

OBEDIENT TO THE POPE

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ISBN 85826 200 2

A.C.T.S. No. 1739 (1980)

Imprimi Potest: P. Duffy S.J. Provincial

Nihil Obstat: Peter J. Kenny S.T.D. Diocesan Censor.

Imprimatur: Peter J. Connors D.C.L. Vicar General, Melbourne.

25th July, 1980.

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OBEDIENT TO THE POPE

What we are setting out to do here is to explore the nature of the obedience we give to the Pope, and to see how that obedience can be integrated into the "whole" that our personal spiritual life should be. If this integration is not achieved then we run the risk of seeing obedience to the Pope in one or other of two false lights.

That is to say, we might see it as something on the edges of our spiritual life, as an accidental thing that goes with our being Catholic Christians. Or we might see it as something primarily polemical, as something to be established by argument, and left at that.

If we look at obedience to the Pope simply in the one or the other of these two lights we are, first, failing to get to the heart of the matter and, secondly, are impoverishing our own spiritual life.

PART ONE

CHRIST OUR TEACHER

In all things, we have only one teacher, Christ Our Lord, who teaches us by his words and by the example of his life. Now, if we look, even if only superficially, at the life of Our Lord we cannot fail to see how central to it is obedience. And this obedience is central both to his mission and to his own personal spiritual life as man.

1: Obedience and Mission

(i) The Incarnation

Christ Our Lord frequently speaks of himself as **sent**. That is to say, he asserts that he did not come into this world of his own volition but in obedience to the will of another.

Now, when he speaks of himself in this way he is clearly not speaking of himself precisely as the Divine

Son. There can be no question of one Divine Person commanding another Divine Person, no question of the Father commanding the Son. For, as Divine Persons, they are co-equals; and the Divine Will is one, just as the Divine Nature is one. There is but one God, and there is but one Divine Will.

When, therefore, Our Lord says that he is **sent**, he is speaking as the Incarnate Son - though not merely as man. He is not saying simply that his human nature is a creation of God, and that in this sense he is sent into the world. No created thing can come into existence of its own volition. So he means something more.

SENT ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURE

Nor is he 'sent' in the sense in which the Angel Gabriel is said to be 'sent by God'. There it is simply a question of God 'making his ministering spirits his messengers who obey his commands'. Nor, again, is he sent as John the Baptist was 'a man sent by God' - that is, commissioned in the first moment of his life to be the precursor of the Lord.

Speaking of himself as **sent**, therefore, Our Lord is saying that the Incarnation, that act whereby the Divine Son took to himself a human nature, was an act commanded by the Divine Will. That is to say, the Blessed Trinity wills the Incarnation of the Son; and hence the Incarnate Son can speak of himself as **sent**.

The fact that, as a Divine Person, the Son wills his own incarnation does not present a problem. The sender can also be the sent. We have an analogy in our own experience. When we will something, we, as it were, send ourselves to be united to 'the good' which exists in the object of our willing.

That Incarnation, therefore, by which 'for us men and our salvation' 'the Word was made flesh' is effected through obedience.

(ii) The Saving Death

In the words of that great hymn to be found in St. Paul's **Letter to the Philippians**, 'Christ became obedient unto death, even to death on a cross'. It is necessary, then, to see in what way that act of obedience is relevant to the saving nature of Christ's death.

In the Scriptures, the essence of sin, whether of the angels or of men, is expressed as rebellion against the will of God, expressed in some particular concrete situation. And since the will of God in these situations is an expression, always and purely, of his love, sin is essentially a rejection of the love of God. The undoing of the terrible results of man's saying 'I will not' are undone by the unfailing 'I will' of the God-Man, whom the Scriptures call 'the Amen,' for with him it was always, Yes.

Every act of the God-Man, Christ Our Lord, is salvific. Every act of his promotes, effects the salvation of man. For in the moment of the Incarnation, the human will and understanding of the human nature of Christ, utterly submit to the Divine Will and understanding of the Divine Nature with which it is united in the unity of a single Person. Every act of the will of Christ, even of his human will, is consequently, the act of a God-Man, a Man-God, and so a saving action.

