

ECCLESIASTICAL OBEDIENCE

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[The article translated below appeared in the *Ami du Clergé*, 26th January, 1950, in response to a request expressed as follows:

'The ideas about obedience current among seminarists and even the younger clergy are often far removed from the formula: the Superior is the representative of God. Obedience is given when the order is agreeable or when the Superior is sympathetic. But to obey precisely because the Superior is God's representative is becoming more and more a rare thing, and as for the '*etiam dyscolis*' of St Peter, it is quite out of date.

On this question of obedience among the diocesan clergy, so important at the moment, will the *Ami* put before us the teaching of the Gospels, St Paul and papal documents, and show what is the part it plays in our life?'—Translator.]

FOR those who are of the diocesan clergy, the undisputed authorities must naturally be our Lord himself, St Paul and the Popes: from them we shall seek for the principles of our conduct, and then consider the practical application of those principles to our lives.

THE PRINCIPLES INVOLVED

1. Our Lord instructs us both by his teaching and by his example. At Jacob's well we hear these surprising words: 'My meat is to do the will of him (the Father) that sent me' (Jn. 4, 34). Again, in the sermon on the Mount, after the Beatitudes: 'Not everyone that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 7, 21). To the cry of admiration that went up from the crowd, 'Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the paps that gave thee suck', our Lord answered, 'Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it'—whence it follows that if the two could be dissociated, Mary would be less blessed in her divine motherhood than as the perfect 'handmaid of the Lord'.

The acid test of charity is obedience: 'If you love me, keep my commandments' (Jn. 14, 15); 'You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you' (Jn. 15, 14); 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me' (Jn. 14, 21).

* Translated by Canon Bernard Wall.

True obedience is inspired by charity, not by fear or self-interest or routine; on the other hand, genuine charity is expressed in obedience. It is this alone that will win through at the last: 'He that doth the will of God abideth for ever' (1 Jn. 2, 17). Here we find the spirit of the beatitudes in all its purity.

On this teaching of our Lord an intense light is shed from his own example. From the outset, beginning with the miracle at Cana, he speaks of 'his hour', that is to say, the manifestation of his Father's will, for him always decisive: 'The Son cannot do anything of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doth, these the Son also doth in like manner' (Jn. 5, 19). This all-sustaining, all-pervading, all-enveloping will is crystallised at times in a concrete fixed purpose, a clear-cut demand, making known to Jesus what it would have him do. It is 'his hour'. (Cf. Jn. 7, 6, 8; 8, 20; 12, 20-28; 13, 1; 17, 1.)

But *the hour par excellence*, the hour to which all others led and for which he came, is the hour of Redemption. 'Not what I will, but what thou wilt; not as I will, but as thou wilt' (Mk. 14, 36; Matt. 26, 39). A mysterious sacrifice—a bewildering human failure, yet source of universal liberation: 'In the which will we are sanctified by the oblation of the body of Christ, once' (Heb. 10, 10).

To reach this hour in perfect realisation of his Father's will, Jesus began by resisting the threefold temptation, ever-present to any apostolate: putting spiritual gifts at the service of his own personal and material interests, exercising the apostolate through the use of power, exercising the apostolate for the benefit of power¹ — all characteristic of Jewish messianism and the expression of profound human tendencies. (Cf. Matt. 4, 1-16.)

2. St Paul teaches us 'his ways' (1 Cor. 4, 17), that is, his moral doctrine, whose standard is the will of God (Rom. 12, 2; Ephes. 5, 17 2; Heb. 10, 36), that will which is revealed in the commands of civil authority. Of religious authority he speaks in Hebrews 13, 17: 'Obey your prelates and be subject to them: for they watch as being to render an account of your souls; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief. For this is not expedient for you.' (Cf. also 1 Thess. 5, 12, 13): 'We beseech you, brethren, to know them who labour among you, and are over you in the

¹ Henri Dumery, *Les trois tentations de l'apostolat moderne*, p. 220.

² F. Prat, s.J., *La Théologie de Saint Paul*, II, p. 382, ff.

Lord, and admonish you: that you esteem them more abundantly in charity for their work's sake'.

St Paul reveals to us in their utmost depth what were the dispositions of the Word at the moment he became priest through the Incarnation, and the following passage will ever remain for priests a key-text on the priestly spirit: 'Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not: but a body thou hast fitted to me (*sed aures aperuisti mihi* is the version in the new translation of the Psalter, *Fer. 3a, ad Tertiam*) . . . Sacrifices and oblations and holocausts for sin thou wouldst not. . . . Then said I: Behold I come to do thy will, O God. . . . In the which will we are sanctified by the oblation of the body of Jesus Christ, once' (Heb. 10, 5, 7, 10).

