

materials of the same and the manner of their observance, acquire their obligation from the vows themselves. Those prescriptions which have reference to the government of the Congregation, determine the necessary offices, the duties involved in their exercise, and basic rules, also, the prescriptions which determine the nature and special purpose of the Congregation, create an obligation in proportion to the gravity of the matter involved.

Disciplinary or ascetical prescriptions, not included in those prescriptions mentioned above, do not of themselves oblige directly under pain of guilt even though they may involve matter having reference to the vow and virtue of obedience. The transgression of these prescriptions, even minor ones, if done out of formal contempt, or for provocation, or with a wrong intention, or if scandal is given and laxity in the spiritual life results, the guilt corresponds to the violated virtues.

LAUDETUR JESUS CHRISTUS

APPENDIX

**LETTER OF ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA
ON OBEDIENCE**

SERVANTS -2966

APPENDIX

Letter of St. Ignatius of Loyola On Obedience

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"THE VIRTUE AND VOW OF OBEDIENCE"

Letter of St. Ignatius of Loyola to the
Brethren of the Society of Jesus.

IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA TO THE BRETHREN OF THE SOCIETY
OF JESUS IN PORTUGAL WISHES GRACE AND LOVE
EVERLASTING IN CHRIST OUR LORD.

1. It is a cause of great comfort to me, most dear Brethren in Christ, to hear with what an earnest desire and endeavor you strive to attain to the highest perfection of all virtue and piety by His favor, Who, as He has called you to this kind of life, so in His mercy keeps you in the same, and directs you to that blessed end, whereunto those that are chosen by Him do arrive.

2. And truly, though I wish you to be perfect in all spiritual gifts and ornaments, yet especially do I desire (as you have understood of me heretofore) to see you most eminent in the virtue of obedience; and this not only for the excellent and singular fruits thereof, which are proved by many testimonies of Holy Writ, and by examples both in the Old and New Testaments; but also because, as St. Gregory says: "*Obedience is the only virtue that plants all other virtues in the mind, and preserves them after they are once planted.*"¹

1. Greg., lib. 35; Moral., cap. 10.

As long as this virtue shall flourish, all others doubtless will flourish, and bring forth in your hearts such fruits as I desire, and He with good reason requires, Who by His salutary obedience repaired mankind when afflicted and destroyed through the crime of disobedience, *becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*²

OBEDIENCE PROPER TO THE SOCIETY

3. More easily may we suffer ourselves to be surpassed by other Religious Orders in fasting, watching and other severities in diet and apparel, which according to their institute and rule every one does piously practice; but in true and perfect obedience and the abnegation of our will and judgment, I greatly desire, most dear Brethren, that those who serve God in this Society should be conspicuous and that true and genuine offspring of the same should, as it were, be distinguished by this mark, that they regard not the individual whom they obey, but Christ Our Lord in him, for whose love they obey. For the Superior is not to be obeyed because he is prudent or virtuous, or excels in any other Divine gift, whatsoever it be; but for this only, that he stands in the place of God, and has authority from Him Who says: *He that heareth you heareth Me and he that despiseth you despiseth me.*³

Neither, on the other hand, if he be of less understanding or prudence, is he therefore to be the less obeyed in that wherein he is Superior; since he bears His person Whose Wisdom cannot be deceived, and Who will supply whatsoever shall be wanting in His substitute, whether it be virtue or other qualities. Wherefore Christ Our Lord, when He had said in express and open terms: *Upon the chair of Moses hath sitten the Scribes and Pharisees,* presently added: *All things therefore whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do; but according to their works do ye not.*⁴

2. Philip. II, 8.

3. Luc. X, 16.

4. Matt. XXIII, 2, 3.

MOTIVES OF OBEDIENCE

4. Wherefore, I desire that you should earnestly endeavor with all care and diligence to acknowledge Christ in every superior, and, with great devotion, reverence and obey in him the Divine Majesty. This will seem to you less strange, if you consider how the Apostle St. Paul commands us to obey even secular Superiors and Gentiles as we would obey Christ Himself, from Whom all well-ordered authority is derived, for thus he writes to the Ephesians: *Be obedient to them that are your temporal lords according to the flesh, with fear and trembling. In the simplicity of your hearts, as to Christ: not serving to the eye, as it were pleasing men, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with a good will serving as to the Lord and not to men.*⁵

And from this you yourself may judge what account in his heart a religious man ought to make of his Superior, to whom he has given himself to be ruled and governed, not only as to a Superior, but expressly as to one that has the place of Christ - whether he should look on him as man, or as the Vicar of Christ.

