



# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

The Good of Obedience in a Culture  
of Autonomy

JOHN P. LANGAN, S.J.

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IN A CULTURE OF AUTONOMY

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*John P. Langan, S.J.*

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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

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The Seminar is composed of a number of faculty members from the United States

and the seminar focuses on the spiritual aspects of Islam and the role of the individual in the community.

THE GOOD OF OBEDIENCE

IN A CULTURE OF AUTONOMY

The seminar will explore the concept of obedience in Islam and its relevance in a culture that values individual autonomy.

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## *Of all things . . .*

Buzz words come and go. "Globalization" now reigns in the political and economic sphere; and since Seattle and the World Trade Organization, it has impinged on the public consciousness at least as a word, even if many United States citizens do not recognize it for the reality that it is because at first glance they regard this country as so self-sufficient.

Globalization is more than a word if one works at the Institute of Jesuit Sources or with the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality. Every week we send IJS books to countries in every continent. But much more than numbers makes us globally conscious. For instance, at present we are editing English versions of works originally in Latin, Tamil, and French. The authors and translators of those works and of others originally in English live at present in India, Belgium, Italy, and the United States.

The Latin and Tamil are in three treatises by Robert de Nobili (1577-1656), the great Jesuit who, while living and working in India, urged that in proposing Christianity to the cultures of India, the Church make serious efforts to adapt itself to local customs as far as possible. Those treatises, newly translated by an American and an Indian Jesuit, will be published this year in a book to be entitled "Preaching Wisdom to the Wise." The French book, dealing with the Jesuit Constitutions, is being translated by one of our editors. The book is, as the author, a Belgian Jesuit says, a "sapientielle" reading of the Constitution. We are still looking for a good translation of the word "sapientielle." Do you have any suggestions? They will be gratefully received. In addition, we have had to keep in touch with other current authors who in recent months have been as far afield as Kenya and Indonesia.

For its part, *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* goes to many subscribers all over the world; and as we exchange *STUDIES* with our counterpart journals from all over the world, we find our perspectives broadened and deepened also. At least as vividly, guests who visit the IJS help to foster our global outlook. In the last two years, we have had visitors from at least the Dominican Republic, Belgium, Indonesia, Switzerland, India, Ireland, Canada, and England. (And others forgot to sign the guest book.)

Not only space but also time. Differences there too enrich our imaginations and the ways in which we might view ourselves, the world, and the faith. A book written by Caroline Bynum dealing with a very different time does exactly that: *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (Columbia University Press, 1995). The book does not treat the doctrine of the Resurrection, but rather the attitudes to the doctrine, the ways in which they developed, and the images used to think about and talk about both the Resurrection and the body that was to experience it. Medieval people wondered about questions such as, "What could it mean for

there to be a physical body when there is no more time?" We and they may ask the same questions, but the circumstances in which we ask them surely condition and differentiate the answers they gave and we give.

For us as Christians and Catholics, globalization is also a reality that extends far beyond the space and time of our lives as Jesuits. The Church in its very name "Catholic" intends a universality of space and time, and never was this more true than in the present. But that is matter for comment in a later set of these ruminations. On that subject I shall leave you for now to ponder the implications of the simple statement that I read recently: "The most striking feature of Christianity at the end of the second millennium is that it is predominately a non-Western religion."

Speaking of time—and anniversaries—a Jesuit chronicle notes that in 1650, 350 years ago, none of our priests in the Roman Province "was allowed to be indolent, slothful or lazy in administering the Sacraments since in this Holy Year an incredible number of pilgrims were coming from different nations to Rome."

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*  
*Editor*

P.S. In the last (November 1999) issue of STUDIES, I repeated a request originally made in the September issue that our readers give us a brief personal reply to the question, "What challenges you as a Jesuit at the end of this millennium and at the beginning of the next?" The "Letters to the Editor" in this issue of STUDIES contains several responses to that question.

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
THE DREAM OF RABELAIS .....	2
THE DEMAND OF IGNATIUS .....	4
AUTONOMY AND OBEDIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY .....	6
OBEDIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY JESUIT LIFE .....	8
A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE .	16
WHAT IS THE GOOD OF OBEDIENCE? .....	21
<i>SOURCES: Pierre Favre to Those Going on Pilgrimage</i> .....	26
<i>LETTERS TO THE EDITOR</i> .....	29

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### A NOTICE OF IMMEDIATE IMPORTANCE

On p. 179 of the *Catalogue of the American Assistency* for the year 2000, the telephone and fax numbers of the Institute of Jesuit Sources are incorrectly listed. We retain our customary numbers:

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# THE GOOD OF OBEDIENCE IN A CULTURE OF AUTONOMY

## Introduction

This essay has gone through a long process of drafting and revising, in which it has been much helped by the disciplinary diversity of the members of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality as well as by their perceptive charity. It is not an essay in the sources or the history of Ignatian spirituality, nor is it an exposition of canon law and the internal legislation of the Society on the topic of obedience. Rather, it is a reflection by a moral philosopher who specializes in social ethics and who has long been fascinated by the interplay between the religious and the secular in shaping contemporary moral thought. I hope that readers may find in it some new ways of understanding old values and that they may see connections with wider cultural and historical issues which are customarily left out of canonical and formational discussions.

My own experience of obedience has been within the Society of Jesus. I hope that a good deal of what I say will apply to other religious communities as well. But I thought it better to leave explicit references and comparisons to readers who are more likely to be knowledgeable about other communities than I am. Since I am focusing on obedience as understood and lived by Jesuits, who are, at least so far, an exclusively male community, the pronouns are unrelievedly masculine, a departure from my customary practice.

An aspect of obedience that I do not discuss in the essay, though it has been important in my own life, is the element of personal care—patient, understanding, and profoundly charitable—which my superiors have shown me on numerous occasions over the years.

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## The Dream of Rabelais

One of the most famous contemporaries of St. Ignatius was the enormously talented and entertaining French writer François Rabelais (c. 1483-1553), who made roughly the reverse of the Ignatian progress by becoming first a Franciscan, then a Benedictine, and finally leaving the cloister. Toward the end of the first book of Rabelais's fantastic parody of epic literature, Gargantua proposes to set up as the head of a monastery the monk who has helped him in combat. The monk declines to take charge of an existing monastery, and gave this as his reason: "How should I be able to govern others . . . when I don't know how to govern myself?" He insisted that the new abbey be set up according to his own devices. Gargantua acquiesced by endowing a large and splendid abbey, designed along the lines of the great chateaux of the Loire, such as Chambord or Chenonceaux, and placed in a parklike setting. The abbey is called Thélème, a name that transliterates the Greek word for will; its handsome and well-dressed residents are called Thélèmites. Rabelais tells us that

[a]ll their life was regulated not by laws, statutes, or rules, but according to their free will and pleasure. They rose from bed when they pleased and drank, ate, worked, and slept when the fancy seized them. Nobody woke them; nobody compelled them either to eat or to drink, or to do anything else whatever. So it was that Gargantua had established it. In their rules there was only one clause:

"DO WHAT YOU WILL,"

because people who are free, well-born, well-bred, and easy in honest company have a natural spur and instinct which drives them to virtuous deeds and deflects them from vice; and this they called honor. When these same men are depressed and enslaved by vile constraint and subjection, they use this noble quality which once impelled them freely towards virtue, to throw off and break this yoke of slavery. For we always strive after things forbidden and covet what is denied us.

Making use of this liberty, they most laudably rivalled one another in all of them doing what they saw pleased one. If some man or woman said, "Let us drink," they all drank; if he or she said, "Let us play," they all played; if it was "Let us go and amuse ourselves in the fields," everyone went there.<sup>1</sup>

The picture that Rabelais summons up is a happy one: desires are satisfied, order is maintained, virtue is affirmed, constraints are abolished. It suggests a benign theme park rather than a religious house, a utopia of consumption and amusement rather than a community of shared commit-

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<sup>1</sup> François Rabelais, *The History of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, bk. I, chap. 57, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), 159.

ment and spiritual growth. What makes the fantasy interesting for us is that it provides a slogan for a world of idealized self-love, a slogan which serves as a characteristic enticement for many movements of liberation and social criticism in the modern world: "Do what you will." This slogan is itself an abbreviation of a famous injunction of St. Augustine, "Dilige et quod vis fac" (Love and do what you will).<sup>2</sup>

Augustine's dictum implies that once the heart is fully converted and once love is the dominant consideration in the mind of Christians, they enter into a form of life in which the direction to good follows from their own motivations and is internal rather than imposed from without. The Augustinian command, if taken in isolation, presupposes a world in which obedience to directions established by others is unnecessary and in which an identity of motivation and desire will lead people to harmony in action. The possibility that God or nature may, if unimpeded, bring us to the stable enjoyment of the good without our encountering any need to rely on the restrictive authority of social structures or institutions is an appealing one.

