



REVISION OF CONSTITUTIONS

WAY OF REVITALIZATION

6

THE EVANGELICAL COUNSEL OF OBEDIENCE



Rome, 2019-2021

Constitutions and Obedience

«Loving obedience makes us completely available for the life and mission of the Congregation».

(Const. 30)

Today, proceeding along our **spiritual pathway**, we shall stop to dwell on the issue of evangelical obedience. Our Constitutions devote numbers 27 to 34 to this subject. Some of the articles were dealt with already in Fact Sheet 1, and so they will not be touched on in this paper.

We shall be discussing obedience as the trusting search for Our Lord's will, as an experience of faith in our relationship with Him, as a commitment which leads us to the service of our fellow brothers and sisters. From the faith we manifest through worship, we are now moving on to the liturgy of charity which we practise, both in the community and in serving the beneficiaries of our mission.

Here are some of the main aspects regarding today's reflection: Jesus's obedience as a model and an inspiration for consecrated obedience; hospitaller obedience enlightened by the charismatic experience of our Founders; discernment and co-responsibility for implementing God's plan for our lives and our mission, and the relationship between obedience and the service of authority according to the Magisterium of the Church. By sharing our personal reflections on this subject we will discover fresh elements for renewing our life.

Suggested methodology for the First Week:

- 1. Present the fact sheet as a whole.*
- 2. Propose the work for the first week, the enlightenment.*
- 2. Dedicate time daily to personal reflection.*
- 3. Set a date for the community meeting to share the reflection.*
- 4. Summarise, in the meeting the two or three aspects that can help us in the renewal*

I Week Enlightenment

➤ **In the light of the Word**

As the immediate basis for evangelical obedience we may recall the words spoken by God in the act of Creation. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And God said... and things came into being... and God saw they were good (cf. Gen 1-2,4). God had a plan to bring happiness to His children, and for them he created life in peace and joy. The obedience of Creation was for the well-being of His human creatures.

It was disobedience that destroyed the harmony of Creation, blinding the eyes of humanity and preventing us from discovering God in Creation. But the Father's heart was moved and

He showed mercy. In the fullness of time, the Trinity sent the Son to renew the covenant, which He willingly accepted, saying:

«You, who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, opened my ear, you asked no holocaust or sacrifice for sin; then I said, 'Here I am! I am coming!' In the scroll of the book am I not commanded to obey you will?. My God, I have always love your Law from the depths of my being. (Sal 40,7-9).

Obedience entails the readiness to listen to God's voice, to discern and to do God's will; it is the expression of a radical faith in the absolute value of the Kingdom. Jesus confirms this by telling His disciples: *«My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work» (Jn 4,34), because «I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me.» (Jn 6,38).*

In Jesus, everything was a matter of listening to and obeying the Father (cf. Jn 8, 28-29); the whole of His earthly life expressed and continued everything that the Word had done for all eternity: allowing Himself to be loved by the Father, accepting His love unconditionally, even to the point of doing nothing for Himself (cf. Jn 8,28), at all times doing only what was pleasing to the Father. For this reason, Jesus obtains for Himself and for us the superabundance of the Resurrection, the wonderful joy of entering into the very heart of God, in the happy multitude of His sons and daughters (cf. Jn 1,12). Thanks to Jesus's obedience, *"the many will be made righteous"* (Rm 5,19).

In His historical experience, he did not have it at all times and not all clearly. He nurtured His sense of sonship and the awareness of having received a mission that was not His. He knew how to read the signs of the times and to accept the circumstances through which they were mediated.

«He learnt to obey through suffering; but having been made perfect, he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation» (Hb 5,8-9).

Along the pathway of consecrated obedience we have to follow the example of Jesus. It is He who must inspire our readiness to obey the Father so that, through us, His Divine plan of salvation can be fulfilled, a history of mediations which in one way or another make visible the mystery of the grace which God is pouring out in the depths of our hearts.

To find out God's will for our fraternal life and our apostolic mission we must adopt an attitude of personal and community discernment, as the Apostle urges us to do:

«Do not model yourself on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do» (Rm 12,2).

