

INTRODUCTION

AUTHORITY AS SERVICE OBEDIENCE AS JESUIT TRUST MISSION AS THE LINK BETWEEN THE TWO

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‘Obedience and Mission’ are two deeply inter-related religious realities. Even more, this dyad is at the core of the life of the person called to be a companion of Jesus in his incarnate salvific mission. ‘Mission’ takes shape in persistent and generous service through obedience. And ‘Obedience’ of an adult person and community discovers its meaning and radicality in the entrusted mission, namely, ‘being sent’ in the name of Jesus.

Modern anthropology with its socio-cultural context questions the tension obedience-mission; and in turn this reality particularly in the life of religious apostolic life, is challenged to discern in freedom and to rediscover its mystical roots.

Spiritual guides of lay and religious persons and of apostolic movements, formators of seminarians, superiors of religious communities know well that there is no easy path or a ready made pedagogy to facilitate obedience elicited and lived in freedom.

Experience has shown that a person with the vow of obedience, who does not identifies with or embraces the common mission of his or her religious order and who does not grow in either self-realisation of the value of a vowed life or in personal fulfillment through a collaborative, corporate mission, will find it very difficult to accept obedience as essential to his or her vocation. Typically, such a person will focus on personal projects rather than on the richer experience of a shared apostolic mission, resulting in a life of self-

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sufficiency, competition, careerism. Obviously the more significant result will be the lack of deep meaning in one's relationship with the Lord and frustration with one's everyday apostolic commitment. *A lifestyle of obedience-mission is so radical in its thrust and daily practice, that it is either lived in a deep and joyous mystical experience or it does not meet with human standards and judgment.*

Decree 4 of General Congregation 35 (2008), "Obedience in the Life of the Society of Jesus", complements Decree 8 on "Chastity in the Society of Jesus" of General Congregation 34 (1995) and Decree 12 on "Poverty" of General Congregation 32 (1974-5). The sequence and times that each of the triad of vows – poverty, chastity and obedience – was addressed by general congregations respond to the challenging and complex cultural changes of society, which at the same time, makes it more difficult to find a common language and meaning for our apostolic religious life. Yet, by grace and openness to be sent in apostolic obedience, one discovers new signs and imagines new ways to rediscover living as Jesus lived and taught; living within the tradition of the scriptures, old and new testaments, one's spiritual and religious life is continual renewal which energizes our mission for contemporary society.

In my visits to many provinces in so many diverse countries and regions as part of my ministry at the Secretariat of Ignatian Spirituality, I am always impressed and edified by so many of my brother Jesuits, working with passion in difficult tasks and areas, in monotonous work sometimes, in long years of study and research, hidden many times from the media and the comfortable world. It is a good thermometer regarding obedience in the Society of Jesus where *mission is the link between authority as service and obedience as Jesuit trust*. All this happens amidst our many times ingrained individualism, subtle competition and difficulties to dialogue and discern together. Truly we are sinners and yet "called to be companions of Jesus as Ignatius was" (GC 32, D2, n.1, 11, 1974-75)).

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The article, "*A Mystical Union with God-acting*", by Joseph Tetlow, S.J., helps us understand the document, "*The service of authority and obedience*", of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction, May 2008, in the light of obedience

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as lived in the spirituality and tradition of the Society of Jesus, particularly as articulated in decree 4 (2008) of GC 35. We better understand not only both documents but also the specificity and grace of Jesuit obedience.

Mark Rotsaert, S.J. provides clarity and understanding of decree 4, GC 35 (2008) on “Obedience in the life of the Society of Jesus”. We see Ignatius’ vision of moving from ascetical to apostolic obedience as well as active apostolic obedience today and the Fourth Vow of Obedience to the Pope. The relationship of Obedience and Missions is discussed and commented on. “*Discernment and obedience in the Society of Jesus*”, a theological reflection by Francisco López Rivera, S.J., points to seeking of the will of God and the mission oriented dynamism in the history and tradition of the Jesuits. It presents us with the conditions and the dispositions needed for this.

Even if we all know the effect of culture on the meaning and practice of obedience in religious life, we seldom take seriously the challenges it presents us today. “*Obedience and diversity of cultures*” by Franz Meures, S.J. invites us to do so and thus grow in our spiritual discernment. This reflection is complemented by three life-stories of Jesuits from India, Spain and Burkina Faso, respectively Henry Pattarumadathil, Diego Alonso Lasheras, and Paul Béré. They relate how obedience, during their years of formation, was rooted in Ignatian spirituality and the tradition of the Society of Jesus. By living and practicing obedience, it formed part of an integrated, core religious identity and way of life.

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Authority as service and obedience as trust are only possible by faith as well as lived and rediscovered in each phase of life. We are invited to be better instruments in the hands of God according to time, place, people and mission. Modern social science offers us tools for exercising better leadership and governance in our culture today. We are grateful for publishing the Report and Recommendations, made to the Jesuit Conference Board-USA, in May 22, 2008 and approved by North American provincials in March 2009. It is inspiring and challenging.