not a submission to some limiting behavior, whether this be meted out with the promise of a reward - or the threat of a punishment. Nor does obedience grow when one responds passively, mechanically, to a command from the outside. A dog, even if one may go to 'obedience' school, or children or young people living in some fear, these are not so much free actions - but, responses that have been cultured, learned, often from fear.

To 'obey' is an activity that is specifically rational, and free - it is an act of personal autonomy. It consists in saying 'yes' on the inside to an injunction recognized within as acceptable, and is indeed accepted in a free manner. The precept may come from another, this is true - but, to accept it lucidly and willingly, needs to be interiorized and made one's own: it is then no longer the law of someone else, but it becomes one's own law and constitutes for one a 'self-norm.'

It is of the greatest importance to understand well how authentic obedience commits the most intimate activity of a rational, reasonable being. One's liberty can be cultivated in it, and it might flow out from there toward the most genuine love for what is being done. From this insight a believer might come to comprehend that to obey signifies not to be submitted, but to accept, and that to command will be not so much the imposition of one's will on another person, but to lead the other to accept.

To put this perhaps in a better manner, it is necessary to note that there arises here an important practical problem of vocabulary. There is a traditional jargon often employed when speaking of Christian and religious obedience which constitutes an actual equivocation, and this can render obedience repugnant, and unacceptable.

Expressions were used such as: *to give up one's own will; to abandon to God one's own liberty* - these profoundly offend some aspects of the modern mentality, and this can be understood to a certain extent. In all truthfulness, while these expressions were intended to present the **oblation-element** in the vow, the **sacrificial** aspect - for many interpreters such expressions fly directly in the face of the precise sense of obedience, in that they betray its authentic meaning. God, the Creator of all, would never ask of anyone to 'surrender' his own human freedom, but to utilize it in responsible obedience - He would never offend human dignity, and for this reason there are so many who are unable to accept the 'renunciation' of their own wills, their own freedom. Whatever a free human being does, this should be carried out freely, of one's own volition. Religious obedience cannot consist absolutely in not willing any more, but of willing differently, and more vigorously: instead of being content with seeking and accepting the Will of God according to the ordinary forms of the Christian life, with the risk of often preferring one's own superficial will - through the vow one might be led to accept a way of life in which one would want to make God's Will his own.

This fundamental freedom will appear quite well in the three principal forms of supernatural obedience that need to be pondered here: that of Jesus Christ Himself, that of the baptized Believer, and that of the Religious. These three types of holy obedience, when well comprehended, having nothing to do with humiliation. Rather, they will conduct the human person even to his most high development.

b. The Obedience of Jesus Christ: religious obedience, just like chastity and poverty, are prime aspects of the following of Jesus Christ. **LG 42** notes: that to follow more closely the Self-emptying of the Savior, and more clearly to manifest this... is to be conformed more fully than the simple baptized to the Obedient Christ. **PC 14** manifests in its turn that religious obedience is based entirely on **the obedience of Jesus Himself** and tends to being a participation in His. It is therefore important to cull above all the nature and the meaning of obedience from that of Christ.

To even a superficial reading of the Gospel, especially that of Jn, there leaps before one's eyes the fact that the interior life of Jesus is explained above all with a fundamental and permanent reference to the will of His Beloved Father. He, on the other hand, has said, and repeatedly in explicit manner, with perfect clarity: I have not come of Myself... I do not say anything, I do not do anything, nor can I do anything of Myself. I speak the Words of the Father, I carry out the works of the Father. My food is to do the will of My Father [cf. Jn 4:34; 5:30; 6:38, etc.; PC refers 8 times to the NT!].