These dispositions were strengthened in suffering: 'And whereas indeed he was the Son of God, he learned obedience by the things which he suffered' (Heb. 5, 8); and the upward sweep of the Incarnation-Redemption, wholly animated with this spirit, is engraved in the sublime text: 'Christ Jesus, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. . . . he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father' (Philipp. 2, 6-11; cf. Heb. 2, 6-11; 12, 2-3).

The *Consummatum est* of Calvary meant simply the profound consciousness of this the Father's will now perfectly fulfilled.

Naturally, the teaching of the Popes inculcates the general duty of obedience to constituted authority by commenting on the text given above from the Epistle to the Romans. It brings out fairly clearly the limits of all obedience according to the mind of St Peter and the Apostles (Acts 5, 29): 'There is only one valid reason for refusing obedience: where a command is quite evidently contrary to natural and divine law, for then it is a question of violating either the law of nature or the will of God; both the command itself and the carrying out of the command will be equally sinful'.³

³ Leo XIII, *Diuturnum illud*. (Leonis XIII Allocutiones, etc., ed. Desclee, I, p. 215.) Cf. Henri Brun, *La Cité Chrétienne* (Bonne Presse) p. 175.

And now for that obedience which is common to the whole Church: 'Just as in the exercise of their episcopal powers bishops must be in union with the Apostolic See, so must the members of the clergy and laity live in close union with their bishops. Should a bishop lay himself open to criticism either in his conduct or in holding certain views, no individual has the right to arrogate to himself the office of judge. . . . Everyone should engrave on his memory the wise teaching of Pope St Gregory the Great: "Subjects must be careful not to pass rash judgment on the lives of their superiors, even when they see them acting in a manner worthy of censure. . . . They must be forewarned against the danger of setting themselves rashly in opposition to superiors whose faults are known to them. Even though superiors be really open to censure in their actions, nevertheless their subjects, deeply penetrated with the fear of God, should not pass interior judgment on them except in the spirit of ever-respectful submission. . . ." 4

'It is Jesus Christ who rules (the Churches) through the voice and jurisdiction of each one of the bishops. . . .'⁵

'We must accustom ourselves to see in the Church the Person of Christ. . . . To the extent that Christians bring themselves really to live by this living spirit of faith. . . . they will accord due honour and submission to the more exalted members of this Mystical Body, to those especially who by ordinance of the divine Head will have one day to render an account of our souls.' (Cf. Heb. 13, 15.)⁶

'The Church', wrote Bossuet, 'is Jesus Christ spread abroad and communicated, is Jesus Christ in his completeness, is Jesus Christ perfect man, Jesus Christ in his fulness.'⁷

Naturally, these general principles on obedience will apply even more rigidly to the priest. Pius XI, in his Encyclical on the Priesthood, recalls successively: first, the necessity of obedience, an obedience to which indeed we have pledged ourselves: 'This obedience the priest promised his Bishop immediately after his priestly anointing'. Second, this promise must be kept: 'Let obedience therefore bind ever more closely the different members of the sacred Hierarchy one with another and with the Supreme Pontiff, thus making the Church militant a thing of terror to the

⁴ Leo XIII, *Sapientiae Christianae*, *ibid.* IV, p. 23; cf. Brun, p. 303.

⁵ Pius XII, *Encycl. Mystici Corporis*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Bossuet, *Lettres de Piété et de Direction*, Lettre iv.

enemies of God. . . .’ On penalty of bringing the gravest dangers upon the Church, let obedience ‘assign to each one his part and his competence; let each one, too, accept them without demur, for resistance can only spoil the magnificent work the Church fulfils in the world’.

Thirdly, obedience is to be given in a spirit of abiding faith:

‘Let each one see in the measures taken by his hierarchical superiors measures taken by the one true Head, Jesus Christ our Lord, who for us was made obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. . . . wishing to show that even the most burning zeal must ever be profoundly submissive to the will of the Father; that is to say, ever regulated by obedience to those our lawful superiors, who for us take the place of the Father and make known to us his desires.’

We may conclude, then, that if charity is the bond of perfection (Col. 3, 14), one of the essential strands in that bond is obedience. There is no genuine, profound, sincere, christian, priestly obedience without charity; neither is there true charity without obedience.