PERFORMANCE - THE FIRST DEGREE OF OBEDIENCE
SUBMISSION OF WILL - THE SECOND
DEGREE OF OBEDIENCE

5. Moreover, I desire that this should be thoroughly understood and deeply imprinted in your minds, that it is but a base and a very imperfect kind of obedience which consists in the external execution only of that which is commanded; and that it is not worthy of the name of virtue, unless it pass to a further degree, making the will of the Superior our will, and so agreeing with the same that not only is there an external fulfillment of the command, but also agreement of the will, so that both may be of

5. Eph. VI, 5, 6, 7.

one mind in willing and not willing the same. And for this reason it is said in Holy Writ: *Obedience is better than sacrifice.*⁶

For as St. Gregory teaches us: *"In victims the flesh of another, but in obedience our own will is killed."*⁷

And because this part of the soul is so excellent, hence it is that the offering of it to Our Lord and Creator through obedience is of great price and value.

6. Oh! in how great and dangerous an error are not only they involved, who think it lawful to swerve from the will and appointment of their Superior in things appertaining to the flesh and blood, but in such also as are otherwise very holy and spiritual, such as fasting, prayer, or other good works. Let them give ear to what Cassian prudently remarks in the Conference of Daniel the Abbot, saying: *"It is one and the same kind of disobedience, whether in earnestness of labor or the desire of ease, one breaks the command of the Superior; and as prejudicial to go against the statutes of the monastery out of sloth as out of watchfulness; and finally, it is as much a fault to transgress the precept of the Abbot for the sake of reading as to condemn it for the sake of sleeping."*⁸

Holy was the action of Martha, holy the contemplation of Mary Magdalen, and holy the penance and tears wherewith she watered the feet of Christ, Our Lord: but all this was to be done in Bethania, which word is interpreted the house of obedience, whereby Our Lord would signify to us, as St. Bernard says: *"that neither the endeavor of good works, nor the quiet of contemplation, nor the tears of the penitent, could have been grateful unto Him out of Bethania."*⁹

7. Wherefore, most dear Brethren, cast off wholly as far as you can, your own wills: give up freely and dedicate to our Creator in His substitute the freedom He has bestowed upon you. Do not consider that you are reap-

6. 1 Reg. XV. 22.

7. Greg., lib. 35; Moral, cap. 30.

8. Cass. Coll. IV, cap. 20.

9. Bern. Serm. ad milit. Templ., cap. 13

ing but little advantage from your free will, by being able to give it back fully, through obedience, to Him from Whom you received it. And by so doing you not only do not lose the same, but rather increase and perfect it; since by this means you direct all your wills by that most certain rule of rectitude, the will of God interpreted unto you by him who governs you in the place of God.

8. And for this reason you must always be very careful, that you never seek to wrest the Superior's will (which you ought to look upon as the will of God Himself) unto your own; for this would be, not to conform your will unto God's, but to endeavor to rule His will by yours, inverting the order of his Divine Wisdom. Oh! how great an error it is, and one which belongs to such as self-love has blinded, to account themselves obedient, when by some means or other they have brought the Superior to that which they desire. Listen to St. Bernard, a man eminently experienced in this matter: *"Whosoever (says he) endeavors either openly or covertly to have his spiritual father enjoin him what he himself desires, deceives himself, if he flatters himself he is a true follower of obedience; for in that he does not obey his Superior, but rather the Superior obeys him."*¹⁰

It follows, therefore, that whosoever is desirous of the virtue of obedience must necessarily attain to this second degree, so as not only to fulfill the Superior's command, but to make also the Superior's will his own will, or rather, to lay aside his own will that he may put on the will of God, declared to him by his Superior.

SUBMISSION OF JUDGMENT - THIRD DEGREE OF OBEDIENCE

9. But he that will wholly sacrifice himself to God, besides his will must also offer up his understanding (which is the third and highest degree of obedience) that he may not only will, but also think the selfsame with his

¹⁰. Bern. Serm. de trib. ordin. Ecclesiae.