While it is true that every action of Christ is salvific in man's regard, the death of Christ is, nevertheless, seen as the supreme moment in which the salvation of man is achieved. (The Scriptures present this as a necessary element in the nature of covenanted love. That is to say, the provisions of a will and testament come into effect only at the death of the testator.) Consequently, it is in Christ's Sacrifice on Calvary that the nature of obedience is clearest seen.

THE SACRIFICE ON CALVARY

We can, in considering the sacrifice Our Lord offers on the cross, distinguish two elements. One is visible - the crucifixion, the bloodshedding, the physical death when he yields up his spirit. The other is invisible -

the utter submission of his understanding (even in the darkness of abandonment) and of his will, that this should be.

On the analogy that it is the soul of man which gives life to his physical activity, so it is this interior, invisible sacrifice of his understanding and will which gives life and meaning to the exterior, visible sacrifice - of passion and of death. And, reversing the point of view, just as a man manifests his understanding, his will, his feelings through his physical activity (his words, his actions, his laughter, his tears) so the exterior, visible passion of Christ manifests the essence of the interior, invisible passion.

To accept death willingly at the will of another demonstrates two things. First, that the submission of will is absolute, with nothing whatever held back. Secondly, that this submission is as irrevocable as death itself. The crucifixion and death of Christ Our Lord on Calvary, therefore, is the ultimate proof of the completeness and irrevocability of the submission of his human mind and will to God.

That is to say, by willingly submitting to death, Our Lord in effect says that he no more wills other than the Father wills than he could, speaking purely as man, effect his own resurrection from the dead. Their utter and irrevocable submission was first made in the very moment of their coming to be, in the Incarnation. 'Coming into the world, he says: "A body you have fitted me. At the head of the scroll is written that I should do your will, O Lord".' The death also vindicates the truth of his life-long claim, 'I always do the will of him who sent me'.

(iii) Passive Salvation

Obedience is the submission of one's understanding (whether through knowledge or faith) and one's will (through love) to the understanding and will of another. So perfect was that submission in the God-Man that it merits salvation for the whole human race, of which the God-Man was a member.

As salvation was merited, so is salvation received. Christ submitted so perfectly, the Scriptures teach us, that 'he became a life-giving spirit to all who obey him'. That is to say, if man submits his understanding (through faith) and his will (through charity) to Christ Our Lord, he thereby becomes partaker in the salvation which Christ wins by his submission to him who sent him, the Blessed Trinity - man's ultimate end. It was the disobedience of one man which brought into the world sin in which all men have shared. So it was the obedience of one man which brings salvation to all. Thus the Scriptures teach us.

To facilitate man's making (by grace) this submission, Christ Our Lord does two things. He sets before man the example of his own life; and he establishes a 'chair', a teaching authority which perfectly reflects his will for man. As in Christ the invisible God is made visible and his will for man is revealed, so the continuing visible chair of the ascended Christ is always accessible to man.

2: Obedience in Jesus' Spiritual Life

(i) Childhood

According to Peter (when the Apostles were choosing a successor to Judas), witness to the Good News begins with the preaching of John the Baptist, and continues throughout the teaching and miracles of Jesus up to 'the time when he was taken up from us'. It is not remarkable, then, that little of his life, exterior or interior, before his public career is recorded. But the one incident of his boyhood which is recorded centres on obedience.

When he is found in the Temple, the boy Jesus speaks of the necessity of being in his Father's house, or about his Father's business. Whatever meaning is given to the words, they signify, essentially, doing his Father's will.

On his returning with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth, the Gospel tells us, 'he lived subject to them'. The fulfilment of the Father's will, therefore, can demand obedience to human superiors, not because of their

greater excellence, but because of their office. The keeping of the Fourth Commandment is a concrete expression of the will to keep the First.

(ii) Manhood

In his public life, Our Lord insists that he always does the will of his Father, that neither his words nor his works are his own but his Father's, that the doing of his Father's will is his meat and drink. Most striking affirmation of this utter dependence on the Father abounds in John 5:19-47.

The reason why he can so confidently make this claim is the consciousness he has that he is completely docile to the leading of the Holy Spirit. It was by the Spirit that he was driven into the wilderness, there to be put to the test; that he cast out the powers of evil; that he spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth; that he chose his apostles.