In what way are these principles to rule our lives?

THE REALISATION OF THESE PRINCIPLES

To make the will of God take root in our lives through love is the whole sum of christian life: ‘Thy kingdom come, thy will be done’. In order to do this we must discover what that will is, must welcome it in a certain spirit, must realise it.

1. The will of God is made clear to us in a series of gradually narrowing concentric circles, each one, if it is to be authentic, being enclosed in the circle preceding it. In the first place there are the commandments of God and the Church; then there are the duties of our state defined by our office or mission; then the wishes expressed in the orders of superiors, those also pointed to by Providence; and lastly, the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

To the orders of superiors these words of our Lord have strict application: ‘He that heareth you, heareth me: and he that despiseth you, despiseth me. And he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me’ (Luke, 10, 16).

The juridical and canonical Church, let us never forget, is but the necessary expression of the Church of love.

‘In the authentic letters of St Ignatius of Antioch, at the dawn of the second century, the terminology relating to the ecclesias-

tical hierarchy, and the characteristics of that hierarchy, are already definitely fixed. There is the bishop, and never more than one; there are the priests, intimately associated with the bishop, and so united among themselves as to be normally referred to under the collective name of the "presbyterium" or sacerdotal college. . . . The two lower orders (priests and deacons) are united with the bishop as strings to a lyre. There is but one Eucharist, but one Flesh of Christ, but one chalice of his Blood, but one altar, but one bishop with the priesthood and the deacons.'⁸

Pre-eminently, sacerdotal charity 'makes us love as members of the body; obedience, in its turn, makes us will what we do as members of the body. Both therefore, from different yet allied points of view, contribute to making us parts attached to their one whole: the one, charity, by co-ordinating us with the rest of the parts, the other, obedience, subordinating us to the whole.'⁹

The question has been discussed as the nature of the promise we priests of the diocesan clergy have made.

'Canonists. . . . comparing it with the vow the religious takes on the day of his profession, have hesitated to give it the same rigorous character. But they have failed to see that the two are of totally different orders. The vow taken by the religious is to be classed (primarily) among the means of personal perfection; the promise made by the priest is of the apostolic and pastoral order. One may aim at perfection without entering religion and taking the vow of obedience; but without submission to the bishop there can be no dedication to the service of the apostolate. Here it is a question of the very structure of the Church, of the priesthood, of the apostolate.'¹⁰

Pius XI expressly underlined this, in the passage quoted above, by pointing out the dangers the Church would incur through any relaxation of priestly obedience.

Further, a decision made by authority which in our eyes is a bad decision, as indeed it may well be, will become the best possible if all labour wholeheartedly together in carrying it out: for any company the safest road is the one all travel together.

⁸ F. Prat, *ibid.* I, pp. 407-408. See there the references to St Ignatius of Antioch.

⁹ Emile Mersch, S.J., *Morale et Corps Mystique*, I, p. 119.

¹⁰ A. G. Martimort, *De l'évêque* (La Clarté Dieu, XIX, Ed. du Cerf), pp. 66-67—a valuable little book, extremely suggestive and concrete, which makes us hope for a 'De Episcopo'. Cf. *Pour le Clergé Diocésain* (Ed. du Vitrail) p. 55—one of the best general contributions on the spirituality of the diocesan clergy.

It would, of course, be useless to hide from ourselves that superiors have their failings, that their office has its dangers. This was realised by St John Chrysostom: 'It is one of the most dangerous failures with superiors, and at the same time one of the commonest, to refuse to take account of the views of others, to have their own way as if they were absolute masters, whereas they are only stewards'.¹¹

They must not forget that authority does not work within them like a sacrament, *ex opere operato*.

'When they make decisions, they may be deceived; they may administer their diocese, their parish, more or less well. Their lack of knowledge or their failings may diminish the effect of the message they transmit, whilst on the other hand their holiness will urge souls on to conform to that message.'¹²

In every society superiors are necessary, since it is the exercise of genuine authority that gives to the society its 'form' by directing it to its end. In the Church, normally, they are a blessing, but sometimes a trial too: yet every priest knows that a trial bravely endured is a blessing indeed.

'Superiors are neither infallible nor inspired, nor, necessarily at any rate, even very intelligent or very saintly. St Ignatius, who knew all about obedience, envisages quite naturally and calmly that a superior may be wholly unfitted for his position. Yet his conclusion is that nothing is thereby changed so far as obedience is concerned, any more than (to use a halting comparison) the Real Presence is in any way diminished because of the poor quality of the flour used in making the hosts.'¹³

Consequently, the last word must always be with obedience. Now let us consider in what spirit obedience should be given.