Superior; and submit his own judgment unto him, as far as a devout will can bend the understanding. For though this power of the soul has not that freedom wherewith the will is endowed and by nature is drawn to assent to whatsoever is represented unto it as true, yet, nevertheless, in many things in which the evidence of the known truth does not force it, it may by the strength of the will be inclined more one way than another. When these things happen, whosoever professes obedience must submit himself to the judgment of the Superior. For obedience being a holocaust in which the whole man, nothing at all excepted, is offered up unto His Creator and Lord in the fire of Charity, through the hands of His substitute, and as it is also a full renunciation, in which a religious man freely yields up all his own rights, to dedicate and bind himself to God, to be possessed and governed by His Divine Providence by means of his Superior; it cannot be denied that obedience comprehends not only the execution, so that the person do what is commanded, and the will, so that he do it willingly, but also the judgment, that whatsoever the Superior commands and thinks good, seems just and reasonable, to the inferior, so far, as I have said, as the will by its force and vigor can bend the understanding.

NECESSITY OF THE THIRD DEGREE OF OBEDIENCE

10. Would that this obedience of the understanding and judgment were as much understood and put in practice by men, as it is grateful to God, and necessary for all those who live in Religion. For as in the celestial bodies and globes, to the end that one may impart motion to the other, it is necessary that the inferior globe be placed so as to be below the superior one, that there be a certain subordination and subjection the one to the other, so amongst men, when one is moved by another's authority (as happens in obedience), it is necessary that

he who depends upon another be subject and subordinate, to the end that he may receive some virtue and influence from him who commands. Now this kind of subjection and obedience can in no wise stand, unless the will and judgment of the inferior agree with the will and judgment of the Superior.

11. Moreover, if we regard the end and intention of obedience, as our will, so our judgment may be deceived as to what is good for us: Wherefore, if, lest our will should stray, we conform to the will of the Superior, our understanding is also to be ruled by his, to the end that it may not err: *Lean not upon thy own prudence, says the Holy Scriptures.*¹¹

And even in worldly matters, those who are wise judge it to be the part of a prudent man not to trust his own wisdom, especially in his own cause, in which, when the mind is troubled, one can hardly be a good judge. And if in matters concerning ourselves we are to prefer the judgment and counsel of another, who is not our Superior, before our own; how much more the counsel and judgment of the Superior to whom we have yielded ourselves to be directed, as to one who is in the place of God, and the interpreter of His Divine Will. And certain it is that in spiritual matters and of persons so much the more heed is to be taken, as the danger of a spiritual course is greater when one runs along it without the bridle of counsel and discretion. Wherefore Cassian, in the conference of the Abbot Moses, says: *"By no other vice does the devil draw a monk headlong, and bring him to death sooner, than by persuading him to neglect the counsel of the Elders, and trust to his own judgment and determination."*¹²

12. Moreover, unless we have this obedience of the understanding, it is impossible that either the consent of our will or the execution will be such as it ought to be; for nature itself has so ordained, that the concupiscible

11. Prov. III, 5.

12. Cass. Coll. II, cop. 11.

power of the soul must follow the apprehensive, and the will, without violence, cannot long obey against the understanding. And if there be any who for some time obey, induced by that common apprehension that obey they must though commanded amiss, yet doubtless this cannot be firm and constant, and so perseverance fails, or at least the perfection of obedience, which consists in obeying promptly and with alacrity, for there can be no alacrity and diligence where there is discord of minds and opinions. There perishes that zeal and speed in performing, when we doubt whether it is expedient or not to do what is commanded. There perishes that renowned simplicity of blind obedience, when we call in question the justice of the command, and perhaps even we condemn the Superior, because he bids us do such things as are not very pleasing unto us; humility fails, for although on the one hand we obey, yet on the other we prefer ourselves to our Superior; fortitude in difficult enterprises fails, and, in short, the whole force and dignity of this virtue is lost. And in place thereof there arise pain, trouble, reluctance, weariness, murmurings, excuses and other vices of no small moment, by which the value and merit of obedience is wholly destroyed. Wherefore St. Bernard speaks as follows of those who take it ill when things are enjoined that seem somewhat hard unto them: *"If you begin to grieve at this, to judge your Superior, to murmur in your heart, though outwardly you fulfill what is commanded, yet this is not the virtue of patience, but a cloak of your malice."*¹³

And if peace and tranquility of mind is desired, he certainly shall arrive unto it, who has within himself the cause of his disquiet and trouble, to wit, the disagreeing of his own judgment with the law of obedience.