There are three observations that might be made here:

[1] The Personal Depth of such Obedience: here theology touches upon one of the most intimate depths of the Mystery of Jesus Christ. The Council recommends the text Heb 10:7, one that is rather 'bold' in which a Psalm from the OT [cf. Ps 39:7-9] is utilized to interpret the sentiments of the Son in the very moment of His Incarnation: *You have not willed, o Father, either sacrifice or holocaust...Then, I said: Here I am, I come to do Your will!* Thus, the obedience of Jesus Christ is rooted in the very mystery of His Personal Identity [He is the Son, therefore, with a radical reference to His Father] and in the eternal communion of love with the Father: eternally, the Son is related to the Father in the most complete adherence of His being. And when the Father decides to give His Son to the World so that He might save this world [cf. Jn 3:17], this Incarnation cannot be accepted by the Son other than in the same movement of love.

Therefore, the movement of loving filial submission which realizes the Incarnation, passes, according to a perfect continuity into the very incarnate being and life of Jesus Christ. His soul can only be **filial**: the perfect filial docility, thanks to which, the Incarnate Son of God, realizes in an earthly manner His entire communion of love with His Father, this becomes immediately and forever, the very principle of His human activity, the law of His destiny, His breath, His nourishment, as He Himself will say: this will, therefore, mark His destiny, His entire existence, and will make of Him the Servant, vowed, consecrated totally to the Father's Plan: *I have not come to be served but to serve...* [cf. Mt 20:28]: this service of the Father and at the same time, that of men. The obedience of Jesus overflows immediately into His total dedication to the salvation of human beings.

[2] Its expression through Intermediaries: this fundamental attitude of Jesus is translated with a particular emphasis in the mystery of Nazareth, in those long, very long years of His private life. The Gospel summarizes these in their over-all content with the short expressions: *He was subject to them!* [cf. Lk 2:51]. This is a most interesting aspect as one strives to understand religious, Christian obedience better: Jesus obeys here human creatures - and later on, He will obey the public authorities of His time, and the laws, and even Pilate, who would condemn Him. How is it possible for the Son of God? The fact is that He saw in Mary and in Joseph the signs and the representatives of His Heavenly Father, and therefore, the authentic interpreters of His will. The episode of the years in Jerusalem only confirms this reality, rather than contradicts it.

[3] Its Culmination on the Cross: however, it is clear that the activity of the 'Servant' is totally dedicated to the Father's business, and this finds its supreme expression in the Mystery of the Cross. The Passion and the Death of Jesus are presented to us clearly by the Scriptures as an act of loving obedience for His Father.

From Jesus Himself, this is all quite clear: *It is necessary that the world know that I love the Father! Get up! Let us go!!* [cf. Jn 14:31]. *Not My Will, Father, but Yours* [cf. Lk 22:42]. Therefore, St. Paul, in two of his major texts, cited several times by the Council: *He became obedient even unto death, and death on the Cross!* [cf. Ph 2:8] - and the obedience of one alone has purchased back the disobedience of the First Adam [cf. Rm 5:19], without noting Heb 5:8: Even though He was Son, He learned obedience through His sufferings.

Now precisely this **total interior and exterior sacrifice** has brought about salvation. And there should be noted then this fundamental fact: the obedience of Jesus Christ is not only in the heart of the Mystery of the Incarnation and of the hypostatic union, it is also in the heart of the Mystery of the Redemption. Of itself, this obedience has a soteriological value. Precisely through the act of obedience of the Son of God the world has been saved, and the pride of Satan was defeated, sin was expiated, the New and Everlasting Covenant was realized: of itself, obedience does have the value of expiation, of victory, of communion - the horizons of genuine obedience are infinite.

One other fact, furthermore, has been revealed: the mystery of the agony and the bloody sweat teach us that one can obey perfectly and feel terribly in certain situations the terrible weight of obeying! The deepest part of one's freedom may say 'yes' - but, the rest of the human being may also resist: one's imagination, sensibility, one's flesh, all that which in us may have not been frightened away from the demands of love. It will often be necessary to obey against one's own inclinations. The essential is that one obey in deed and in truth, and not half-heartedly. These are the fundamental positions of Christ's obedience.

c. Christian Obedience: we thus naturally find obedience at the very center of the Christian life, in faith and in Baptism, through which one becomes a member of that Obedient Christ, the Son of the Father. In Jesus Christ, each human being is called down through the ages by God. Each one will realize his true vocation only by renouncing his self-sufficiency, in order to open himself up freely to that appeal of God recognized as each one's 'Father', as a Father Who is both loving and demanding. The response of acceptance is called faith, and this assumes the form of a filial obedience to that Father, or to His Envoy, just as this is attested to by St. Paul: this is a matter of **obeying the Good News** [cf. Rm 10:16], of capturing every intellect to obedience to Jesus Christ [cf. 2 Co 10:5].