In our state of life the essential element governing its spirit is found expressed in the words immediately following the 'form' of the rite of ordination to the priesthood: *Sint providi cooperatores Ordinis nostri*.

'The priesthood is a participation in the sacerdotal office of the bishop. . . . It must not be imagined that to remind the priest of his fundamental, essential dependance on the bishop is to lower his dignity. On the contrary, it is to set that eminent dignity once

¹¹ C. Spicq, o.p., *Spiritualité Sacerdotale d'après Saint Paul* ('Lectio Divina' 4, Ed. du Cerf) p. 151.

¹² Cardinal Suhard, *Le Prêtre dans la Cité*, cf. *New Life*, August, 1950.

¹³ E. Mersch, op. cit. p. 66.

again before his eyes; for were he to imagine himself alone in his activities and independent, he would be tempted to make of his work a human work... he would fail to recognise his true strength, which does not depend on his own personal virtues, but derives from its being rooted in apostolic tradition, from its being founded in the *Catholica*, the Church of East and West.'¹⁴

Our state of life demands an 'active' obedience: '*PROVIDI cooperatores...*' We must enter into it with all our natural resources supernaturalised. To obey is to 'will with' by a whole-hearted co-operation, not simply material but formal. To will thus with the whole of one's local Church, with the whole Church, is not this already to rise above the personal element?

But our obedience will also have a sense of its responsibilities. It may be that in the judgment of the subject, and relatively to the particular sphere of which he has an intimate knowledge, the orders he has received will be ineffective or dangerous or even extremely harmful, and this clearly so. In such a case he has not only the right but the duty, with all due respect and reverence, to inform the superior, who perhaps has not realised it. Though the following passage refers to the relations of priests with their bishop, it applies also, *mutatis mutandis*, to the relations with any ecclesiastical superior.

'This union with his bishop is for the priest a source of great confidence.... Yet it may have cost him heroic efforts. For the Holy Ghost does not guarantee infallibility to each bishop individually, still less sinlessness. Consequently, in following his bishop he does not escape a certain risk: he may find himself at times in disagreement on some doctrinal matter, on some method to be employed in the apostolate.... Will the priest in that case cling to his own judgment, simply recognising the fact that it is not in accord with the bishop's? Will he, in spite of the bishop, follow his own opinion, apply his own personal methods? Will he, where there is a conflict of views, take the part of another bishop against his own? He cannot if he is fully alive to the pledge his priesthood involves. There is a solidarity between him and his bishop whereby he is in duty bound to submit to the bishop what he demurs to, what he finds difficult or open to objection: *In faciem ei restiti quia reprehensibilitis erat* (Galat. 2, 21). Obviously such steps must be taken with respect and reverence and in a

¹⁴ A. G. Martimort, *op. cit.* p. 66.

spirit of faith. Above all they presuppose the virtue of fortitude and a disregard for human considerations. They are indispensable if that unity which our apostolate demands is to be preserved and a profound peace maintained. When a priest indulges in criticism of his bishop in private or in public, it is but a noisy way of stifling the voice of conscience urging him to go and open his heart to him.' 15

If the command is insisted upon, what is the priest to do then? He can still ask, in all humility, that the order be imposed in the name of the obedience he has promised. This is a declaration in a consecrated formula that the superior takes sole responsibility with all the consequences.

And if the command now judged to be not only dangerous but obviously harmful is still insisted on, what then? If it is not evidently contrary to the law of God or that of the Church, if it does not clearly go beyond the sphere of obedience, then *obedience-service will yield to obedience-sacrifice: obedience must be given*, even though, apart from the difficulties mentioned above, it means doing an unfairness, even an injustice, to the subject.

This obedience-sacrifice, the closest possible imitation of our Lord's example, is founded upon the supernatural reality of the Church: its work, being Christ's own work, can be carried out through means quite out of proportion to the goal it seeks, out of proportion especially with means that are purely 'reasonable'.