The Thélèmites strike us as especially fortunate in that they seem to enjoy the benefits of cooperation without having to endure the burdens of authority. The abbey of Thélème probably comes closer to a dream we might have about an unusually successful club or resort than to our expectations of an effective polity or an economically successful firm. It offers us a superficial and easily imagined form of a society free of the efforts and struggles that arise from deep commitments to home and to country, to faith and to transcendent values. A reader of Rabelais may well be right in telling us that we are taking too seriously what is really meant to be a satirical fantasy. But for the purposes of this essay, my suggestion is that we regard it as a secular dream rooted in the Christian hope of Augustine and expressing a widespread wish to transform that hope so that it matches our desires, rather than transforming ourselves and our desires so that we match the hope of happiness that is to be realized in the heavenly city.

The vision of a society in which our desires are easily and harmoniously satisfied does not yield one determinate model or plan for the future of society; it is too vague and indefinite for that. But it is capable of assuming different shapes in different intellectual and social contexts. The dream of a world without obedience, a world of anarchic fulfillment can be dangerously destructive, encouraging conflict and revolution; or it can be seen as a moral demand of a humanity set free from the constraints of traditional

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<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *In Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos*, 7, 8; *Patrologia Latina*, 35:2033; this is also available in an English translation by John W. Rettig, in *Fathers of the Church*, no. 92 (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 223.

society and the tyranny of custom. As modern moral and political philosophy moves forward from Hobbes through Rousseau to Kant and Mill, passing through the revolutionary crises of seventeenth-century England and eighteenth-century America and France, the ideal of the individual set free from artificial or irrational bonds and empowered to become autonomous and self-determining emerges as one of the most powerful and most attractive objectives of an enlightened or modern society. Even the terrible events of the twentieth century have not destroyed a hope that a modern Thélème could be achieved, whether through a contractual agreement reached by rational agents or through some form of social or genetic engineering.

But this ideal or dream is not articulated merely on the higher levels of philosophy and jurisprudence; it is powerfully present in contemporary popular culture wherever "doing one's thing" is taken to be an obvious and important value and wherever traditional institutions are disparaged and personal fulfillment sought after, as defined by the individual. It is present in rugged individualists and in flower children, in business executives and in consumers, in tourists and progressive pedagogues, in would-be liberators of dependent societies and in proponents of self-help movements. The possibility that society can be organized so that each of us can do precisely what he or she wants to do remains an important object of hope and desire. This is true even when people fear to articulate such hopes and desires because, when stated baldly, they seem so naive and so vulnerable to dismissal and derision. The possibility remains attractive even though it resists precise formulation. It is, particularly in its articulation by Rousseau, one of the shaping aspirations of the modern mind.

## The Demand of Ignatius

If one characterizes the abbey of Thélème as a regime of withdrawal, leisure, and autonomy without discipline, one underlines elements that are clearly at odds with Ignatius's conception of the call of the King in the Spiritual Exercises and the Society of Jesus' conception of itself. For Ignatius proposes a regime, a way of life that is marked by engagement, strenuous activity, and obedient service. The projects of individuals are to be subordinated to such overriding goals as the glory of God and the salvation of souls. These, of course, are not ordinary goals such as energetic and ambitious people set for themselves, like winning a marathon or making a million dollars. Such goals require specific steps for their realization. The goals that Ignatius has in mind are compatible with a wide range of means and intermediate conditions. They are also goals that are not primarily within the scope of human agency and human planning. But in the mind of Ignatius they are not so generic or so abstract that they are without influ-

ence on the direction and content of our decisions. It is clear from the course of his life and from the context of the Spiritual Exercises that Ignatius expects the projects of individuals to be integrated within the ecclesial community, which needs committed individuals who will give their working lives to meeting its needs for leadership, for teaching and scholarship, for ministry and service.

The first expectation in accepting the Ignatian demand is that individuals will be willing to join their lives and their projects under an authority capable of coordinating and integrating their individual efforts into the larger but less-than-ultimate purposes of meeting the needs of the Church and the various communities it serves. This commitment to meeting the needs of the Church is a decisive first step in shaping a way of life that will be more specific than doing God's will or observing the two great commandments.

The second expectation is that the individuals who commit themselves to this life of service and obedience will at the same time be ready to undertake a spiritual discipline in which they will, with the help of God's grace, modify and transform their desires. They are not treating this way of life as an instrument for satisfying desires that are considered as given and fixed and effectively beyond criticism. Rather, they are offering themselves to be transformed by the experience of following Christ in the search for God's will. In line with this second expectation, the activity of the community is not evaluated by its conformity to the expectations of the individual agent or by its promise of satisfying the desires of the agent; but, rather, the goals of the community provide a basis for criticizing, assessing, and modifying the desires, the habits, and the actions of the individual members. The individuals who constitute the community of service will then need a process of formation in which they examine critically their personal desires and the affective and social influences that have shaped these desires. They will also have a continuing need for times of self-scrutiny and prayerful reflection in which that task of critical examination can be renewed and made effective. For Ignatius, as for Augustine, the injunction to do what you will can be regarded as realistic and prudent guidance only when the desires and the will of the person have been transformed by charity and by the desire to follow Christ. In the case of Ignatius, this transformation is expected to occur when the person has made the Spiritual Exercises.

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*In contemporary popular culture "doing one's thing" is an obvious and important value.*

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## Autonomy and Obedience in Contemporary Society

The contrast I have been sketching between the dream of Rabelais and the demand of Ignatius brings before us an echo of the "culture wars" of the sixteenth century, in which yearnings to be free from traditional religious authorities led to collisions of established religious and social communities and often with the commands of political authority. The contest

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*There are social spaces for personal decisions that can be beneficially or virtuously filled in ways that are not simply applications or extensions or increases of autonomy.*

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between freedom and authority, between autonomy and the requirements of obedience, between conscience and tradition, has continued down through the intervening four centuries. Autonomy has come to be a dominant concern, what Charles Taylor would call a "hypergood," in terms of which a wide range of ethical issues and social roles are assessed and reconceived.<sup>3</sup> In extensive areas of the law and political life, in culturally innovative areas of artistic creation and technological invention, in sexual behavior, in places where entrepreneurs

are anxious to promote economic change, in periods of dissatisfaction with central authority and its attendant bureaucracies, in generational conflicts within families, in churches that reject hierarchical mediation and affirm the primacy of the Spirit present in the local congregation—in all these, autonomy has come to be one of the most widely acknowledged and deeply cherished values of modern societies.

But there are also vast stretches of modern life in which the place of autonomy is either insecure or unclear or else regarded as clearly secondary. Most businesses, the military, nursing homes, schools, government agencies, and correctional facilities are all organized according to goals or principles that may leave some place for autonomy but that, as an essential part of their functioning, impose significant constraints on it both internally and externally. In fact, obedience is a notion more likely to be at home in these and similar settings, where it makes sense to borrow the language of the military and to speak of a "chain of command," than in a society composed purely of marketplaces and voluntary associations. But given the divisions within our culture, the acknowledged importance and value of obedience within such institutions as the military and bureaucratic agencies and organizations, whether these are public or private, is not likely to produce a

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<sup>3</sup> See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 63-73.

positive response among those who most value autonomy and who look with considerable suspicion on the institutions that demand and exemplify obedience.