This is saying more than that, simply, his human choices were in harmony with the breathing of the Spirit. They were, in fact, choices in which the will of the Spirit was the determining factor. Even his affective life was subject to the Spirit and it is in the Spirit that he exults with joy at the Father's revealing things to little ones; and it is in the Spirit that he grieves over the lack of belief in the bystanders when he raises Lazarus from the dead.

Our Lord himself, then, is the model for St. Paul's words, 'They who are sons of God are led by the Spirit of God'. Docility or obedience to the Holy Spirit is characteristic of the Christian; but that it is truly the Spirit who is leading a man has always been discerned by the harmonizing of a man's spirit with The Tradition.

(iii) Passion and Death

It was Our Lord who taught us to pray, 'Thy will be done'. That this attitude of obedience and submission is central to his life is strikingly illustrated in his hour of spiritual anguish and physical pain in the agony in the garden. Three times he makes the prayer, 'Not my will, but Yours be done'.

Because the human nature of Christ is united to the Divine Nature of the Son in the unity of a single Person, the human mind of Christ enjoyed the beatific vision of God. Yet, in time of spiritual anguish in the garden, it is not this vision that he draws on for strength, but submission to the Father's will. So, too, in the moment of death all is committed into his Father's hands, accepted, that is to say, as decreed by the Father's will.

The most perfect 'spiritual life' that a man ever lived was, we see, grounded on, lived in, and consummated by obedience.

3: The 'Chair' of Jesus

Our Lord told his contemporaries: 'The scribes and the pharisees occupy the "chair" of Moses. Whatever they tell you to do, therefore, you ought to do. But don't imitate them in what they do themselves'. Our Lord hereby affirms that there existed in Israel identifiable persons whose office it was to guard and to teach the revelation made by God to Moses. It was they who judged whether or not something was in harmony with the Law of Moses. In their exercise of this office, they were to be obeyed - irrespective of the holiness or otherwise of their personal lives. The preservation of the Law was not simply left to charismatic figures such as the Prophets.

God, because he acts intelligently and lovingly, acts consistently. Almost necessarily, then, we would expect that the revelation he makes of himself in and through Jesus Christ would be guarded and taught from a 'chair' of Christ - that is to say, by an office-bearer teaching in the name of and with the authority of Our Lord himself.

FULFILLING AND TO BE FULFILLED

Moses had foretold the coming of a 'prophet' after himself, to whom the people were to listen as they had to him. Jesus, in fulfilling this prophecy in his own person, thereby fulfils rather than abolishes the Law, as he himself says. The teaching authority of Moses is absorbed into his own, not nullified. Because of this continuity of teaching authority, Our Lord is able to point out to those who refused belief in him that the reason why they did not accept what he said was that they did not really accept what Moses had written.

It is, then, inevitable that Christ Our Lord would establish a 'chair' to ensure the continuation of God's revelation of himself in Christ. And as the chair of Moses continued until it was taken up into the chair of Christ, so the chair of Christ will continue until faith gives way to vision in eternal life, wherein God reveals himself to us as he is; and 'we shall become like him for we shall see him as he is'.

To adhere, then, to the chair of Christ Our Lord makes us conscious, with thanksgiving, of our participation in the whole sweep of God's saving action - 'as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ'.

A CONTEXT OF CHARITY

We can distinguish three moments in, or three aspects of, Christ our Lord's establishing a spokesman to occupy his 'chair'.

At Caesarea Philippi, when Peter makes his confession of faith, 'You are the Christ,' Our Lord does two things. He commends Peter for accepting faith, God-given, in something 'flesh and blood' (that is, merely human perception) could never come to know. Then he makes Peter the rock on which he will build his Church. (Matthew 16: 17-19)

At the time of the Passion, Our Lord warns Peter of his approaching defection from and denial of Christ. But he adds, 'When you have come back, strengthen your brethren.' The college of Apostles will be dependent on Peter. (Luke 22: 31-32) So, too, Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*) teaches, 'The college, or corporate body, of the Bishops does not enjoy authority unless it is conceived of simultaneously together with the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, as its head . . .'; and, 'The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the visible and perpetual foundation and principle of the unity both of the Bishops and the multitude of the faithful'.