This process assumes its full significance in Baptism which, still according to St. Paul, is a close adherence to the very Person of Jesus Christ in His Paschal Mystery. Thus each believer comes to be associated to the death-by-obedience of Jesus Christ, and to His Glorious resurrection: Consider, then, that you are dead to sin and living

for God in Jesus Christ! [cf. Rm 6:10] Baptism is the fundamental commitment to obedience toward God, an obedience full of love since this God is the Father and thus, each believer becomes His child!

From this derive two fundamental realities of every Christian life. It is above all a listening to, and submission to the Word of God. The Christian is the Man of the Word: that means that each person does not organize his own life at his own whim; rather, it is referred continuously to Another who speaks to each one, to his Lord, because in everything all be done in accord with His Word. In this way, each of the baptized can exercise his own common priesthood: this is nothing other than the marvelous possibility bestowed on each Christian of offering the Spiritual sacrifice of each one's obedient love for God and of glorifying Him thus permanently: [it would be helpful here to re-read **LG 10; 31**]. In short, the Christian is the man of the Our Father: ***hallowed be Your Name! Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven!***

d. Religious Obedience: the Religious is simply a baptized man who wishes to live his Baptism in intensity and, therefore, his filial obedience: moved by the Spirit, in an act of most vivid faith, he wishes to go further in the communion to the Will of the Father, and the instrument will be the Vow of Obedience according to the prescriptions of a rule and the decisions of a superior: With the profession of obedience, the Council teaches, religious offer to God the **complete renunciation of their own will** as the sacrifice of themselves, and by means of this, in the most solid and secure manner they are united to the salvific will of God [cf. **PC 14**]. Beginning with this Council statement, which defines religious obedience under its most profound aspect through its dimension which might be called ***theological***, it implies a fuller and more secure union to the Will of God the Father. The Council thus details these aspects very rapidly in three directions:

[1] Christological Dimension: in imitation of Jesus Christ, Who came to do the Will of His Father, the religious, moved by the Holy Spirit, submit themselves to their superiors who are the representatives of God [cf. **PC 14 a; LG 42 e**]. The obedience to the religious superior is connected precisely to the imitation of Jesus Christ, from the Incarnation all the way to the Cross. The Religious wishes indeed to participate in the radicality of the obedience of Jesus Christ to the despoilment by Christ accomplished for this purpose. As one of the baptized, He already perceives the Will of the Father, through a certain number of human supports: the Church as the assembly of all the brothers, attentive to the reading of the Scripture, and very especially, to the hierarchy. Moved by the Spirit, the religious seeks and chooses those supports that are the more precise and the more sure, the value of which is guaranteed by this same hierarchy: a restricted group of brothers united among themselves by the same evangelical rule, and a superior entrusted with leading them to that perfect

communion with the will of the Father. The Religious commits himself, then, to follow this rule with his brothers and to obey this superior: both in the rule, as well as in the superior, faith allows each consecrated person to see these as privileged instruments for the interpretation of the concrete will of God concerning him: only God receives the homage of faith, and the gift of the will of the religious - this is not given to human instruments.

On the other hand, neither the rule nor the community, nor the superior are infallible absolutes: the rule can become hardened, fossilized; the community may become lax; the superior can easily be deceived. A continual effort on the part of all will always be necessary so that the instruments of the divine will might be authentically constituted, and serve in a fecund manner. This effort is assisted in an exterior way by various levels of superiorship, and by the hierarchy of the Church, and in an interior manner by the Holy Spirit. The religious is able to move ahead in life in full confidence, if he chooses to do so.