Furthermore, such a way of trying to make obedience intelligible runs the risk of turning it into a purely instrumental value contributing to the more efficient attainment of institutional purposes. But obedience as a significant religious and cultural value cannot be simply a mechanism for getting people from job *A* in Minneapolis to job *B* in Indianapolis—a point that spiritual writers have understood down through the ages when they connected it with the search for the will of God and with the gift of the self to causes, values, persons, and communities that are seen to be of greater worth than the individual self. But if obedience, conceived as a social instrument for allocating resources and as an institutional means for effectively carrying out tasks, does not give us an adequate appreciation of the religious meaning of obedience, it is a way of thinking which helps to show that even if we think of the matter in purely secular terms, the culture of autonomy is far from giving us a complete or comprehensive model for complex modern societies and the values that they need to affirm and practice. There are social spaces for personal decisions that can be beneficially or virtuously filled in ways that are not simply applications or extensions or increases of autonomy.

Once we come to see that autonomy cannot be made to serve as a unique criterion of institutions and that its place as an overriding or supreme value for contemporary societies can be contested, we should not, on the other hand, rush to denigrate it. Autonomy is often invoked to protect the selfish desires of individuals for petty or tawdry objects, and the appeal to autonomy often signals a desire on the part of the well-off and the comfortable not to be bothered by the needs of their neighbors or to be burdened or constrained for the good of society at large. But still, we must recognize that appeals to autonomy also serve to remind us of the urgent need to protect the minds and consciences of persons from the intrusive power of the state and the “big battalions,” as well as from the pressures and resentments of a conformist or intolerant society. The idea of autonomy can be used to legitimate selfishness, but it retains close and powerful connections with intellectual and moral projects that aim at liberating human beings from closed and oppressive social systems and enabling them to take responsibility for their own lives and to contribute to the common good of a free society.

We also need to be candid in recognizing the limitations and the historic failures of cultures in which obedience has been a central value. The ability of authoritarian and militaristic regimes to exploit the ethos of

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obedience and the frequency with which obedience is enforced by coercion and fear rather than allowed to arise from personal commitment are factors that make many of our secular colleagues and fellow citizens wary of entrusting important values to organizations and cultures in which obedience is a dominant element. In addition to the broad social, political, and historical questions that a demand for obedience raises, there are also the particular negative personal experiences with obedience that people have had within organizations ranging from the U.S. Army to HMOs. These experiences can be frustrating and absurd; they can also be demoralizing and dangerous. Our society generates numerous stories ranging from *Catch 22* to *Dilbert*, in which obedience leads to farcical results and unfits us for dealing with the stupidity and selfishness of leaders and rulers. Even when their arguments run thin or lead to inappropriate conclusions, the defenders of the culture of autonomy can wage a fierce and often telling polemic against the proponents of obedience and authority.

### Obedience in Contemporary Jesuit Life

If we are to get beyond pointing to the limitations of autonomy and if we are to offer some positive account of religious obedience to persons who have been largely shaped by the culture of autonomy, we need to sketch something of the contemporary practice of obedience in Jesuit life. I will follow this by offering a general framework for thinking in philosophical terms about the practice of obedience. In carrying out these tasks, I will not proceed by reflection on the theology and canon law of religious life or by explicating relevant Jesuit documents, though I will refer to them. These documents have primarily an internal audience of people who share a very large number of experiences and assumptions and who have a common religious commitment and a shared institutional framework both in the Society and in the Catholic Church. The audience that I have in mind is not, however, purely external to the Society and the Church, since the line between the culture of autonomy and the culture of obedience runs through the hearts and minds of my brother Jesuits and many other religious who have had to struggle with living and understanding the life of the vows in Western societies in the late twentieth century. Much of what I say about our current practice may strike them as banal or obvious; but I venture on an approach that relies heavily on description of basic features of obedience that are often taken for granted, hoping thus to move the discussion beyond the influence of certain stereotypes beloved of both critics and defenders of obedience. The remarks that follow reflect the limitations of my own experience, but they are not intended to be autobiographical or merely anecdotal.



Most Jesuits of my age (I entered the Society in 1957) or older were shaped by a style of novitiate and seminary training that was highly disciplined and provoked most of us to think of our life together as monastic or quasi-military in its drastic restrictions on personal freedom. In the early years what we did was regulated hour by hour and day by day. Those outsiders who remember the lifestyle of those days and those whose views of Jesuits have been strongly influenced by the military background and military metaphors of St. Ignatius may harbor the illusion that Jesuit life is still lived in such a regimented style and that superiors routinely issue commands requiring instant obedience under pain of sin. More recent visitors, on the other hand, and persons who are struck by the diversity of opinions and activities among Jesuits may wonder whether there is indeed any effective authority governing the lives of Jesuits that they are ready and willing to obey.

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Here it is useful to recognize the difference between

- a. those regulations which a superior or official of the community issues in order to resolve problems of coordination in a large institutional community,
- b. the decisions which a superior makes and the policies which he adopts about the values to be expressed in the life of the community and the work of its members, and
- c. the commands which he issues to individual members of the community with regard to serious matters in the expectation that they will be obeyed.

All of these can be expressed in the imperative mood, and they may all proceed from the same individual; but they are different in purpose and in their religious gravity. In a non-Thélémite religious community, all three sorts of directives will be present as factors in the awareness of the community and its members; but they normally apply to different kinds of issues and areas of life.

If one looks back over the thirty-five years since the days of Vatican II and the Thirty-First General Congregation of the Society (1962-65), the most visible changes relevant to the life of obedience have taken place in the



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regulations governing community life and in the decisions and policies shaping the community and its work. To put matters in a compact and oversimplified way, the number of regulations has been greatly reduced and toleration of exceptions to them has significantly increased. The regulations are also usually expressed in a more pragmatic and flexible way. In a large community, for instance, one now shows up for dinner within certain determined hours, not at a time fixed for all. Living according to a set schedule and doing the same thing at the same time with one's brothers in the community is not and never has been essential to religious obedience; but it was often thought to manifest and to promote a culture of obedience, which is why it was thought especially suitable for seminaries and houses of formation. It was never really compatible with Ignatius's recognition of the variety in the gifts and calls of individuals or with his pragmatism with regard to the choice of means in our ministries. On the other hand, the issuing of regulations in a large organization or even a sizeable community has many generally beneficial effects, some of which are more attractive to the regulators than to the regulated. Regulation can further standardization and predictability, and it can resolve many problems of coordination. So even if the Society were in the next century to become an electronic network of widely dispersed small communities, regulations of some sort would still remain useful and necessary.

The making of decisions and policies regarding community life and the work of institutions sponsored or conducted by the religious community is a vitally important task for religious superiors, as it would be for the leaders in any comparable organization. Recasting ministries so that they are available to and supportive of the poor and the marginalized, providing support and refuge for persons whose human rights are in jeopardy, committing substantial resources to the care of elderly and frail Jesuits in a period of lengthened lifespans, discontinuing ministries that are no longer viable—these are all decisions that contemporary superiors take, though usually only with much prayerful reflection. These decisions often present subjects, both as individuals and in groups, with prospects that can be intensely painful and be interpreted as a rejection of their past efforts. But they are at the same time decisions that they have made a prior commitment to obey.

In the post-conciliar period, it has come to be recognized that for a wide range of such decisions, preliminary processes of open discussion and formal and informal consultation are useful and even necessary. Working on a common task usually requires a shared understanding; when the tasks are complex and the criteria of success are multiple and varying, the procedures usually employed in a vertical model of organizational behavior, in which information travels up and decisions travel down, are often pathetically

inadequate. Even if consensus cannot be achieved in difficult cases, it is widely recognized that the effort to achieve it through open discussion and wide consultation is worthwhile and leads to a better-informed and more intelligent implementation of the decisions.

It would be idle to pretend that this has led to the transformation of the Society into a participatory democracy of the type favored by some political theorists and by assorted radicals of the sixties. But it is safe to say that there has been a significant shift in the direction of providing more information, of attempting to build common understanding, and of encouraging comment and feedback. This shift has been modeled on a global scale by the four general congregations that have been held since Vatican II, but it is also seen locally in a clear and direct form where Jesuits conceive of their work together as the functioning of a team. But it can be

found wherever the power to lead is seen as including a significant emphasis on the power to persuade.<sup>4</sup> The power to persuade is essential whenever the work of the Jesuit community requires for its realization a high degree of collaboration with non-Jesuits.