Finally, after the Resurrection, Our Lord, having three times drawn from Peter a protestation of love, installs him in the pastoral office, with the words, 'Feed my lambs; feed my sheep'. (John 21: 15-18)

It is worth thinking about: it is in the context of a revelation by the Father that Our Lord makes Peter the foundation rock of his Church; it is in a context of human weakness sustained by the prayer of Christ that Our Lord makes Peter the president of the Apostolic College; it is in a context of love that Our Lord installs Peter in the pastoral office. The teaching authority within the Church is, therefore, to be an expression first of the love of Christ and then of his flock. When the Pope teaches it is an expression of loving obedience to Christ and of loving concern for the flock of Christ. When we give obedience to the Pope we vindicate Our Lord's own words, 'My sheep listen to my voice'.

PART TWO

Let us consider, now, ourselves - the sheep of Christ the Good Shepherd - who are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and who are thereby incorporated into Christ and into his Mystical Body, which is the Church.

I: Baptismal Faith

We are baptized, and we profess our faith, 'in the name of the Trinity'. 'In the name of' can mean two things. First, it can mean 'in the power of'. That is to say, the efficacy of our baptism and of our baptismal faith comes from the Trinity, who is the **Source** of all the truth we attain to by faith.

'In the name of' can also mean 'as commanded by'. So any spokesman for another puts aside the communication of his own judgement and will in order to communicate the judgement and will of another. Hence, our profession of baptismal faith is a confession of **ours** only because we have made our own the understanding and will of another. Baptismal faith is essentially a submission of our understanding to the Trinity, who is the **Revealer** of all truth.

2: The Obedience of Faith

The Revealer's supreme Revelation of the truth is Christ himself - the Way, the Truth, the Light, the Life, the Word made flesh.

Let us consider the scene in which Christ Our Lord is baptized by John. As Jesus comes up from the water, the Father's voice is heard, and the Spirit is seen, in the form of a dove, descending and resting upon Jesus.

Here we have the visible, public commissioning of Our Lord to begin his ministry: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me to bring the Good News'. We hear the Father's command, 'Listen to him'. At the same time, we see that on Christ rests the Spirit of Truth - the Spirit who will be given to all believers in order that he may lead us into all truth and the truth may set us free.

That is to say, the obedience of faith is given by us out of love; and that submission of ours issues, paradoxically, in freedom.

The question arises, then; how can we, who desire to enjoy 'the freedom of the sons of God' ensure that we are obedient to Christ Our Lord, and thereby, to the Holy Trinity who commands us, 'Listen to him'? Our Lord, speaking to his Apostles, says, 'Whoever listens to you is listening to me'.

Just as Our Lord assured his contemporaries that by listening to the occupants of the 'chair' of Moses they were listening to Moses himself, so he assures all generations to come that by listening to the occupants of his 'chair' they (and that 'they' includes us) are listening to him.

If, then, obedience to the Church ensures obedience to Christ, then it is obedience to the Pope and to the College of Bishops which ensures obedience to the Church.

FOR EXAMPLE

It might help to see all these considerations in the concrete by taking an historical example. When St. Ignatius Loyola applied to the Pope for approval of the Society of Jesus which he had founded, he presented the following as the purpose of his society:

to serve the Lord alone
and the Church, his Spouse,
under the Roman Pontiff, Christ's Vicar on earth.

Because of the union between Christ and his Church, St. Ignatius can use the linguistically curious combination of words - the Lord alone, and his Church. But what guarantees this service of Christ is that it is under the direction of the Pope.

In passing, it is worth noting how far removed is this obedience to the Pope from any sentimental personal attachment. In St. Ignatius' time, the memory of the notorious Borgia Pope was still fresh, and a descendent of his, St. Francis Borgia, was a contemporary of St. Ignatius. More, even as he formulated

this ground-plan of his Society, St. Ignatius knew of the possibility of one of the cardinals, a man hostile to St. Ignatius' views, becoming Pope. As, indeed he did. The Pope, then, is not obeyed because he is 'a good man' like John XXIII [now Blessed] or 'a strong man who will be good for the Church' like John Paul II. He is obeyed because he is the Vicar of Christ.

In reply, the Pope replied, in summary, as follows:

The duty of the pastoral office
for which the Divine Majesty has chosen me
demands that,
as did my predecessor,
I approve this ground-plan,
because it is consonant with the Revelation.
And I forbid anyone to contradict me.