[2] Soteriological Dimension: leading the religious to the full communion with God, the rule and the superior lead him unfailingly to the service of all his brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, since this God is the Father, Who wills that all men be saved. This obedience is salvific because it participates in the very obedience of Jesus Christ Who saved the world. It gives, therefore, to the community the better probabilities of apostolic fruitfulness.

[3] Ecclesial Dimension: finally, the Council points out that the religious is thus always more intimately bound to the service of the Church, inserted in it more intimately. In the deepest part of herself, what is it that the Church would want? To remain listening to the Word, to be the handmaid of God, through an obedience full of love. The religious live this mystery intensely and can, therefore, express it more than the others: their fervor is at the service of the vocation of the Church herself. These are the great theological horizons that open up from this first brief paragraph of PC 14. They make clear in what climate obedience should be exercised. The Council has underlined only some of the more actual aspects.

2. The Evangelical Attitude of the Obedient Religious [cf. PC 15 b]

a. The Humble Submission [*ossequio*] to the Superiors according to what the Rule and the Constitutions prescribe: Humility is the basis of all authentic obedience. It is not without purpose to remember this. Jesus Christ was meek and humble of heart, and Mary, the Handmaiden of God, was humility itself - while Satan, is the disobedient one, due to his pride and has suggested the pride of Adam and Eve to be disobedient: *you will be like God!* [cf. Gn 3:5].

However, the Council clarifies that this humble submission is exercised according to the Rule and the Constitutions. This injunction means beyond any doubt *first of all*, that the concrete type of relations between the superiors and their confreres varies in accord with the spirit of the rule; *in the second place*, that the religious should depend on his superior in all that is foreseen by the rule and by the constitutions, and not beyond that. This is a detail of the concrete life, it seems, that the religious ought to take directly upon his own shoulders. This is a personal and secret field that escapes all lessening. There are activities which depend on particular laws: election duties, the technical aspect of certain services or labors.

b. Active and Creative Submission: the Council at the same time insists that the religious should obey as a responsible human being. In the Council discussions of November 1964, one major superior made these following observations: while they lay people grow up and mature, it is necessary to take care that religious do not remain children and immature. **Oblation in union with the obedient Christ** will certainly be truer when it is offered by a personality who is in better dominion over himself. It is necessary to form a **filial obedience** rather than a servile one. At this point it is necessary to keep well in mind the initial thoughts from this chapter regarding 'human' obedience. The sense of personal freedom and responsibility can be expressed on three levels:

[1] In the determination of the order that the superior might give: the superior cannot take all the decisions in the place of the religious. The latter, as a grown man, has the duty of thinking through his life and his activity as a religious, as a mature adult thinks over his human life, and to seek always that which God expects of him. The adult religious, too, is expected to present to the superior his ideas and his projects, resolved beforehand to make his own the decision of the superior, no matter what this might be.

[2] In the Acceptance of the order given: in fact, the religious still enjoys that freedom which receives, transforms the order received into his own personal responsibility - he assumes its responsibility, above all if its execution imposes sacrifices on him. Mechanical and passive obedience has nothing to do with authentic obedience. If, for example, the superior, badly informed, commands something that seems inopportune, impractical, risking dangerous consequences, the religious ought to express his thought and his fear. If instead he reacts by a blind obedience in the case of an order poorly given, all the worse for the community! Such blind, militaristic obedience is really a renunciation of one's intelligent responsibilities. There is an old formula that still has weight: It is necessary to take initiative in responsibility, and to be obedient in initiatives!

[3] Personally committed to the order received of which the obedient religious has taken as his responsibility, he commits himself then actively to its execution. He brings to it above all his love, and love is always creative. How said it is to see religious rather than giving themselves enthusiastically, with all their hearts, they just carry out the order with a boring sense of routine. The Council reminds Religious that far from burying their own talents, each one should make use of them to the fullest degree, wherever obedience places one, for the up-building of the Body of Christ. Obedience conceived in this manner is a sure means to increase in human maturity and in filial Christian liberty!