In contemporary settings, many of the non-Jesuits who are involved in the work are likely to be as intelligent and as highly educated as the Jesuits themselves; they will be understandably reluctant to accept exercises of authority that they regard as arbitrary or unaccountable; they will have interests and concerns that they feel morally bound to protect, for instance, the welfare of their spouses and children. As participants in the culture of autonomy in many societies around the world, they will more readily challenge the authoritarian style of governance that has often flourished in the culture of obedience.

While regulation has declined and persuasion and discussion have increased in importance in the daily lives and the work of most Jesuits as well as in the shaping of policy, it would be a major mistake to think that the commands of superiors no longer function as a central means of resolving pressing issues in the lives of individuals and communities. Obedience does not need to be explicitly invoked very often; it remains a decisive factor

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<sup>4</sup> This point figures prominently in the influential work of Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Leadership* (New York: Wiley, 1960).

in the context of many deliberations and exchanges between superiors and subjects. It is simply presumed that major superiors or provincials will be able to assign their subordinates or subjects to new tasks or to new locations, that they and local superiors will direct people to behave in ways intended to mitigate or resolve disputes which may have arisen within a particular community or work, that superiors at both levels will order subjects to take steps to deal with health or addiction problems, that higher superiors will forbid people to act in ways which are deemed to be injurious to the Church or to the Society. There may, of course, be more specific commands; but the categories I have just mentioned probably cover most of the situations in which members of the Society have felt that they were expected or required to obey. Superiors would almost certainly view non-compliance with their directives in these and similar matters as a failure in obedience, even when they do not construe it as a direct violation of the vow of obedience.

We should also notice that some of the broad categories I have mentioned are matters on which educated Christians of intelligence and goodwill routinely have disagreements. It is clear that a Jesuit who engages in sexual harassment of his female colleagues or who is unable to complete a full day's work because of alcoholism is acting in a way which is injurious to the Society and to the Church, as well as to himself and the values he is vowed to promote. But it is far from clear in all cases that a Jesuit who truthfully accuses local political authorities of corruption and abuses of power is acting in a way which harms the Society and its work, even though his outspokenness may well put some aspects of the work at risk.

In many cases, of course, the pattern is not that the superior commands and the subject obeys, but rather that the subject proposes or requests permission and the superior responds to the proposal by granting or denying permission.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Here we must remember that a terminological ambiguity arises from the difference between the ways in which philosophy talks about "the subject" and the ways in which canon law and Catholic writers about religious life talk about "the subject." Both of these in turn are different from the common use of "the subject" to refer to the topic one is discussing or investigating, as when a judge or a teacher admonishes a witness or a student, "Stick to the subject at hand." In philosophy "the subject" is the singular person (who may be first person in the style of Descartes or third person) who thinks or acts or feels or questions or uses language or chooses. The term is normally used in a generalizing way to discuss features that are common to human beings rather than those that are proper to this particular individual. It usually refers to the person who stands in the subject position of a declarative sentence when the verb is in the active voice; for example, *I* chose to teach at Loyola University," or "*He* thought that going to the missions was a way to respond to the general congregation." The term is commonly used to refer to the

This too is an exchange structured by the vow of obedience; but it allows for considerable initiative on the side of the subject, and it takes into account that in many cases the subject is much more knowledgeable about the various possibilities in a given field of research or work situation and about their likely advantages and disadvantages. Particularly with regard to undertaking new academic or professional positions, Jesuits are now expected to take exploratory initiatives and, in a timely fashion, to bring possible positions for consideration by superiors. At the same time, they are not to take the approval or permission of superiors for granted, even though they may have to make some decisions themselves when the opportunity for effective communication with superiors is restricted or when emergency situations arise.<sup>6</sup> The superior may then be in the position of ratifying a decision that a subject has already taken or perhaps of approving a plan for an institution that he does not fully understand. Such a situation is likely to require humility and trust on both sides of the exchange.

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person as a center of thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires—one who is related other subjects co-inhabiting the world. This usage differs from the sense of “the subject” found in canon law and then in literature about religious life, in which “subject” is contrasted with “superior” (and not with “object”). This second usage is derived from a monarchical or hierarchical organization of society and, simply by itself, presents problems for anyone who thinks about religious life from the standpoint of the culture of autonomy. Nonetheless, because of its familiarity and its place in the legal system of the Church, it is the term I will use in this paper to refer to ordinary members of religious communities who have no executive or judicial authority. To talk about “the subject” of decisions and choices, that is, the one who decides or chooses, I will (at least provisionally) use the term “source.”

<sup>6</sup> This possibility was recognized by St. Ignatius himself. It has been an essential part of the life of the Society over the centuries that its members were expected to go to distant places and then, within the limits set by quite broad and flexible directives, to improvise what actually needed to be done. An early example of this is found in a letter Ignatius wrote in February 1555 to Fr. João Nunez Barreto, who had been nominated patriarch of Ethiopia; a translation of the letter is available in *Letters of St. Ignatius*, ed. William Young, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 381-90.

and his effective authority. Candor about these asymmetries is one factor that differentiates the practice of obedience in contemporary culture from what prevailed during those eras when it could reasonably be assumed that superiors and leaders routinely had greater access to information and a broader range of experience and competence than those who were called to obey. The virtue of obedience cannot require the subject to pretend that the superior knows things of which he is manifestly ignorant.

But what is at stake in many situations is not simply the use and interpretation of information on which a decision is to be based; it is a matter of deciding which of several possible goals and competing values are to have priority. Here the subject needs to acknowledge that the superior is entrusted with authority for the good of the community and of the Church as well as with responsibility for the personal and religious development of the subject. It is surely reasonable to think that his judgments and decisions can add important, often crucially important, considerations to the deliberations and desires of the subject. The superior is often unlikely to know

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which is the best graduate program in physics or economics or sacramental theology; but it is his responsibility to decide whether approving a particular person's request to undertake graduate studies will be for the good of the Society or of a particular apostolate, such as higher education or retreat ministry, and whether it will be for the long-range good of the individual himself. The practice of obedience is increasingly seen to require attention to the information that subjects have about their capabilities, interests, needs, problems, and possibilities for cooperation in various apostolates. Neglecting this information is unlikely to lead to better decisions or better

outcomes. At the same time, flexibility and generosity have to be present in the subjects, who may have to postpone or subordinate their own interests or preferences for the sake of goods and needs that the superior judges to be more urgent or more worthwhile; the superior is, of course, expected to make these judgments in line with the traditions and values of the Society and with a view to the common good of the Society and the Church, and certainly not with a view to enhancing his own interests.

What these considerations point to is the transformation of a situation of command and obedience into a richer and more complex process

of exchanging information and discerning reactions on both sides with the resolution of the matter still remaining in the hands of the superior. This process will not always lead to convergence and can often be experienced as frustrating and disillusioning. But if it is carried on honestly and patiently, even the negative moments that make it difficult can also be seen as positive because of the ways in which they build a more realistic understanding of the points of view of both superior and subject ("Yes, I do have an addiction that diminishes my work and my apostolic effectiveness," or, "I did not understand why you were so reluctant to do what I proposed") and because of the opportunities that they provide for the expression of mutual respect and fraternal charity.

The result of these changes, which have some precedents in the early experience of Ignatius and his followers in the years before the Society became identified with its global institutional network, is that the culture of the Society has become less authoritarian. Consultation, representation, and open discussion are routinely practiced and recognized as important aspects of the life of the Society. The making of important decisions about institutional policies is no longer treated as closed to discussion and assessment by communities; decisions about personnel, on the other hand, are normally more tightly held, since they often involve confidential information. Stereotypes and fantasies about rigid systems of control executed by the general and his advisers, about arbitrary commands issued by petty tyrants, and about the unquestioning, quasi-automatic responses of their subjects are now seen as travesties of the authentic practice of obedience and as ways of discrediting the work and the spirituality of the Society.