By our vow, we commit ourselves to obeying God who uses our superiors as a human authority. He manifests His will through the events in our life, the demands of our specific vocation, the guidelines laid down by the Magisterium of the Church and the Constitutions.

As well as the laws governing social life Psalm 143 offers us words of encouragement: *«Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground».*

➤ In the light of our Spiritual Heritage

The theme of obedience was highly significant at the origins of our congregational history. María Angustias made this clear.

“So we took refuge in Our Lord’s mercy, imploring his help and saying with love: My Jesus, what is it that you want of us, poor miserable creatures? With the help of grace we received our Father’s suggestion with patience. We told him that we truly had a great deal to offer Our Lord in this, but we hoped that our good Jesus would manage everything, trusting that God would help us»¹.

Our Foundresses sought Our Lord’s will, as a merciful, friendly and loving will that wishes to show His creatures the path to follow. They directly addressed their obedient question to the Jesus of all goodness and mercy: *My Jesus, what do you want from your most unworthy children?* They were seekers of God and His will: theirs was a fully believing search, confident in receiving Jesus’s answer, a quest beset by doubts and tensions, but a quest driven by trust and certitude. They humbly accepted the difficulties created for them by our Father Founder, but they also listened to the voice of Our Lord, seeking His enlightenment. They wanted to be called through the mediation of authority and to move forward in a climate of prayer, listening, and patience, passing through the twilight that would lead them to the light.

Our Father tells us that *“to obey is to love”*.² Looking to Jesus, he discovered that the only thing that motivated His obedience was his love of God and his brethren which led to His total giving of His life on the Cross. Love opens the gates to accepting obedience by consent, through dialogue, seeking what is most fitting to do God’s will, even at the cost of sacrifice and renunciation, but also in communion with God and fullness of life.

«To obey is to love, to deny one’s own will for love of Jesus is to follow Our Divine Saviour along the Way of the Cross which He marked out for us the royal road which leads us to Heaven and to unending union with the Most Holy and Adorable Trinity».

Father Menni accepted authority on the basis of faith, acknowledging God’s will in the mediation of his ‘lawful superior’. It is from this vision of faith that our readiness and promptness to serve stem, which takes us out along the path to hospitalier service and enable us to practise consecrated obedience in freedom and joy.

«Hence you will not have been surprised that I left without being able to say goodbye because I was in such a great hurry on account of Very Re. Father General whom I am obliged to obey, and whom I obey promptly with my whole heart. By obeying my lawful Superior I obey Jesus, the master of my life, love of my loves; most Blessed Jesus in whom I hope and whom I love with all my heart».

María Angustias tells us how the Father Founder helped them in their process of discernment until they understood and fulfilled Our Lord’s will³. We have frequently felt that obedience in our religious life merely refers to the instructions or orders issued by our superiors, and we have not taken enough account of this faith and joint quest by our Foundresses, their process of discernment in union with Father Menni, their sincere search for Jesus’s will, along a path by no means free of difficulties and of different opinions and views of things, and of barriers of

¹ RMA, pp. 86-87.

² Letter 426.

³ RMA p. 85.

which they were unaware at the time our Founder experienced them in his own person and his mission. She tells us in her *Relación*:

«Having heard all we had to say, our Father with motherly affection, and knowing that Our Lord was calling us, said: "I have been thinking in the presence of God about your good desires and about the serious obstacles which hinder you achieving your object. You see I love you as if you were my sisters. I would like to give in to your petitions, but my vows impede that. For I am a poor religious, a son of obedience. I will tell you what occurs to me that I can offer, if you like. I could provide a small house for you in Ciempozuelos, where you could live quietly, and I could find work for you to live on [...] "Really, we did not like this proposal. We said to ourselves: My Jesus, perhaps you do not like this; for if we are not religious, we are quite well at home».

The Superior General of his Order needed Father Menni to undertake his main mission, and considered his dedication to any other parallel wide-ranging mission would threaten his work. While our Foundresses had to practise great discernment, the Father pursued a path of obedience that was fraught with surprises, fraught with contradictions and dilemmas which only the passage of time, his personal faithfulness, his love of the Cross, and the wisdom of the Spirit were able to resolve. Our Foundresses obeyed, but they sought light looking much further beyond first impressions.