From this we might observe that the exercise of the Pastoral Office is itself an act of the obedience of faith. In other words, the Pope is under the necessity of speaking, for it was in order that he should speak that the office he holds was divinely instituted. The divine institution of the office guarantees the truth of what he teaches; and this is why any Pope's teaching is always consonant with that of his predecessors. (We have a striking example of this in Paul VI's **Humanae Vitae**.)

The tradition whereby a Pope, having taught something, forbids contradiction is simply a way of underlining the fact that only the truth sets man free. The Pope forbids contradiction because the person contradicting would be wrong. And to be wrong is the worst possible state that the human intellect can be in - because it would be in bondage to error.

A MYSTIC'S INSIGHT

It was St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) who persuaded Pope Gregory XI to return from Avignon to Rome. Nine popes had resided in Avignon and no papal election had been held at Rome for three quarters of a century. The prestige of the papacy has rarely been so low, and was to sink lower. Within a year of Gregory's death there were two rival claimants to the papal office and the Church was utterly divided. Before the Schism was healed, there would be three simultaneous papal obediences tearing the Church apart.

And yet, for St. Catherine, the Pope was 'our sweet Father, Christ on earth' - even while it seemed to her (or, rather, because it seemed to her) that the whole Church rested on her shoulders and crushed her with its weight.

PART THREE

From what has been said above, it is clear that the claim is being made that an understanding of obedience illuminates the nature of human freedom. We turn now to see how this is so. Since freedom and responsibility go together, we shall also see how obedience is an exercise of human responsibility, not an abdication of it.

FREEDOM

Obviously, we are not speaking of physical freedom but of the freedom of the non-material faculties of man. These are his intellect (by which he understands) and his will (by which he loves). Now, something is functioning freely only when it is acquiring possession of the thing for which it functions at all. Even naturally, therefore, the intellect is free only when it is attaining to the truth. For the whole purpose of the intellect is to know.

To the extent, then, that the intellect holds to be true something which is, in fact, false, to that extent it is

in bondage to error. This may or may not lead to disastrous practical consequences. It may not matter much whether or not we believe in the existence of life in other parts of the universe; it matters considerably if we are convinced that fire does not burn. But whether or not the practical consequences are great or small, the fact remains that the intellect in error is not free.

So it is, too, with the will. The will is given us so that we can reach out in love to all the good around us. Only that will, then, is free which embraces the good by loving it. To love, to desire what is evil is to do violence to the will.

SUPERNATURAL FREEDOM

If man were created for only a purely natural end, that end would still be to attain to the fullest possible natural happiness achieved through possessing the truth and loving the good. But man is made for a supernatural end - that is, for the attainment of happiness through the possession of the Source of all truth, Truth himself; and the possession of the Source of all good, Goodness himself.

Only when he is attaining the end for which he was created is man truly free. It follows, then, that only those acts which help man achieve the purpose of his existing at all are truly to be called free. Such acts are the knowledge and the love of God - knowledge through faith and love through charity.

'This is eternal life - to know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent'. 'To know', in such a context, means to adhere to in faith and in love. Such adherence is effected through the obedience of faith to him who alone has 'the words of eternal life', him 'to see whom is to see the Father'.

RESPONSIBILITY

It is often asserted that to hand over, through obedience, one's understanding and will to the will and understanding of another is to abdicate personal responsibility - either through sloth or through cowardice.

If this were so, then the man Jesus would have to be held to be the most irresponsible of men. For, in the Incarnation, the human will and judgement of the humanity of Christ totally submit themselves to the will and judgement of the eternal Word.

Our greatest responsibility to ourselves is to see to it that we keep our intellects from error and our wills from evil. That is why, in St. Paul's words, we 'test all things and adhere to what is good'. It is the reason why, in matters in which our own experience is not to be trusted, we look to find the most reliable authority we can and conform our judgements to those of reliable authority.

Hence obedience to the Pope is responsible as well as liberative.