Some members and friends of the Society still hanker after an earlier period in which the Jesuits were widely perceived as the "marines" of the Church, an elite body of shock troops ready for rapid deployment wherever needed. Even if this image is no longer appropriate for most decisions shaping the lives of Jesuits, it is still true that individual men and communities continue to make great sacrifices of cherished projects and personal preferences because superiors have made decisions that require these sacrifices either directly or indirectly. That many men make these sacrifices and become reconciled to decisions they would never

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have made if left to themselves may strike many inhabitants of the culture of autonomy as alarming or regrettable; it impresses most Jesuits as a manifestation of grace and reassures them that the voluntary and noncoercive bonds holding the Society together remain intact. Non-Jesuits may appreciate these sacrifices by analogy with the sacrifices that spouses and parents make within the setting of the family; people accept the modification, postponement, and renunciation of cherished projects for the sake of those whom they love. The reality of obedience in the Society has become loquacious and interactive—and this should be no surprise for anyone who knows more than one Jesuit. But it has not become an empty formality or a mere echo of the historic past, even though it has become in important respects a new social reality.

Contemporary Jesuits are not Thélèmites: their experience of conflicting visions and demands is too real and too painful, too rich in its responses to the needs of Church and society, too venturesome in its engagement with contemporary culture and its conflicts for it to be captured by what is an amusing but ultimately insipid vision of how human beings are to live together happily while pursuing a shared set of values.

### A Framework for Understanding Contemporary Practice

What follows here is a provisional listing of factors that need to be considered in the development of a realistic account of obedience in the contemporary Society of Jesus as well as in the large number of religious communities that look to developments within the Society for assistance as they formulate their own understanding of their way of life and its charism. I will be trying to move beyond the generalizing descriptions of the previous section and attempt to point out the fundamental elements in the concept of obedience, hoping to make them more intelligible to those who approach obedience after long immersion in the culture of autonomy.

First, obedience is a commitment freely undertaken. Without the initial and continuing exercise of freedom, obedience is simply conformity to the desires or the power of another; and such conformity is not of any religious worth in itself. An act of obedience carried out in conformity with the vow is both a commanded act and a free act.

Second, obedience alters in a fundamental way the source of the decision. The point here is that the decision maker in acts where religious obedience is being exercised is in reality composite. In different ways, both the superior and the subject decide, the superior by issuing a command, the subject by choosing to obey the command. The action will not occur unless both concur. The action is in this sense intersubjective. It is thus liable to



problems of misunderstanding and imperfect communication of the type that we usually encounter in intersubjective dealings. The action or decision will stand in different relations to the motivational systems and preferences of the two persons, which will likely overlap (since both are members of one religious community, have made the same vows, and have shared a broadly similar spiritual and intellectual formation), but which are not going to be identical.

Third, obedience involves a structured relationship in the making of decisions and in the life of a community, with one party, the superior, retaining the authority to decide and the other, the subject, accepting the obligation to act in conformity with the decision. The relationship continues beyond the particular moments of decision and can be assessed along a number of different dimensions. We are normally concerned with the emotional quality of the interactions between superior and subject (trusting, resentful, distant), with the way in which the relationship manifests the character of the persons involved (reliable, friendly, open, solicitous, withdrawn, sensitive to criticism), and with the moral and religious assessment of the relationship (faithful, generous, inspiring, exploitative, immature).

Fourth, obedience is a relationship between persons who are fundamentally equals, that is, the superior and the subject are equal in human dignity, in their standing as creatures before God and as persons redeemed by Christ. By definition, the superior and the subject are not equal in authority; and the subject in taking a vow of obedience accepts a relationship of subordination not merely to this superior but to anyone who occupies this or a similar position. But the relationship is voluntary and not necessary or natural. It is also reversible, since the superior himself has taken the same vow of obedience as the subject, who may in fact someday become his superior. The vow forms a gift of certain aspects of the self. The subject, like the superior, remains a person who has responsibility for his own growth as a moral and religious person, who has obligations of conscience, and who has to determine the shape and meaning of his own life. Both of these persons are fallible in their knowledge, limited in their sympathies, and imperfect in their progress to the fullness of life in Christ.

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Fifth, obedience is a virtue and value concerned with the living of a life and with the shaping of decisions in a way that is faithful to the standing of the person as a free and intelligent creature. It is not exhausted in the making of objects, the carrying out of tasks, or even the doing of deeds and the achieving of goals. It is thus not primarily an instrumental value; and its worth for the subject and for the superior as well as for the community is not to be appraised primarily in terms of the successful conduct of operations or the accomplishment of tasks. In this respect it is fundamentally different from obedience in a secular organization. A religious may actually be commanded very rarely, but lives under obedience constantly. Obedience serves as a steady condition of his or her life, a defining relationship that, because it is a definite commitment, excludes certain possibilities and requires that other possibilities be approached in a certain way, for instance, by asking permission.

Sixth, obedience is lived within a community. Certain matters may be decided by superior and subject acting within their structured relationship. But the superior leads a community (which is normally more than one individual), and the members of the community routinely interact with each other. The superior can and, for certain matters, is required to attend to the views of members of the community in consultative processes. The superior often takes advice from and chooses to act in parallel with other superiors. Some of the most important and difficult decisions a superior or chain of superiors may take have to do with the terms under which a community lives, for example, accommodations, allocation of resources, and with the continuation and orientation of its work. Other important and difficult decisions that bring together both communal and personal aspects of life in a religious community have to do with the resolution of conflicts among the members of the community. A religious community usually (but not always) functions on a scale in which face-to-face interactions are the ordinary way of sustaining shared values and working out problems.

Seventh, the community bound together by obedience is itself included within and is subject to the discipline of the Church. Depending on the history and scale of the community, this will bring with it a requirement of obedience to the local bishop or to the Bishop of Rome. This juridical requirement is in addition to the obedience that all Christians owe to those who hold authority within the Church, an obedience whose limits and obligations are themselves contested in contemporary theology and practice but one that cannot be eliminated from the life of the Church.

Eighth, in addition to this juridical requirement, the community will recognize the need to interpret its life as a form of service to the Church, its members, and the world. This form of service will vary depend-

ing on the charism of the community, the needs of the local and the universal Church, and the decisions of superiors and members of the community; it can take the form of contemplative and intercessory prayer, of artistic production, of educational and medical ministries, of charitable activities, of pastoral ministries, of spiritual formation and direction. The work may well have a form of organization and authority that is distinct from the organization of the community itself. This division has in fact become quite common in the educational works of the Society, where it is not unusual to find both a religious superior or head of the community and a president or director of the work. This can produce conflict between those who hold authority in the two overlapping organizations, cognitive and normative dissonance in the members, conflicts of values between those more involved in the work and those more involved in the community.

Ninth, these reflections have focused on the superior-subject relationship. But we should note that one does not obey only a superior. One can also obey a specific command, a general norm or rule, a body of norms. One can act in conformity with the desires of the superior, the implicit or explicit wishes of the superior, the commands or desires of a higher superior (of whom there may be several layers), the spirit of a community and its founder, and the legislation of a governing body. The diversity of these authorities and the varying degrees of difficulty we have in interpreting them suggest that, even when there is genuine commitment and a

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desire to obey, there may continue to be lively disagreement about what obedience requires in a particular situation. Obedience channels but does not terminate processes of reflection, questioning, and interpretation. There is a casuistry and a moral deliberation internal to obedience. Obedience does not eliminate disagreement and uncertainty from the conduct of the religious and moral life. It is a travesty to present as the model of religious obedience a conformist individual who never questions or explores limits.

Tenth, the ultimate objective for the person who has taken a vow of obedience is to do the will of God. This is itself a difficult notion requiring theological analysis; but it is also one of the basic points of Christian spirituality and prayer, and it evinces a desire that has been strongly felt both by ordinary Christians and by great mystics, and one that is definitively expressed in several places in the New Testament, notably the Lord's

Prayer and the Epistle to the Hebrews. Two conclusions leading in somewhat different directions follow from this affirmation. The first is that searching to do the will of God without reliance on prayer is in effect to go up a blind alley. The second is that the point of obedience is not to do the will of the superior. The command of the superior is a very weighty indication of the will of God for this religious in this situation and is not normally to be overridden. But appeals to higher superiors are ordinarily available, and crisis situations may occasionally arise in which the command of the superior and the moral demand of conscience appear to be irreconcilable. For the command of the superior is not an infallible indication of God's will; much less does it constitute God's will for the subject. The virtue of humility continues to be relevant for both the superior and the subject. The continued difficulty experienced by a subject of goodwill in accepting a command should be an occasion for the superior to reflect again on whether the command truly expresses God's will for this person.