«The devil let us see that to accept this would be madness, or just sheer necessity. [...] We answered resolutely that although we were such miserable creatures we only wanted to place ourselves in his hands so that he could do whatever he liked with us. [...] We tried to forget the natural sadness caused by these precautions, and we answered decidedly: Father, we shall have to bear this, just the same as everything else you have mentioned. We trust in the goodness of our Lord who will help us to offer it for his love. [...] Through the divine mercy, not without much pondering, weak as we were, we allowed ourselves to be carried along by the force of our desire, and we carefully thought out everything before Our Lord. We talked, the two of us, according to our lights to find out what was most pleasing to our Jesus, encouraging each other not to go back or hesitate».

The path of discernment requires us to live under the gaze of God where we detect moments of consolation and desolation. The evil spirit only reminded them of the difficulties, the fears, the hold-ups, and the insecurities; but Jesus's spirit gave them patience, enlightenment, strength, and fraternal communion. Along the path as they searched for God's will, drawing on the wisdom of the Spirit, they had to fight against the feeling of desolation which could have blinded and paralysed them, which might have prevented them from continuing the search. They placed their reliance on strength, hope and trust and thereby continued to seek the light with the certitude that Jesus would open up the path before them, and manifest His Father's will for them. All they experienced together, they shared and discussed, and continued to search for what was most acceptable to Jesus. Their dialogue was not a matter of merely exchanging views, but was a search for God's will and to lend mutual support with this attitude of searching, entailing suffering and demanding great strength and fidelity.

Another text which can help us in this reflection is the letter from Father to Father Chevalier⁴. St Benedict Menni had professed hospitaller obedience in the Order of St John of God, an

⁴ cfr. M. Martín Carrasco, *Benito Menni y la asistencia psiquiátrica en España en el siglo XIX*, Pamplona, 1994, pp. 373-374.

obedience to show mercy and hospitality; in this letter to Father Chevalier, he explains a series of circumstances in his life in which he had experienced the special protection of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Some of the circumstances were "signs" enabling him to discover God's will calling him to respond to one of the social emergencies of his age in the field of women's mental health.

«At the present time we are witnessing an alarming increase in the number of people with mental illnesses, and there are many sick people who need to be looked after by people who see them as the living images of Jesus Christ, and to care for them always lovingly and by Religious vocation. But I could see that it was impossible for the Brothers of St John of God themselves to look after women with mental illness, and that it was necessary to have a Religious Congregation of Sisters Hospitallers to look after women patients, thereby completing this work of charity, for it was unjust to fail to give those women loving care. Consequently, I set about trying to find a Congregation of Sisters who wished to devote themselves to taking on these special mental hospitals to meet the demand. But all my efforts came to naught.

And not for a moment did it occur to me to set up a new institution to fill this gap. And I did not take any steps in this direction whatsoever, and indeed, I rejected attempts by a number of women who kept on pestering me to direct them towards the Religious Life. But then, things fell into my hands in such a way, and so providentially, that I realised that it was decidedly mistaken to resist the will of the Almighty if I refused to agree to lead these aspirants towards the Religious Life».

"I must confess that I was afraid that this might have been a signal from heaven to take upon myself a new and by no means simple undertaking, such as the foundation of a new Congregation." The charism of hospitality and the signs of the times are the means whereby God manifested His will. Those signs were not the happenings or events in themselves, but the reading of them in faith by Father Menni, listening to the underlying meaning of them. This approach challenged him, disturbed him, and touched his heart animated by the love of Christ and became a manifestation of God's will, a command, a pathway of obedience.

Our Father Founder is a model of the believer, the seeker of God's will; imbued with the spirit of his charism, he listened, interpreted and read them through his intelligence and his eyes as a believer, discovering what he was to do, and how he had to do it. Religious obedience is primarily a matter of "listening" to God's will and being faithful in fulfilling it out of love.

➤ **In the light of the Magisterium of the Church**

The typical obedience of consecrated life is a particularly practical way of experiencing the obedience of Christ to his Father and shows that there is no contradiction between obedience and freedom. By obedience, consecrated people intend to show their awareness of being children of the Father, as a result of which they wish to take the Father's will as their daily bread (cf. Jn 4:34), as their rock, their joy, their shield and their fortress (cf. Ps 18(17):3). In this way, they show that they are growing in the full truth about themselves, remaining in touch with the source of their existence, which is the Lord⁵.

⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic *Ehhortation Vita consecrata*, Rome, 1996, 91.

Obedience entails taking personal responsibility and accepting fraternal corresponsibility:

«In the Consecrated life, each one should search with sincerity the will of the Father, because otherwise this kind of life would lose its meaning. But it is of great importance that such a search is made in union with the brothers and sisters; this is what justly unites and makes a family united to Christ»⁶.

The mission of the sisters who have been vested with the service of authority is to help to discover the sense and the quality of consecrated life, which requires:

A constant presence which is able to animate and propose, to recall the raison d'être of consecrated life, and to help those entrusted to them to live in a constantly renewed fidelity to the call of the Spirit»⁷.

Obedience is a path of faithfulness equally committing everyone, superiors and sisters, as the Magisterium of the Church says:

«The best authority is the one that is most obedient to God. It must be kept in mind that true obedience always puts obedience to God first, before authority and the person who obeys, just as it refers to the obedience of Jesus»⁸.

By virtue of the vocation and mission which unites us as a community, each sister and all the sisters as a whole are required to constantly hold up their own lives against God's plan for them in terms of our charism. We need a transparent climate of communication and dialogue in order to generate ideas and suggestions that will lead to the most appropriate choices to take in every circumstance. The community is the special place in which we have to acknowledge and welcome God's will.

"Daily living in community require a participation which allows for the exercise of dialogue and discernment. Each individual, then, and the whole community can work out their own life with the plan of God, together carrying out God's will. Corresponsibility and participation are also exercised even in various types of councils at various levels, in order to ensure the constant presence of the Lord who enlightens and guides"⁹.

Personal and community discernment must be the natural environment in which to practise obedience and take decisions, which demands: listening to God's Word and the charism; a climate of prayer and receptiveness to the Spirit; readiness to recognise that each sister has a part of the truth to offer; attentiveness to the signs of the times and the demands and needs of those who suffer; freedom of spirit to accept the decisions taken in common, while maintaining unity.

➤ **Community prayer**

*To listen to God and to lay our insights, desires and concerns before Him, we propose setting aside a time for community prayer which each Community can organise according to their circumstances, but it will be interesting to make good use of this week of **Enlightenment** to*

⁶ CIVCSVA, *The service of authority and obedience*, Rome, 2008, n. 12.

⁷ CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, Rome, 2002, n. 14.

⁸ CIVCSVA, *New wine in new wineskins*, Rome, 2017, n. 24.

⁹ CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ*, Rome, 2002, n. 14.

strengthen the climate of discernment and praise. Perhaps a time of celebration already planned might be used, giving it the appropriate spiritual motivation.

II Week: Enlightenment

Suggested methodology:

1. *Present the objective of the III week.*
2. *Motivate the reflection and evaluation of personal and community life.*
3. *Prepare to share in community.*
4. *Set the date for the community meeting.*

➤ **Revision of personal and community life**

Drawing on these reflections, let us dedicate time to contemplate consecrated obedience in the manner of Jesus, and review our personal and community life. The following questions may be helpful:

1. What ideas, aspects, insights and desires filled my heart during last week's reflection?
2. What is the Lord telling each and every one of us and our communities today, to obey as women who believe in our vocation and mission?
3. What attitudes and means we use as a community to discern the new pathways of hospitality which God is expecting us to take today?
4. What contributions can breathe more life and further enrich the theme of consecration in our Constitutions?

Sharing in the Community: convene a community meeting to share two or three aspects which will help us to make further progress along this path of revitalisation.

➤ **Psalm of obedience to the Word** (Ps 18 adapted)

I will keep your law continually, for ever and ever.

I shall walk in liberty, for I have sought your precepts». (Ps 119,44-45)

Lord, I wish to make your Word the pathway for my life;

I wish to love your will with all my heart.

I wish to be your disciple and listen to you every day;

I wish to make your Word the rule which leads me forward, step by step.