13. And therefore, for the maintaining of union, which is the bond of every Society, the Apostle so earnestly exhorts all to think and say the same thing, that by the agreeing of their wills and judgments they may be mu-

13. Bern. Sermon. 3 de Circumlocione.

tually comforted and sustained.¹⁴ Now if there must be one and the same sentiment between the members and the head, you may easily judge whether, it is more just that the head should yield to the members, or the members unto the head. It is plain, then, by what has been hitherto said, how necessary is this obedience of the understanding.

EXCELLENCE OF THE THIRD DEGREE OF OBEDIENCE

14. But how perfect the same is in itself, and how pleasing to God, we may gather by this: First, because thereby the most excellent and precious part of man is consecrated unto Him: secondly, because the obedient man is by this means made a living holocaust most grateful to His Divine Majesty, keeping nothing whatsoever to himself; lastly, by reason of the great difficulty of the combat; for the obedient man overcomes himself for the love of God, and resists that natural inclination which all men have to embrace and follow their own opinion. Hence therefore, it follows that obedience though its proper fruit seems to be to perfect the will, inasmuch as it makes it prompt and ready at the beck of the Superior, yet it must also belong to the understanding as we have declared, and bring it to be of the selfsame opinion in all things with the Superior, that all forces of our will and understanding being united together, we may fulfill what is commanded with all speed and integrity.

MEANS FOR ACQUIRING THE THIRD DEGREE OF OBEDIENCE

15. It seems to me, most dear Brethren, I hear you say that you now no longer doubt of the necessity of this virtue, but that you earnestly desire to know how you

¹⁴. Rom. XV. 5; 1 Cor. 1, 10; 2 Cor. XIII, 11; Phil. II, 2.

may attain to the perfection thereof. To this question I answer with St. Leo: *"Nothing is difficult unto the humble, and nothing hard unto the meek."*¹⁵

So that, if humility and mildness are not wanting in you, assuredly God will not be wanting in His goodness to help you to perform that which you have promised Him, not only patiently, but also willingly.

FIRST MEANS

16. Moreover, three things I will lay down unto you, which will greatly further you in the attainment of this obedience of your understanding. The first is, as I have said in the beginning, that you do not behold in the person of your Superior a man subject to errors and miseries, but Christ Himself, Who is the Highest Wisdom, Immeasurable Goodness, and Infinite Charity, Who neither can be deceived nor will deceive you. And because you are conscious within yourselves that you have undertaken this yoke of obedience for the love of God, to the end that you might, in following the Superior's will, more assuredly follow the Divine Will, doubt not but the most faithful charity of Our Lord will continually direct you, and lead you to the right way, by the hands of those whom He has given you for Superiors. Wherefore, hear their voice no otherwise than if it were the voice of Christ, seeing that the Apostle, writing to the Colossians, and exhorting subjects to obey their masters, says as follows: *Whatsoever you do, do it from the heart, as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that you shall receive of the Lord the reward of inheritance: serve ye the Lord Jesus.*¹⁶

And St. Bernard: *"Whether God, or His man substitute, commands anything, we must obey with equal diligence, and perform it with like reverence, when however man commands nothing that is contrary to God."*¹⁷

15. Leo. Serm. 5 de Epiphania.

16. Col. III, 23, 24.

17. Bern. Tract. de precepto et dispensat., cap. 9.

And thus if you do not look upon man with the eyes of the body, but with those of the soul, it will certainly not be hard to conform your will and judgment to that rule which you yourselves have chosen.