St Ignatius has termed such obedience 'as it were blind', 16 a qualification the modern spirit has little taste for. Yet, if it is considered as manifesting the spirit of faith, it is seen to be singularly 'clairvoyant', functioning in the clearest light, not of mere natural reasons, but of faith, convinced that at 'the very moment self is renounced and the most intimate, compelling inclinations are sacrificed. . . . the imperishable common good is assured. So soon as worldly efficiency is disowned, at that very moment the power of the supernatural begins to work and with effect.' 17

The ultimate basis of obedience-sacrifice is confidence in Christ assisting his Church, confidence also in the Church, able to transform into a source for good the mistakes, even the culpable

15 Ibid. p. 67-68.

16 A. de Bovis, S.J., *De l'Obéissance à l'Eglise*, in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, Jan. 1948, pp. 20-47. (Certain ideas which could only be touched upon here are there vigorously developed.)

17 Ibid.

mistakes of superiors, and that through the heroic obedience of their subjects.

There are times, of course, when 'we require the faith of the good thief to discern the divinity of the Church behind the temporal features'.¹⁸ 'Moreover, those who are truly obedient are not timid nonentities who can be moulded and twisted at will; they are persons to be reckoned with, persons of decision.'¹⁹

'Ordinarily, it is those parts of the machinery doing the most work which require the closest adjustment to the rest; it is the priest, the missionary, the apostle, who require to be most closely linked with a work to which they would dedicate themselves ever more wholeheartedly.'²⁰

The plan of the Redemption continues to be realised far more effectively through sacrifice than through genius, still more when genius itself is sacrificed. God may allow all our best ideas, our most efficient collaboration to be set aside, assuring us of an unimaginable compensation at the cost of our sacrifice.

3. A word about the realisation of this spirit as it affects, not only the priest, but the seminarist also.

Seminarists belong to the diocesan clergy from the day of their incardination through tonsure. From that time they must begin to labour for their Church in union with the bishop—*providi cooperatores Ordinis nostri* even before the phrase strictly applies.

They require a keenness in their sense of the supernatural increasingly more than ordinary to be convinced that the vocation to which they are called, obedience-service, is in fact realised essentially during their period of formation in obedience-asceticism, for the training of the will, purifying it, giving it flexibility and self-mastery.

And so with the unreflecting there is induced a strong feeling of unease, of being stifled; and the reason in part is this. By his vocation and therefore by reason of certain capabilities he possesses, the seminarist is destined for obedience-service; yet for long years he is asked to practise obedience-asceticism almost exclusively. He does not grasp as clearly as he should that the dearest wish of his bishop, the greatest service he can render the Church, is that he prepare and make perfect the servant of tomorrow through the asceticism of today. It does not occur to him

¹⁸ Cardinal Suhard, *Essor ou Déclin de l'Eglise* (Ed. du Vitrail), p. 19.

¹⁹ E. Mersch, *op. cit.* p. 269.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 121.

that his dreams about carrying out some sort of ministry now or in the future (apart from a ministry, judiciously organised, designed to give him practice or to make contacts) are so many forms of escapism, deflecting him from the appropriate service incumbent upon him now in co-operation with the bishop's threefold ministry—in *teaching*, to prepare himself for it by a sustained, penetrating study, which in mastering the fundamental themes will enable him to adapt them to widely different needs—in *ruling*, to learn to direct, to govern others by submitting himself now to direction, getting into the way of ruling self, striving unceasingly for self-mastery and self-control—in *sanctifying*, to surrender himself completely to grace so that tomorrow, with all the heaped-up powers given him in the priesthood, his may be a spirituality that is contagious.

A magnificent programme this, which, in laying down in the soul the firm foundations of the priesthood, prepares the way for its application to many varied and unexpected fields.

For those already priests, the spirituality of the diocesan clergy is distinguished by three characteristics: 'the bond between them and the bishop, a father to his priests; the communal character of the diocese; the pastoral mission'.²¹ All these, obviously, can be realised only through obedience.

They should gladly remember that the Pontifical 'insists at length on their quality as auxiliaries subordinate to the bishop. This is their grand title to glory, their very definition. By virtue of their intimate dependence on the bishop they, with him and under his direction, are charged with extending the Redemption through the world in the exercise of apostolic charity.'²²

Sustained by their sense of the local Church²³ and a correct, profound *mystique* concerning the hierarchy, convinced also that 'without a deep, filial respect for the Pastor of the diocese, *Sacerdos et Pontifex*, fullest expression of Christ's Pontificate, there can be no Apostles',²⁴ they will accept whole-heartedly the orders they are given, presenting as occasion demands whatever information may be necessary. Then, if in the circumstances explained above the order is insisted upon, they will comply with all their hearts, convinced that an order, which in a particular instance may

²¹ *Pour le Clergé Diocésain*, p. 135.