Eleventh, there are normally two goods brought into being by obeying the command of the superior. The first is the moral and religious good of obeying, of acting in accordance with one's prior solemn commitment. This good is present in acts of obedience, whether these are explicitly commanded or undertaken freely within the context determined by obedience. The major exception to this claim about the goodness of obedience arises when the act commanded is manifestly sinful; then the act of obedience does not have this moral and religious goodness. The constant tradition

within the Church is that religious superiors do not have the authority to command acts which are manifestly sinful and that there is no requirement for their subjects to obey them when what they command is manifestly sinful. In the absence, however, of reasons to think that the act commanded is sinful, the moral and religious goodness of obeying constitutes a good reason for the subject to obey; this reason will in normal circumstances be sufficient both to ensure the goodness of the act and to motivate the well-disposed subject. Second,

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*The heart of a positive exposition of obedience would, I believe, lie in an account of the ministry and passion of Jesus as an expression of obedience to the will of the Father.*

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ond, there is the goodness proper to the act being done, which will include the goodness of the consequences of the act as well as the goodness that it has as an exercise of human capabilities. This goodness is limited and incomplete and may be looked at from a number of points of view. Not every act performed under obedience is successful in achieving its goal or beneficial in its effects. The cognitive and affective limitations of the superior

may make it more likely that he misses the point and commands or requires something which is less good or even harmful. But it is one of the responsibilities of the subject to look at the positive side of what is commanded as fully and generously as he can. This does not eliminate the possibility of asking the superior to reconsider or of appealing to a higher superior. It is an important means by which the subject incorporates the decision and the act commanded into his plan of life and endeavors to make something good of it, even when he may have serious reasons for doubting whether the act is a good thing to do.

This enumeration of fundamental features of the practice of obedience in contemporary religious life is very generic. It is not intended to show that obedience in religious life is always a good thing or the better course for an individual or a superior way of life. Rather, when taken with the previous section's description of the contemporary practice of obedience, it is intended to give the basis for a positive assessment of obedience as an element in religious life that can be understood by those who are in varying degrees committed to the culture of autonomy. Consequently, I have not explored here important aspects and different conceptions of obedience, some of which have been highly cherished within the Church, nor have I attempted a more positive, less defensive exposition of obedience. The heart of such a positive exposition would, I believe, lie in an account of the ministry and passion of Jesus as an expression of obedience to the will of the Father.

### What Is the Good of Obedience?

The two previous sections of this essay have been efforts to explicate the practice and the moral and social structure of obedience in the contemporary Society of Jesus. It is my hope that this account is in general both accurate and compatible with the values of the Society. It is also my hope that it contributes to the elimination of both positive and negative stereotypes of what the practice of obedience in a contemporary religious order is like. More positively, I hope that it is possible to offer, in the light of these general observations, some reasons why even those who have long been immersed in the culture of autonomy should be ready to recognize significant goods that are internal to the practice of obedience. In so doing, I will be offering what will seem to many to be a minimalist approach to justifying

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and commending obedience. This is not because I think that a more vigorous and robust approach to affirming obedience is not possible. There are, to be sure, considerations arising from the search for a deep personal identification with Christ and a strong, precritical love of the Church and its work and from the personal influence and persuasion exercised by individual Jesuits and other vowed religious. These considerations have an immediacy and an effectiveness that the more specialized considerations I will propose simply do not have. On the other hand, they are convincing and powerful for those who are already disposed to be committed; and they do not shed much light on the issues that occur to people who are torn between the culture of autonomy and the culture of obedience.

I should also mention that I will avoid certain lines of argument which I think are simply unacceptable within the culture of autonomy and which are also at the same time theologically or psychologically unsound. These would include approaches commending obedience to us on the ground that it is better for us not to be free or not to take responsibility for the shape and meaning of our lives, or arguing that authority ought always to be obeyed or that we ought to adopt an attitude of blind trust toward those who exercise authority.

In the contemporary situation, it seems to me that there are three main reasons why obedience should be esteemed as a good. These reasons demonstrate why it is that individual acts of obedience may have a kind of goodness appropriate to them that is in addition to the goodness that acts may have as an expression or instantiation of other virtues, such as charity, humility, and the like; they will demonstrate also why obedience as a constitutive feature of a way of life may help to make that way of life a good way of life.

The first reason is that to vow obedience and to act in ways which fulfill the vow is to engage in an exercise of trust and commitment. The relationship arising when a religious enters a religious community bears some analogy to the commitment that the spouses make to each other in matrimony: "For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, until death do us part." Entering into such a commitment and observing it over time requires an ensemble of virtues of the sort enumerated by Paul in Col. 3:12-25: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, mutual forbearance and forgiveness, and, above all "love, to bind all together and to complete the whole." These are virtues that are necessary for the nourishment and maintenance of long-term relationships; they have to be cultivated for the health and peace of a community that is strong enough to make serious demands of its members.

While the relationship between superior and subject has an important interpersonal element, it is fundamentally, of course, an institutional reality. The subject knows that in time, normally every six years, the superior will be replaced and the interpersonal element will have to be reconstituted. Also, the subject's concern is not to obey the superior as an individual, but to obey the superior as one who holds office and authority within the community. The subject's commitment and the superior's also (for the superior is not above the law and the community) is to the order, the community understood in the broad sense of all the members in union with the Church. The community, if it is to be a worthy object of trust and a sustaining reality in the lives of its members, must be trying seriously to be faithful to its distinctive religious inspiration, to what is often called the "charism of the founder"; and it must be striving to grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, who is the source, model, and goal of all religious communities in the Catholic tradition and who is the example of obedience to the will of the Father as a fundamental attitude of the soul. The existence and flourishing of communities of trust and commitment should be seen even in secular terms as an important good.<sup>7</sup>

The second reason for commending the practice of obedience as a good even in a culture of autonomy has to do with the transformation of the subject's hopes and desires and with the broadening of the focus of the subject's concern. Most contemporary moral and political philosophy in the English-speaking world is written on the assumption that we have to take people pretty much as we find them, that is, divided among themselves about what things are really good, ready to quarrel with each other about the distribution of those goods that nearly everyone wants (pleasure, wealth, power, esteem), intent on maximizing the benefits that they receive as individuals, confused at best on the priority of moral and religious values, and wavering in their readiness to treat others with fairness and goodwill. They do not manifest the vicious egoism of the inhabitants of Hobbes's state of nature, but they manifest the moral variability of, say, the inhabitants of New York

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<sup>7</sup> A secular interpretation of the value of religious communities can be developed on the basis of John Rawls's notion of social union presented in *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), and alternatively on the basis of Robert Nozick's notion of demoktesis in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1981).



or Naples. On the other hand, it has been an essential element in the major traditions of spirituality, both Eastern and Western, that the desires of the individual as he or she first enters upon the spiritual journey are not to be accepted as being in proper order just as they stand. Both novices in the spiritual path and the masters of the tradition find that a long and demanding process of transformation of the heart and its desires is necessary if we are not to be led astray by "disordered affections."

The life of obedience, which brings the subject into shared reflection with the superior about important decisions involving the priority of values, can clearly be a powerful aid to this process of transformation. It provides a social structure and an interpersonal setting within which the individual is willingly brought to confront possibly excessive and dangerous attractions to imperfect goods and to realize the hold of selfishness on his heart. This will be particularly true when obedience is not conceived as behavioral conformity to the commands of another who holds power, but as the commitment of a life to religious and moral values and to a community of other persons who have their own needs and their own perceptions of both the social situation and moral demands. This transformative effect of the practice of obedience is not something

that is always achieved at once when the subject does the act commanded, important as that ordinarily is; this transformative effect may also require a considerable time and serious conversations with one's spiritual director and the opportunity to learn and to experience in ways arising from the new situation brought about by the act of

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*Our affections and our hearts are often educated by our actions and their effects. The religious practice of obedience, then, is a model of one way in which people can be brought from a condition of individualistic selfishness to committed cooperation in the pursuit of the good.*

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obedience. Our affections and our hearts are often educated by our actions and their effects. The religious practice of obedience, then, is a model of one way in which people can be brought from a condition of individualistic selfishness to committed cooperation in the pursuit of the good. It is certainly not the only way; and it is not the primary way for most people, for the school of love formed by marriage and the family is that. But it is a way that, because of its openness and flexibility, is a valuable example which can be made to serve many of the needs of the Church taken as a whole.