PART FOUR

We are, however, fallen creatures. As a result of original sin, our intellects are darkened, our will is weakened, and we are inclined to evil. This is why revelation is necessary: so that things concerning God and the things of God which are not of themselves unattainable by human reasoning might, given the present condition of man, be more easily known to all with certitude and without the admixture of error. From this condition, two other consequences follow. First, that what can be seen to be so clearly right is not thereby the thing we are most anxious to do. Secondly, it means that, just as the universal sinfulness of man required the universally salvific sacrifice of Christ Our Lord, so our individual sinfulness requires of us individual sacrifice.

BAPTISMAL PRIESTHOOD

For a sacrifice, it is necessary to have a priest and a victim - and for each to be designated by the one to

whom the sacrifice is offered. It is God who in the Old Testament institutes the priesthood. It is God who appoints Christ as 'High Priest for ever' who offers, as we saw early in this discussion, a sacrifice of obedient submission to his Father's will expressed in his death.

By baptism we are made partakers of every aspect of Christ's mission. We become 'prophets', proclaiming the wonderful works of God. We become kings, rulers in freedom since the truth has made us free. We become priests, in order to offer spiritual sacrifices to God; and the offering of such sacrifice to God is, as Christ's was, the offering of our understanding and will through obedience.

Our noblest faculties, the chief constituents of our selfhood, are what we offer. They become the victim we offer. We put to death in ourselves our self-will and the 'conceit of our hearts' - our personally arrived at judgements - by submitting our will and understanding to God's truth and love. 'I want obedience', says the Lord, 'not sacrifices; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings'.

OBEDIENCE AND ASCETICISM

Broadly speaking, when the Pope addresses himself to the Church at large, he is speaking in one or other of two areas. He is either teaching some point relevant to the content of our faith or morals; or else he is suggesting some particular way of acting. For example, Pope Paul VI in **Humane Vitae** was clearly addressing himself to a moral question.

On the other hand, in his address on Holy Thursday, 1980, Pope John Paul wrote, 'Furthermore, it must always be remembered that only the word of God can be used for Mass readings. The reading of Scripture cannot be replaced by the reading of other texts, however much they may be endowed with undoubted religious and moral values'. Here there is not a question of faith or morals being taught, but of direction being given regarding the proper celebration of the Mass.

MATTERS OF FAITH AND MORALS

'The true' and 'the good' are absolutes. When therefore, the Pope, exercising his office as teacher of the whole Church, declares something to be true/false, good/evil, we must respond with both interior and exterior assent. In other words, we must submit our understanding and will to what he teaches; and we must so speak and act that it is evident that we do so submit.

It is not sufficient that we should act as if we do give that internal assent of will and submission of understanding when, in fact, we do not. Merely exterior submission is pointless on two counts. First, such teaching is not aimed primarily at our behaviour, but at illuminating our understanding of religious truth - thereby setting it free of the fear, even, of error - and at setting free our will to love as good the truth proposed to our understanding.

A second reason why merely external submission is not enough when there is no real internal assent is that in this situation there is set up a tension, a contradiction between the invisible and the visible in man. In speaking of the sacrifice on Calvary, we noted how the exterior manifests the interior. When, therefore, a person's way of behaving does not correspond with what he really believes and desires, there is established an unhealthy contradiction. In religious matters, of course, this can lead to giving scandal - in the sense of putting a stumbling block in someone's way when it is discovered that only lip service is being given. Such merely pretended submission gives greater scandal than does straight-out rebellion.

In this case of accepting the teaching of the Pope in matters of faith and morals, we act out our baptismal priesthood. As priests we offer in spiritual sacrifice our own will and judgement as victims. This act of love issues in freedom for the will (since now it confidently embraces 'the good') and in freedom for the understanding (since it now acknowledges 'the true'.)

Allowance must always be made for the invincibly erroneous conscience; but since this is the exceptional

case it is unnecessary to consider it here.

BLACK AND WHITE

It is sometimes said that Catholics will, at the word of the Pope, say black is white. This is based on a misunderstanding of a well-known proposition of St. Ignatius in his **Rules for Thinking with the Church**. What he actually says is simply an acknowledgement of the fallibility of the human mind in its search for religious truth. He writes:

In order that we may be altogether of one mind and in harmony with the Catholic Church, if the Church should declare **to be** black something which **appears** white to our eyes, we ought likewise declare it to be black. For it is to be believed unwaveringly that the spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Catholic Church his Spouse is the same - through whom we are governed and led to salvation. Nor is the God who formerly gave the precepts of the Decalogue any other than he who orders and rules the hierarchical Church of the present age.