²² Eugène Masure, *Prêtres Diocésains* (Lille), p. 75; cf. pp. 70-74.

²³ *Pour le Clergé Diocésain*, pp. 131-132.

²⁴ *Essor ou Déclin de l'Eglise*, p. 56.

spell disaster and in the generality a low standard, will in practice be for the best, provided all unite to make it a success.

Among the diocesan clergy the priest who has a sense of his state must experience an instinctive aversion to any personal element intruded in his work. Instinctively he will labour 'to promote joint effort in the apostolate itself, to de-personalise the priestly ministry in favour of the whole group'. Here we have applied the principle of the indivisible priesthood, so dear to the Fathers of the Church following St Paul. The faithful must not be in a position to say, 'I am of Paul, I am of Apollo', but only, 'I am of the Church, I am of Christ'.²⁵

'Priests and militants cannot remain in isolation without danger and the risk of being ineffective. The guarantee for their interior life, as also for their moral perseverance and mutual comfort, lies in the community; and this does not necessarily consist in a physical dwelling together. Above all it presupposes the team-spirit. It would have the messengers of the Gospel not to act the rôle of sharpshooters, but to surrender themselves to joint action in a convergence of views and methods. The return will be increased tenfold. The christian (and the priest) in isolation is a tiny islet in a watery waste of indifference.'²⁶

Every priest should keep continuously before his mind that he is the heir to yester-year, with the responsibility this heritage entails, and that he is preparing the way for tomorrow.

'Juridical membership of the Church calls for a like membership that is also mystical and vital; the visible union expresses a like union through grace in charity and obedience. The more profound the incorporation into the body of the Church, the more necessary is the vocation to give her obedience, the more necessary, too, for the obedience itself to be inspired by a highly delicate, generous charity.'²⁷

Thus it is that in the Church those in religion are more rigorously vowed to ecclesiastical obedience than are the simple laity, priests more than them all. Ordained after incardination into their local Church to labour always and exclusively in active co-operation with the bishop, they are ever ready for action in the service of the diocese, a service pursued with zeal and prudence; are careful, too, to practise through that service a sure way of

²⁵ *Pour le Clergé Diocésain*, p. 149.

²⁷ Cf. A. de Bovis, loc. cit. p. 46.

²⁶ *Essor ou Déclin de l'Eglise*, p. 54.

personal asceticism arising from the duties of their state. Nevertheless, they will, if need be, accept obedience-sacrifice in the clear light of faith, uniting themselves as closely as possible with the spirit of the Redemption—that obedience which was the main-spring in the life and passion of our Lord. Here is realised in an eminent degree the text, ‘I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ’ (Col. 1, 24); here, too, is realised the final commission given to the priest at his ordination, ‘Bear in mind what you do, let your conduct be in conformity with the action you perform, so that as you celebrate the mystery of the Lord’s death, so will you take care to mortify your members from every vice and concupiscence’. This priestly obedience is for the life of the Church the choicest form of the *opus operantis* in the Redemption. In the last resort, therefore, obedience is simply the most expressive form charity takes when, refusing to be content with fine words, she seeks a real union with him whom she loves, whom also she would closely imitate, the more effectively to further the redeeming work of him who is the Lord Jesus.

‘The priesthood is not a derived function (in the body social): it is not something artificial, an arbitrary product of our passing, incomplete (social) systems. It is not an incidental, an outward ritual garb; it affects the priest in his very being. . . . [It] is not something to be invented, it exists. In a sense it is not something but Someone.’²⁸ Its innermost spirit will ever be found expressed in that text from the Epistle to the Hebrews: ‘Then said I: Behold I come to do thy will, O God’ (10, 7). For the priest, charity is first embodied in obedience, which will preserve for the evangelical office its rightful structure, undivided and communal. The Apostolate is the activity of the Church.²⁹

Actuated by this spirit, ‘our diocesan clergy has also had its heroes, its saints. Of their virtue, a virtue of no mean order, we know the secret. Priests from our own land, they were nurtured from its soil. Where they were born, there they lived. As clerics they made it their choice, the Holy Ghost choosing for them. As priests, *they dedicated themselves to it—a mystical union this, a sublime contract, binding them indeed, but with a chain they hold dear and to a task that transfigures them.* Their regard for their beginnings has traced for them their destiny, and when the oak falls, it is on the spot that saw its seeding.’³⁰

²⁸ *Le Pretre dans la Cité*, p. 49.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 83.

³⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 90-91.