



Father Nély humbly participates in Divine Sovereignty.

VIRTUES UNDERPINNING OBEDIENCE

*Adapted from the writings of a priest of the Society of St. Pius X
residing in the region of Marseille, France.*

In the last edition of the *Apostle*, an attempt was made to expose the underlying principles governing the duty of obedience in our children. Obedience was seen to be the co-relative of authority by **which children, according to God's will**, are led towards the common good. Obedience is nurtured by authority not with a big stick, but by example, direction and experimentation. In this article the virtues of humility, docility and prudence are exposed as the fertile soil in which the virtue of obedience may grow.

Humility Of The Child ...And Of The Superior

Obedience makes a child accomplish the commands he has received, but, in

order that he submits to these commands, it is necessary that he first put himself in his place relative to the commanding authority. **A child's submission to authority** is not just an exterior affair, it is above all an interior disposition by which he holds himself in a position of filial dependence.

A modern threat to this interior disposition of dependence is an unhealthy familiarity that is often seen between parents and children. This familiarity destroys the reverence due to authority. Those parents who make friends with their children, lowering themselves to become childish under the pretext of adaptation, have not sufficiently reflected upon the nature of authority. Certainly

they must adapt to their children, but only to make their children correspond more effectively to authority – their own authority and also to the most important **authority which is God's**. As soon as one abandons the title upon which authority rests, obedience is destroyed. (*L'exercice de l'autorité dans l'éducation, François CHARMOT - Les Etudes 1932*).

One might object, however, that by insisting on respect, any relationship of loving confidence between parent and child will be dampened. The example of the lives of St. John Bosco and many other saints should serve to dispel this fear. The reverence required of children is not a fear of punishment, but the perception of the greatness of those charged by God to make them grow. The respect (from the Latin verb *spectare*: to regard, to look at) a child has for his parents makes him look up to and esteem those to whom he owes his existence and education.

Another objection raised by the moderns is that the **imposition of one's authority** is a manifestation of pride. In fact, the opposite is more true. To diminish **one's authority** is to diminish the pre-eminence conferred by God by which one shares in His sovereignty. God asks us to reign by humility. It is the height of pride to **allow the consciousness of one's authority** (which is divinely conferred) to diminish or to allow someone to hold it for nothing.

Indeed, Père Charmot rightly explains that **the imposition of one's authority is actually a sign of one's humility**:

We must make our authority be respected as something sacred (...) We must, first of all, carry it with a dignity

that renders it eminent and, if possible, supernatural in the eyes of our children. As we participate in the authority of God, our authority is an expression of the sovereign dominion of God over His creatures. (P. Charmont)

This truth has significant consequences in the exercise of authority: A superior must be self-effacing before the Absolute. Which means that he must be spiritualised [elevated by grace], become transparent so that God shines forth through the visible signs of his paternity. That which must be effaced in the superior are his imperfections, his miserable condition, his narrow-mindedness, his disordered love of self. All must be effaced before Him of Whom we are but instruments. This means that a firmness of action is called for when there are principles at stake. A superior must impose his decision because it corresponds to what God wants. This implies that he must abandon his simple personal views and must submit himself humbly before the wisdom of God.

Docility

Another virtue which nourishes the virtue of obedience is docility. Docility is defined as the ability of allowing oneself to be taught.

God gives children a natural propensity to believe their parents, but two obstacles might present themselves to this virtue: (i) laziness which prevents the child from making the necessary effort to understand what his parents are saying, and (ii) pride which is contemptuous of the judgement of others. Aristotle has this advice: **“One must be attentive to the indemonstrable sayings and opinions of old men and of prudent men, and believe**

them not less than a demonstration.”

The modern world continues to delude the youth by making them think that they are capable of being the sole judge of what must be done. The youth, on the contrary, must understand that they know very little and that the commands of their parents are the words of God by which they are led to heaven.

Prudence

Finally, the virtue that renders obedience easy is prudence. Prudence is the habit of understanding why things should be done. When a child understands why he is commanded to do a certain thing (like washing hands before meals), he readily obeys. Parents and teachers should therefore be ready to explain their commands—not to justify themselves (that would be wrong)—but to progressively develop the virtue of prudence in the child according to their ability to understand. For those children below the age of reason, however, explanations are a waste of time (rather like explaining things to your dog).



“Anthony, just do it!”

Perfect Obedience

There are occasions, however, when explanations are not possible (e.g. when there is no time to explain or when the issue is too complicated or sensitive) and so children should sometimes be expected to obey without any explanation. This is not blind obedience, which disengages reason, but pure obedience and is of the hardest sort. It presupposes the virtues of humility, docility and prudence and is only possible with the aid of supernatural grace. Now, if you would like to cultivate *this* in your children, then you probably need to kneel down and pray for it !

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Sesu (centre)... a model of docility, but the two in the front (Moses and Joyson) could do with a good prod.