APART FROM FAITH AND MORALS

When the Pope speaks on such matters as the example given above regarding the proper celebration of the Liturgy of the Word at Mass, he is clearly not teaching the Church some point of faith or morals. He is not talking of absolutes, but is speaking of things which, in themselves are contingent. In other words, he is saying that at the present, this seems to be the most desirable way of acting. From this, three consequences follow.

To a certain extent, the end he has in view in giving the directions that he does, is achieved even if our obedience is only external. Thus, in the example given above, the good the Pope hopes will be achieved by the avoidance of replacing the Scriptures with other writings for the Liturgy of the Word at Mass will be largely achieved even if celebrants do so unwillingly and without conviction. However, this is to be called conformity rather than obedience. The best value that such merely exterior submission could have would be that, given time, it might lead on to interior submission, since there is not that second remove from true obedience which a refusal even to conform entails.

The contingent nature of such directional utterances of the Pope allows for the exercise of personal responsibility in the implementation of these directions. This does not mean that we decide whether or not a particular injunction of the Pope is to be obeyed. Simply, as such it is to be obeyed. However, quite evidently there can be circumstances which could properly lead to a suspension of exterior obedience. For example, when the Pope says he wishes priests and religious to dress recognizably as such, he would not mean priests and religious to do so in a country where such dress is forbidden by law.

As a practical issue, it is possibly in these areas where the Pope is not teaching matters of faith and morals that most people have the opportunity of exercising the asceticism of obedience. To put aside our own will and judgement in small matters can sometimes be harder than putting them aside in greater matters. So, too, with exterior conformity. We all have our own ideas on what is the best way of doing something.

A TIME AND PLACE FOR EVERYONE

These directives of the Pope, then, certainly more frequently and perhaps more demandingly, invite us to both exterior and interior asceticism. The interior sacrifice we are invited to make is the putting aside of our own will and judgement. The exterior sacrifice we make is our surrender of a way of speaking and acting we might naturally be more inclined to, and adopting the way requested of us.

Sometimes, this latter can require the acceptance of life-long consequences. For example, the marriage laws of the Church of a bygone time are no longer applied with nearly as much stringency as they once were. But while they were in force their observance demanded of many people a life-long sacrifice. They

would have fallen with particular hardship on people who could feel that the situation would eventually, inevitably change. (Rather as people had, and have, to accept the fact that, given time, medicine will cure illnesses which at the present are fatal or have crippling life-long effects.)

Ideally, of course, this should not be - and would not be in a world in which sin and the effects of sin were not realities. We, however, are presently concerned with incorporating often very difficult obedience into a total spirituality. If you like, literally making a virtue of necessity, literally making the best of a given situation.

Realistically, we must concentrate on the fact of two points in time, two places. They are the 'then and there' of Calvary; the 'here and now' of the time and place in which I find myself.

From all eternity, the two dates surrounding the hyphen on my tombstone are known to God my Father. So, too, are known to him the geographical boundaries of my pilgrimage on earth. Known to him also is every single item of the world's history which, being contemporary with mine, will impinge on me and on my life. We believe this; and we also believe that allowing this as he does God does so for no other purpose than our own good.

When, therefore, the law of the Church or the directives of the Pope, seem to fall heavily upon me, it is within my power to accept them in a spirit of submission in faith and love. Such self-denying submission is comparable only to that of the human nature to which the Son of God united himself when he, too, willed to belong as man to a given time and place.

By accepting obedience in any given situation, we are lovingly submitting to the providence of God which places us in a given time-place situation. Just so did Christ accept a manner of death which was purely contingent on the time-place situation in which, as eternally decreed, 'for us men and our salvation' 'the Word became flesh' in order 'to die for our salvation and rise again for our justification'.

CONCLUSION

It is not difficult to establish that within the Church of Christ there exists a pastoral office which has the right to command obedience. It is possible to divide and subdivide the degrees of seriousness in papal teaching and the degrees of obedience which must be given. But, in the long run, the thing that is really useful to us is to understand the spiritual dimensions of obedience and to integrate it into 'the whole' which our spiritual life should be.

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