

THE FIRST LESSON

The First Step

We know from our catechism that God made man to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him in this world. Now, the first step to achieving this end is to know ourselves first, for by doing so we can begin to understand *what we are in relation to Him*. Put more simply, the first step in the spiritual life, the first step in our return to God, is to practise the virtue of humility.

Humility is a virtue which enables us to see how poor and helpless we are before God. Our Lord tells us in the Gospel of St. Matthew (18:1-5)

At that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying: Who, thinkest thou, is the greater in the kingdom of heaven?

And Jesus, calling unto him a little child, set him in the midst of them.

And said: amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven.

And he that shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me.

So if we wish to enter the kingdom of heaven, or if we would wish to embark on the path to heaven we should become humble as children.



The Attributes of a Child

Just as a child is naturally humble because he knows that he is no greater than his mother or father, so should we be before God – knowing that before God we are nothing.

A child trusts his mother and father too. Just as you probably have never had to worry about where your next meal was going to come from or where you were going to sleep, if we were like children before God, we would always trust that He would provide for our needs and that He would be there to help us when we are in distress.

Just as a child is naturally innocent – knowing and doing no evil – so we should be as adults.

Just as a child learns from his mother, so should we from our Heavenly Mother.

Just as a child loves his mother and father so should we – all our desires should be theirs.

Our Lord's Example

Now the best way of teaching is not with a whiteboard, it is not with a big stick, it is teaching by example.

If we place ourselves, therefore, in the stable in Bethlehem, we can learn from the example of our Lord. By His Nativity, He teaches us how to be small again – not physically, but spiritually. This was the first lesson of His life on earth: to teach us how to be sons and daughters of God the Father, brothers and sisters of Himself and also how to be children of Mary.

It is not possible to become more humble than God. No greater humility is possible than for God to join Himself to His creation – especially in such a manner. He was not born in a palace, but a humble stable, in a poor town, in a country occupied by a foreign power, in a race which had been punished for its infidelity.

As a child, He chose to entrust Himself to Mary and Joseph – His food, warmth, clothing, shelter and protection all came from them.

As a child, He showed us His innocence, His freedom from sin.

As a little child, He teaches us that we should learn from our parents – our earthly parents and our heavenly parents: God the Father and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

And finally as a child, he teaches us how to love: totally, unselfishly, devotedly and affectionately.

Let us ask the Baby Jesus that we might learn this first lesson well. May each of us become a child like Him so that, to make up for the coldness of His welcome into His creation 2000 years ago, we might welcome Him into the warmth of a loving heart from this moment until we can be with Him forever in heaven. Ω

THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE

Written by a priest of the Society of St. Pius X residing in the region of Marseille, France.

Developing the virtue of obedience is of primary importance in the education of children. Directly opposed to this belief, and one which has been in fashion for the last 40 years, is the notion that, no, it is the emancipation of the youth that must be cultivated to educate the young. In the light of the disastrous consequences of this latter notion, it is perhaps opportune to recall the Church's teaching on obedience. This teaching has never changed.

“Obedience in a rational creature is, in a certain way, the mother and the protector of virtue,” says St. Augustine (Cité de Dieu XIV 12).

St. Thomas Aquinas exposes the notion obedience by referring to same principles as those used to explain the notion of authority. These two notions are in fact correlative which means that you cannot have one without the other. Obedience,

therefore, might be understood in the light of an exposition of the notion of authority and vice versa.

Authority : To Make Grow

God has established a law in nature: superior beings make inferior beings act on account of a superior capacity they have received from their Creator (*Summa Theologica* 2a2ae q104 a4). The Sun is the principal agent of the elliptical orbits of its satellites. Adult animals engender new generations. Inferior beings cannot mature without the influence of beings which are superior to them. A child will always remain interiorly a child if it has not the improving influence of its superiors, in particular, by means of the virtue of obedience. The word *superior* denotes more than a juridical primacy in a child's parents. The word *authority* comes from the Latin word *augere* which means *to augment*

or to *grow*. This is not without good reason.