SECOND MEANS

17. Another means is, that you always seriously endeavor to justify within yourselves that which your Superior commands or thinks best, but never to disapprove it. And to this it will help, to be well affected towards whatsoever he shall command; whereby you shall not only obey without trouble, but even with joy and pleasure. For, as St. Leo says: *"It is not hard to serve, when we love that which is commanded."*¹⁸

THIRD MEANS

18. The last means to subject your understanding, both more easy and secure, and one also in use among the holy Fathers, is to determine within yourselves whatsoever the Superior commands to be the commandment and will of Almighty God Himself; and as to believe what the Catholic Faith proposes, you at once bend all the forces of your mind to consent thereunto; so in doing that which your Superior commands, you must be carried with a sort of blind impulse of your will, desirous to obey. So it is to be thought that Abraham acted, when bid to sacrifice his son Isaac.¹⁹

So in the time of the New Testament did some of those Holy Fathers act of whom Cassian speaks.²⁰

So John the Abbot acted, who did not question whether that which he was commanded was profitable or not, as when, with such great and continued labor, for a year together, he watered a dry stick; nor whether it could be done or not, when he endeavored so earnestly to move

18. Leo, Serm. 4 de jejunio 7, mensis.

19. Gen. XXII.

20. Cass. de Institutis Renuntiantium, lib. IV., cap.

a huge rock, which many men together could not have stirred. This kind of obedience we see sometimes to have been confirmed by miracle. For to say nothing of others, whom you yourselves are not ignorant of, Maurus, St. Benedict's disciple, going by command of his Superior into a lake, did not sink.²¹

Another, being bid by his Superior to bring a lioness to him, took hold of her and brought her unto him.²²

Wherefore, this manner of subjecting our own judgment so as, without questioning, to sanction and approve within ourselves whatsoever the Superior commands, is not only a common practice among holy men, but also to be imitated by all who are desirous of perfect obedience, in all things where manifestly there appears no sin.

19. Neither are you hindered by this, if anything occurs to you different from the Superior's opinion and it seems (after you have commended the same humbly to God) that it ought to be declared, but that you may propose unto him. Wherein, lest self-love and your own judgment should deceive you, this precaution is to be taken, that you remain both before and after you have made the proposition most indifferent, not only as to undertaking or relinquishing the matter of which there is question, but also as to approving and thinking better, whatever seems good to the Superior.

SUBORDINATION OF OBEDIENCE

20. And this which I have said of obedience is equally to be observed by every private person towards his immediate Superior, and by the Rectors and local Superiors towards the Provincial, and by the Provincials towards the General, and by the General towards him whom God has placed over him, to wit, His Vicar upon earth; to the end that thus a perfect distinction of degrees,

21. *Greg. Dial.*, lib. III, cap. 7.

22. *In Vita PP.*, lib. V., libell. 14, n. 4.

and consequently peace and charity, may be preserved, without which the right government neither of our Society nor of any other Congregation, can be maintained. And this kind of proceeding the Divine Providence uses in disposing all things sweetly,²³ and bringing them to their appointed ends, the lowest by the middlemost, and the middlemost by the highest. Whence also flows that subordination in Angels of one Hierarchy towards another, and that perfect harmony of the celestial bodies and all things which are moved, each in its own determined place and position; whose revolutions and motions proceed in order and by degrees from one supreme mover unto the lowest. The same we see upon earth, as well in all well-ordered commonwealths, as most of all in the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, whose members and functions all are derived from one General Vicar of Christ Our Lord; and the more exactly this disposition and order is kept, the better will be the whole government; and, on the other hand, there is no one who does not see what grievous damages have befallen various Congregations through the neglect thereof. And therefore, in this Society, whereof Our Lord has delivered unto me some charge and care, I desire this virtue should be practiced as diligently, and flourish as perfectly, as if the whole good and safety of our Society depended thereon.

21. Wherefore, that where my letter began there also it may end, I most earnestly beseech you for the sake of Christ Our Lord, Who gave Himself unto us not only as a Master, but also as an Example of obedience, that you will bend all your forces to the attaining of this virtue; and that, desirous and greedy of so glorious a victory, you will endeavor to overcome yourselves, that is, to conquer and subdue the most excellent and difficult part of the soul, your will, I say, and understanding; to the end that the true and solid knowledge and love of God Almighty Our Lord, may draw you wholly unto Him, and rule and govern you in the whole course of this

²³ Sap. VIII, 1.

life and pilgrimage, until at length He bring you and many others assisted by your help and example, to the last and most happy end of bliss everlasting.

I commend myself most earnestly to God in your prayers.

From Rome, the 26th of March, 1553.

LAUDETUR JESUS CHRISTUS