Your Word of truth lights up my steps along the path;

In your Word I have placed my hope day and night;

I wish to commit myself to fulfil Your will with all my heart

And wish my pathways to be Your pathways at all times.

Teach me wisdom and I shall learn to be free and happy;
Teach me prudence and I shall learn to find my place in life;
Teach me the secrets of Your Fatherly Heart
And I shall learn to live from the depths of my being.

I love your Word, and rejoice to feel communion with You;
I trust in your Word, and believe it is the answer to all my questions;
I fulfil your Word, and that gives me strength like no other;
I believe in your Word, and that nurtures my weak faith.

Your Word teaches me to love truth and reject lies;
Your Word teaches me to love and take it to its extreme consequences;
Your Word teaches me to keep my heart free and to show solidarity;
Your Word teaches me to seek justice among the nations

Keep my heart firmly fixed on the project of your Word;
May your Word always be the source of the joy of my heart;
May I always try to keep your commandments;
And may I seek in your commands my path of salvation.

III Week: Contributions

Orientación metodológica:

1. *Present the work of the week*
2. *Motivate the responsibility for revising the texts of the Constitutions.*
3. *Share and take up the aspects of change which are driving our charism today.*
4. *Record the situations for changes to each number in the grid.*
5. *Forward the summary to the Province the following week.*

Obedience in Constitutions

Numbers of Constitutions	Inputs
<p>The basis</p> <p>27 Christ, whose food was to do the Farther's will, and to carry out his work, fulfilled the plan of salvation by giving his life in obedience unto death, death on a cross. By imitating him, and moved by the Holy Spirit, we offer to God the complete oblation of our own will, and by unconditional obedience to the Farthe's will, we continue the saving work of the Son in the Church acording to the charism of our Congregation.</p>	
<p>Mediations</p> <p>28 Jesus obeyed the Father with filial love, accepting his will, also manifested through human mediation. By our consecrated obedience we, like Him, discover and accept God's will manifested principally through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Word of God; - the Magisterium of the Church, especially that of the Pope; - the Constitutions; - the superiors of the Congregation; - and the community. 	
<p>Object of the vow</p> <p>29 Superiors share in the authority which Christ gave to his Church, and we obey God through them. By the vow of obedience we promise to fulfil the commands of lawful superiors in all that refers to the life and mission of the Congregation, according to the Constitutions.</p> <p>Obedience can imply renunciation, sacrifice and abnegation for us, as for Christ, who by suffering learned to obey.</p> <p>So we should have recourse to prayer and to contemplate Jesus' passion, which will strengh us and help us to accep it in faith.</p>	
<p>Obedience and mission</p> <p>30 Loving obedience makes us completely available for the life and mission of the Congregation, subjecting our own personal project and the community project, to the mission of the Congregation in the Church.</p> <p>By accepting obedience in this way, we place the gifts we</p>	

have received at the service of the hospitaller charism, in order to build up the body of Christ, on behalf of the sick and needy.	
<p>Obedience and dialogue</p> <p>31 Trusting, fraternal dialogue helps evangelical discernment and is an efficacious means for finding the Father's will and for practising active and responsible obedience.</p> <p>In this process of dialogue and discernment, the superior has the final decision.</p>	
<p>Authority and obedience</p> <p>32 Authority and obedience are exercised in the service of the common good, in a deep attitude of faith, as two complementary aspects of sharing in Christ's oblation. He did not come to be served but to serve. Hence, authority should be a humble service of love for the sisters, so that it manifests the love with which God loves them.</p>	
<p>Obedience and freedom</p> <p>33 Religious obedience, far from diminishing the dignity of the human person, leads it towards maturity, making her grow in the liberty of the children of God. It is an efficacious means for attaining peace of heart and is a source of abundant graces.</p>	
<p>Mary, model of our obedience</p> <p>34 Mary, was totally available to the Father's will, and through her <i>fiat</i> she accepts God's will with joy. She encourages us, by her example of fidelity, to follow God's plans for us promptly and with trust and humility.</p>	

IV Week: Celebration

Methodology:

1. *It is very important to celebrate the steps of the work.*
2. *Prepare a celebration of prayer and another festive celebration.*
3. *We end up giving the fact sheet number 7.*