It is evident that men are unequal with regards to both the natural and supernatural gifts bestowed upon them. This is not only true of the gifts received from birth, but also of those received throughout their lives. This inequality imposes duties upon the superiors: parents for their children, the gifted for the less gifted, the greater for the lesser. Our talents are not bestowed upon us for our own personal comfort alone, but for the common good – for the benefit of our neighbour. St. Thomas Aquinas has this to say, “If one man is superior to another in understanding and in justice, it would be shocking if he did not employ this superiority in the service of others.” In these words he does no more than express the teaching of St. Peter, “As every man hath received grace, ministering the same one to another: as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Peter 4.10)

And so the function of authority is not to crush or constrain to maintain calm, but to act to make its object grow or mature. “It is all too easy to think of authority as a force which imposes tranquillity, but children need to be developed and directed and not simply to be immobilised. They must be given a certain vigour; their talents must be given a goal, a method, an arena for their exercise. They must be given the opportunity to act and react, putting them in circumstances where they must motivate themselves, instead of simply holding them down in a



“Now Vijay Joseph, this is the umpteenth time I’ve had to tell you...”

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state forced inaction. The goal of education is not produce children who are deemed “wise and good” because they are amorphous.” (L'exercice de l'autorité dans l'éducation, François CHARMOT - Les Etudes 1932).

Educating children is not about creating well controlled automatons; it is about teaching children of God to act out of charity and, as they grow, to act with the virtue of Christian prudence.

How are automatons made? Père Charmot (ibid) says that, first of all, “by a mechanical precision of action which leaves nothing to the initiative of the child, one produces more a puppet than a man. A despotism which makes no appeal to judgement, to reason, or to moral liberty, is good for making jelly babies, but is no good for forming the man [n.b. this is true only for children above the age reason – it is not a good idea to negotiate with toddlers]. Despotism does not form the virtue of prudence, it forms the passive virtue of resignation. The result is disastrous. Certainly for the despot, all will be well regulated according to his wisdom which is superior to that of the child, but the personality of the child would be destroyed. This how to make the perfect automaton.”

Convergence Towards the Common Good

Authority does not have for its end the making of automatons; it has the highest end which is the *common good*. Authority should be used ultimately for the convergence of many individual wills towards one common good. For parents and children, for example, the common good is the family. The convergence of wills cannot happen without authority: There, “where there is no government, the peo-

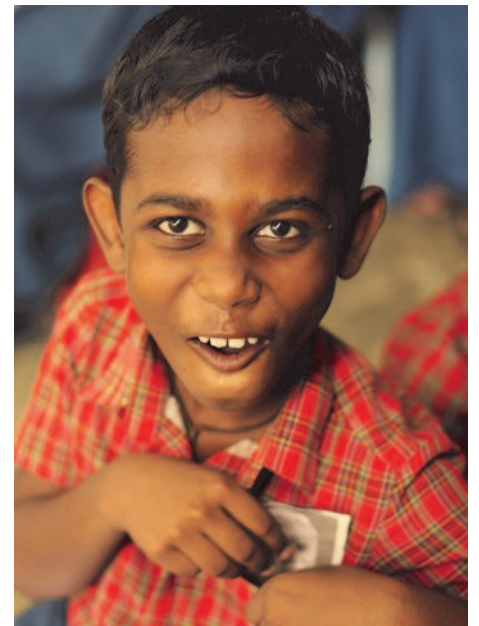


“Err, now let me see... yes Simroon...(What a picture of pathos!)...err never mind.”

ple disperse.” (Prov 11:4).

And so the goal of parents is not to simply make the different members of the family coexist together by carving out a “free space” for each one. This is the modern notion of liberty: “My liberty stops where the liberty of another starts.” Obedience has nothing to do with this; obedience is the virtue which ensures a collaboration of each member of the family towards a common good. When we exercise authority over a child, our commands should therefore be inspired by the necessities of the common good, rather than the particular good of this child or that. This means that sometimes we are called upon to impose decisions which require that a child sacrifices his particular good for the good of the whole family.

As can be seen, the notion of obedience is not complicated. It remains to reflect upon how its principles might be applied to the field of education. This will be treated in the next edition of the Apostle [if my dear confrère keeps his promise]. Ω



“Got Father’s note book! We’re all free!”



Scenes of jubilation.