The third reason why the practice of obedience ought to be esteemed in the culture of autonomy is the structure that it provides for



people to undertake a commitment of lifetime service in work that tries to meet the needs of diverse overlapping communities. These include the Church, the ecumenical religious community, political and civil society, various local and regional groupings, and the "ungroup" of those who are poor and marginalized, persons lost in the great social transformations of our time. This reason is especially important for Jesuits and for members of other apostolic (as contrasted with contemplative) religious orders. The commitment involved in obedience is not merely a commitment to a relationship; it is also a commitment to the work needed for the development of the Church and for the expression of its character as the people of God. The religious is not committed by vow to a particular project or type of work; in fact, he subordinates his personal commitment to a project or a shared task to the larger commitment made to the Church. His personal commitment, valuable as it may be in itself, is taken up into the commitment of the religious community that interprets the needs of the Church and of the people in need of help. The Jesuit or other apostolic religious makes himself or herself available to the community and to the Church for the work. The stance of openness for service, of "apostolic availability," constitutes an effort at cooperation that can be applied within education, social work, intellectual research, the organization and empowerment of communities, health care, and many other areas of human concern offering significant social benefits recognizable across religious and ideological boundaries.

The three reasons that I have proposed for acknowledging the good to be found in obedience correspond to three different, though not unrelated, ways in which the person grows beyond a naive and often egoistic subjectivity in which elements of generosity and selfishness are spontaneously intermingled and are often obscured by a lack of self-knowledge. These three ways are trusting relations with others in a community to which one makes the commitment of obedience, commitment to the transformation of one's own desires, and readiness to serve the needs of others beyond the community. Persons who have chosen to enter into a course of life in which these commitments are centrally important have some prospect of attaining the harmonious and unconstrained way of life to which the Thélémite dream aspires, but only after the long discipline of complying with the Ignatian demand as articulated both in the transformative prayer of the Exercises and the practical requirements of obedience.

## SOURCES

BL. PIERRE FAVRE, S.J.

### Instructions for Those Going on Pilgrimage

*Favre probably gave these instructions for travelers to Alvaro Alfonso and Juan de Aragon, two court chaplains to the infantas Maria and Juana, daughters of Charles V. (Juana later became the one woman Jesuit in the history of the Society.) As an act of courtesy, they sent the two men to accompany Favre when he left Spain in 1542. The chaplains fell so much under his influence that they asked to join him. He later sent them on pilgrimage, fortified by these instructions. The text was preserved among the writings of Jerónimo Nadal, S.J. The instructions touch on a number of topics dear to Favre. This text, translated by the late Martin Palmer, S.J., is taken from *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre: The Memoriale and Selected Letters and Instructions* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 340–42. The translation has been slightly revised.*

Father Favre, at Mainz, when he was asked for instructions for the pilgrimage[, wrote as follows]:

Some persons want to be delivered from their woes—poverty, hunger, toil, and the like—by turning immediately to creatures in order to find help in them. Others turn to creatures, but do it through God, asking him that they be helped by creatures and through them delivered from their woes, as with persons who in time of need pray thus to the Lord for deliverance: “Lord, give us bread; give us this or that; move this man or that man,” and similar petitions. But there are others, walking more perfectly, whose desire is not to be delivered from their woes, but to receive strength in the midst of them directly from the Lord. These persons ask him to grant them patience and courage, to take away their fear and similar emotions, so that they can bear their woes bravely. Their concern is for their interior woes; they care not for the outward ones and cast aside all worry about

them, as Christ has taught us. At the same time, they take care to guard against anything that smacks of tempting God.

Sometimes timidity and weakness of spirit can weaken our bodies. Conversely, robustness of mind can make our bodies robust. Hence, in our toils we ought to throw aside all fear, timidity, and so forth. The spirit will bear up our bodies.

When eating, drinking, and conversing with others, we ought to aim not at winning their approval but at edifying their consciences. There are some who pay regard to other people’s characters and behave in such a way as to get their approval as affable and good-natured; these do not so truly edify others’ consciences. Those who are concerned about their consciences, on the other hand, strive to live in such a way that

they will always be pleasing both to God and to anyone who at all times could not but express approval of what is right and good.

Entering any city or town, we should call upon the angels, archangels, saints, and patrons of that city or town. We should greet them and call on them to assist us, just as we would in paying visits to men. We should converse with them and pray to them on behalf of the city or town placed in their charge. We should ask them to rule and guide it and on its behalf to beseech the Lord to move the hearts of its inhabitants to repentance and the like. We should also give thanks for the blessings that have been bestowed on those territories: the crops, the river, and so forth. As we consider how many enjoy these gifts and how few acknowledge them, we ought to render thanks in the name of all.

Seeing strangers on the road, even if they are soldiers or other men, we should not allow ourselves to have any suspicions against them. Our thought should be that they are good people, and we should pray for their good and should in a way unite ourselves to them with a bond of charity and love. Thus we will rid ourselves of fear, rash judgments, and the like. And if anything untoward does befall us, we should take it as coming not from man but from God; for nothing can happen to us apart from his will. Taking it in this spirit, as from the Lord's hand, we ought to bear it patiently and calmly.

Our words are of three kinds. They may represent our ideas, as when a person expounds in words some idea or insight he has had; these we could label "thought words." Again, some words serve to explain other words, as in the exegesis of Scripture and the like; these

we could call "word words." Finally, some words recount things that we or others have done to the praise of God; these we could call "deed words" or "action words." Now, while it is true that people generally take pleasure in the first and second kind of words, which nourish our minds, still, since what people want most is to act, they get more pleasure from the third kind and find them more useful for life, because through them they learn ways, methods, and procedures by which they can act.

Speaking of students, he [Favre] used to say that they should not take it ill to go back to learning the elements of Latin or basic logic, and the like. People would find it even harder to have to go back and learn how to speak their mother tongue, how to think at all, and so forth; yet that is just what God did. He became a baby and over a period of time acquired a mother tongue and began to know and understand by what is termed experiential knowledge. More than that, he went so far back as to have his feet, hands, and other parts of his body grow larger little by little. Rightly seen, this is an amazing thing even in ourselves—how much more so in God!

He used to say that in all of God's gifts we should consider three aspects: the gift itself, the one who gives it, and his motive in giving. This will bring us to have a high regard for each and every gift, as is the case in our dealings with human beings when these three elements are present. It is by not directing our minds to these three things that we often get a reputation for ingratitude, because we fail to value the gift as we ought.

He used to say that just as in any major or difficult undertaking we carefully plan out its execution beforehand,



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eager to perform it as perfectly as possible, and then after its execution we look back with regret on any mistakes we have made, thinking, "Here or there I went wrong"—and similarly even with our conversations—in the same way we ought to plan out our prayer beforehand, saying, "I am going to make this prayer at such and such a time," filled with anticipatory eagerness to perform it with attention and devotion and to have it heard by God and so forth. And when it is over, we should examine any faults we may have committed and rue our mistakes. In this way, we will eventually reach the point of praying with fruit. He used to say it was amazing what care we take about things we are going to do or say, and how negligent we are in the matter of prayer, even

though prayer is more important than anything else we say or do, however good. We go to prayer negligently and we leave it cold.

Simplicity and goodness should eventually get the upper hand over our natural way of thinking. That is to say, though on a natural level we might think it right to be angry or depressed over something, nevertheless, goodness and simplicity ought to put up with it. Sometimes we are interiorly anguished; and though this spirit may speak what is true, reproving us for our many failures, nevertheless, if it robs us of our tranquillity, it is not the good spirit. The spirit of God is peaceful and gentle even in reproof.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

In the opinion of the undersigned "Juana, S.J." is an idea whose time has not arrived. Helping women to be Themselves by having them become Ours is radical but ill advised. Why not focus our attention on rehabilitating the word "obedience" for our individual and communal search for knowing and doing God's will? Not only is this radical but advisable and counter-cultural as well.