3. The Evangelical Exercise of Authority on the Part of the Superiors

In the course of that same discussion of November 1964, a superior general made in the hall a vigorous declaration that had the effect almost of a scandal: some superiors, he noted, point out incessantly the crisis on the part of obedience. In his view, the crisis was not one of the religious, but rather of the superiors! There have been many superiors in various forms of religious life, who do not even know how to conduct a Council Meeting worthy of its name and which only gives the impression of being effective. The genuine renewal has to be much more a question of formation and of the efficiency of superiors than a question of an ever greater obedience on the part of the membership. There are three principal directives for a formation of these post-Conciliar superiors. They are being called to be less administrative and legalistic - and more spiritual, and more concerned with Gospel values:

a. The Superior is the First to obey, the Servant of the Community: the Decree offers a marvelous definition of the superior: the superiors submit to the will of God in the fulfillment of their duty, are to exercise their authority in a spirit of service towards their brothers, so much so that they might express that charity with which God loves them!

The Superior is the intermediary between the will of the heavenly Father and the fidelity of one's brothers. This challenge asks that there be established these two poles: the will of the Father, overflowing with love, whom the subjects are called to serve, manifesting to them this love and permitting them to correspond to it. Religious authority is exercised in a two-fold service, existentially unified: that of the Father and service of one's brothers. This is the way Jesus seems to have exercised His constitutional obedience. In Christianity, the model of authority will always be Jesus who washes the feet of His Apostles and says to them; if, therefore, I, the Lord

and Master, have washed your feet, then you too should for one another. I have given you an example... [cf. Jn 13:14-15].

The superior is therefore, the first to obey in the community, the one through whom the fundamental mystery of obedience, the communion with the Will of the Father, is fulfilled in an eminent manner. Now, he ought to take note of the two forms of obedience to the Father:

- above all, to obey the will of God regarding the community, just as it is manifested in the rule [of which he is called to be the concrete interpreter even more than the scrupulous arbiter, and guardian] - and also in events, situations and the human needs by means of which God launches His appeals;
- in the second place, to obey the appeals of the Holy Spirit in the subjects, after having placed all one's supernatural prudence in valuing them and in assisting each one to do this. This evidently presupposes dialogue. Each one, in fact, has a certain manner that is legitimately personal to live out the common vocation.

It is up to the superiors especially the major - to conciliate these two appeals of God.

b. The Superior and Religious Paternity: between superior and religious, the relationship should be that of man-to-man, between person and person, a relationship of a family type, in mutual respect, in reciprocal confidence, and love. All flows from this encounter of paternal authority [without any paternalism] and filial confidence [without childishness, or total lack of caring]. Another important text reads: the superiors will rule their subjects as sons of God and with respect for their human personality, being careful to see to it that their subjection is voluntary. This means, for example, that it is not evangelical to dispose of confreres as checkers on a board, without ever explaining to anyone at least some of the reasons for their moves, without even permitting them to explain themselves.

c. The Superior is the Animator of the Community: one further aspect is noted here. The superiors should guide in such a manner that the religious in their care, in absolving their own responsibilities and undertaking initiatives, will cooperate with an active and responsible obedience. Therefore, the superiors should listen willingly to their religious and promote union among them with all their strength for the good of the Institute and the Church, even while remaining firm in their authority to decide and to command that which should be done. We have pointed out this with regard to the task of renewal and of adequate updating. However, the Council affirms that this co-responsibility is requested for all of one's life and for every aspect of the Apostolic Mission.

One last paragraph insists on the regular functioning of Chapters and Counsels: it will become ever less normal that a superior should take on the responsibility of a province or of a community by himself, and rule it with his own authority, without having exercised consultations and quests, and without having share to the fullest in the various aspects of his power. However, in enlisting the help of others, there may be increased the assurance of discerning God's will.

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