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Editor:

As a Jesuit who has been sixty-seven years in journalism and theatricals, I have consistently welcomed STUDIES this past decade. Judging from the paucity of letters to the editor, I wonder about the enthusiasm of readers.

So, I wish to make a small contribution to the McDermott-Fagin colloquium in the current issue of STUDIES, as a non-theologian. [See STUDIES 31, no. 5 (November 1999): 42f., and 31, no. 3 (May 1999): 1-23.—ED.]

Briefly, their disagreement is about "fidelity." Father Fagin contends that "all Christians [must] search together for truth in dialogic community with different gifts" and confesses that we have suffered from a "too narrow understanding of 'fidelity' that does not acknowledge the voice of the Spirit in all Christians."

This, to my mind, is basically Lutheran, fully Protestant; and it explains

why there are so many divisions of Lutherans—a house divided. For what purpose did Rome convene nearly twenty councils "that encouraged informed and open discussions" on such varied interpretations and personal proclamations of these voices "of the Spirit" and condemn them as erroneous?

In other words, there is but one true Church, one true voice, one truth, and one magisterium: "You are Peter, on this Rock is my Church."

Martin McDermott is right quoting the whimsical poet: "I am faithful to you in my own fashion" (to myself).

John J. Barrett, S.J.  
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*In the November 1999 issue of STUDIES, we extended an invitation to our readers to give us a brief personal reply to the question, "What challenges you as a Jesuit at the end of this millennium and at the beginning of the next?" The following letters were inspired by that invitation.*

Editor:

As a reader of STUDIES, I neither dislike writing letters nor fail to find a challenge as a Jesuit. But preoccupation with the millennium is a matter for those who read the decimal-number system into the realm of real change.

Not having any software vulnerable to the coming new year, I have given little thought to this event. Born during the first World War, I experienced some real epochs, like National Prohibition and the Great Depression. But none of these eras neatly corresponded to dec-

ades. I remember the "Roaring Twenties"—my older cousin was in college—but they stopped roaring because the stock-market crash on Wall Street came in 1929, not because the next page on the calendar was 1930.

In the Society I have never been impressed by conventional anniversaries. An anniversary is "golden" only for those conditioned to think of numbers with a base of ten. I never felt much difference between being in the Society forty-nine or fifty-one years.

In this day, computers have, for practical reasons, made the binary system of numbers prevail. And having dealt with degrees, minutes, and seconds, I am at home with the base of six. The primary timekeeper in my room is a marine chronometer, faithfully ticking off time at the meridian of Greenwich; this means that when New Year's Day arrives, it will render revelry at Times Square an anticlimax.

In the terminology of the Scholastics, the millennium is an "ens rationis." But that doesn't prevent me from discussing challenges any old time.

Frank Cosgrove, S.J.  
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Editor:

The challenge for me in the new millennium lies in the grace of my annual retreat this year. I went into the retreat with the deepest feeling of desolation that I had experienced in my twenty-five years since ordination. I trembled as I told my director that I had lost all feeling of zeal, enthusiasm for ministry, availability, and desire for God's will. I

felt utterly mutilated—castrated might even be a better word. Ignatius's counsel about the grace of experiencing our weakness in desolation became my path to consolation and to my particular examen for this year and probably the next. With my hands on his crucified feet, I beg the desire to do the Father's will; to be available to the whole Society to work anywhere in the world where I can make some small return for all he has given me.

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Editor:

Here's my reply. Not bookish, but personal and brief:

When Ignatius first looked around for something that he and his followers could do for the Church, he went to the area where he saw the greatest need. So he first had them teach the *rudes* about their Catholic Faith.

As we enter the twenty-first century, I see that the greatest need in the Church (in North America, at least) is the basic education of our young—those in **grade school**. The old parochial schools are disappearing (have already disappeared in many places), or have lost much of their clout.

"As the twig is bent . . ." Now we are receiving into our high schools and colleges young people who don't have a strong foundation in Catholic doctrine and practice; they have already imbibed much of the materialist and consumerist culture of our time. The CCD education that is given is not really enough to "unbend" these twigs.

I would like to see the Society move in where the need is greatest today and get into grade-school education for both boys and girls, without, however, leaving our high schools. There are any number of other groups who can go for the big degrees and do the scientific research. We, the "shock troops of the Church," should mass our forces where the need is greatest.

I don't mean just teaching religion, but teaching the whole nine yards of the grade-school curriculum, in a religious atmosphere. Public schools just don't cut it.

That, my brothers, would entail some painful amputations, and would dismay many. It is a gigantic challenge! Can we take it up for the next generation(s)? Would this be to the greater glory of God?

A sidelined teacher,  
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Weston, MA 02493-1398

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Editor:

This letter replies to your request in the November 1999 issue of *STUDIES*, soliciting a response to the question: What challenges you as a Jesuit at the end of this millennium and at the beginning of the next?

What challenges me as a Jesuit is what, I believe, challenges the Church and all believers in Jesus Christ. Since the discovery of organic and cosmic evolution, the Church as such has never related Christian revelation to what we now know of the real world that God created. From massive and basically in-

contestable research, we know that the universe we live in is now more or less twelve to fourteen billion years old. Over the past several decades, this has been news to all human beings, including both scientists and others, believers and nonbelievers, the well educated and the less educated, from all laity through all clergy and all theologians. Concomitantly, today the size of the universe, though surveyed only approximately, is beyond anything that could have been reasonably imagined until very recently. Despite the massive study and research that has brought humankind this relatively new knowledge, many human beings inside or outside communities of Christian believers have hardly assimilated this knowledge theologically or otherwise. The Church cannot continue indefinitely to act and speak as though this knowledge did not exist. This is the world that God created.

Recognizing the problem facing us is not answering it, or even addressing it. How can we situate ourselves and Christian belief in what we now for the first time know of God's creation?

No matter how vast the universe is, we can situate ourselves in it *spatially* in the sense that we know that we are *here*, even though it might take a little doing to find out what *here* comes to in terms of the vastness of the universe.

The question of time is more complicated. What is remarkable is that, although time is evanescent—"time flies"—we can situate ourselves in the universe in *time* rather well. Not in terms of the beginning of the universe, because we cannot date the beginning of the universe with any precision if we can only say, "more or less twelve to fourteen billion years" ago. But in terms of well-known events in historical time datable

from our present position in time as known in secular history, we can situate ourselves and the rest of the world around us in real time rather well.

We know that, however old the universe is, in faith Christians relate to it in terms of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and his life and death, which the Bible is careful to anchor in our secular time—not with total accuracy, to be sure, yet with the kind of accuracy with which we commonly work when dealing with matters in antiquity. But the anchoring faces ahead. We are not supposed to get *back* to the Incarnation or to anything else. Christian fulfillment, the second coming of Christ, lies *ahead*. This means that we had better incorporate the insights of evolutionary studies into our Christian understanding of God's creation. Evolution faces the universe in the present and the *future*. Nonevolutionary understandings of creation have the future closed. A non-evolutionary secular history is simply false. A nonevolutionary understanding of the world in which God's revelation was given and now exists is theologically fatal.

The urgency of situating ourselves in God's real creation, rather than in an

imagined creation we are more comfortable with, is intensified today not only because our knowledge of the real universe is so vast and circumstantial but also because the place of humankind in the universe has been so radically changing over the years. On January 22, 1985, I gave the Wollson College Lecture at Oxford University. Its title, "Writing Is a Technology That Restructures Thought," means what it says. Writing has changed forever the relationship of human beings to creation. Later, print has changed this relationship even more. Electronics still more. With the computer, human beings are interacting with the *evolving universe* in ways not possible earlier. With online contacts, we are *operating* not on a projected calendar but at the known point in time where the universe *really is*.

The issue is urgent and complex—too complex to be handled as a full answer to your question. But this makes the question even more pressing.

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