

OBSEQUIUM: WHY AND HOW IT IS STILL POSSIBLE TO DEMAND AND OFFER

1. Introduction

The problem of obedience¹ is one that has troubled the conscience of man since his genesis. *To obey or not to obey?* This primordial «Hamlet-esque» question whispered in the consciences of Adam and Eve and continues to do so right up to our own day in the consciences of each one of us. Indeed, as we hear it whisper within, we sense the tension between, on the one hand, our innate, creative genius and freedom, our god-likeness and control of life and its direction and, on the other hand, our innate, created limitation and finitude, our ungodliness in subjection to beings and powers other than ourselves and our inability to escape death. Truly, each one of us is at one and the same time authored and author and, therefore, subject to and subject of authority. We are creatures and yet «creators»; we make rules, and yet we ourselves are ruled. We are powerful, though not all-powerful and, at times, even powerless. Most of the time when we give commands, we are obeyed;

¹ I use here the word obedience taking into consideration the definition of *obsequium* as follows: «A personal act of obedience (or submission) to one who is superior from which flows one's interior or exterior actions which becomes an act of homage (worship) due to the superior, which when offered to superiors in general is reverence (*ob-servantia*), when offered to parents is piety (*pietas*), and when offered to God is worship (*cultus* by means of *devotio* and *latritia*)». J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church. From Tradition to Council, Code, Liturgy, and Contemporary Application*, Rome 2013, 35.

and yet, we know all too well that we too must be obedient and often are not. Having knowledge of many things, yet, not knowing all things, each one of us, therefore, is a believer, e.g., in our doctors, our bridge builders, our teachers, our priests, our parents, etc. We are autonomous, and yet we do not and cannot live in isolation — we live in relation to others and, therefore, we must love or die.

Moreover, in the context of our modern, post-Christian world the question of obedience is rendered all the more challenging. Man has practically reached the apex of his use of reason and will to power to do practically everything under the sun. We have gone to the moon and now, from light years away, we are studying the soil on Mars. Indeed, man has seemingly eclipsed God by making himself god, or at least forgetting his need for God as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI reminded us so often during his pontificate². The question of obedience recalls the primordial temptation which led to man's original fall from grace. In a very real way, we can say that the Tower of Babel is being built anew in our own day, but can it avoid another collapse? To

² Cf., e.g., BENEDICT XVI, Letter to the Bishops, 10 March 2009, in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*. V/1. 2010 (Gennaio-Giugno), Città del Vaticano 2010, 356-362; Cf. also Id., Address, 18 May 2006, in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, II/1. 2006 (Gennaio-Giugno), Città del Vaticano 2007, 618-622; Id., Address, 19 August 2011, in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*. VII/2. 2012 (Luglio-Dicembre), Città del Vaticano 2012, 118-120; Id., Address, 1 December 2011, in *ibid.*, 2012, 823-826; Id., Angelus, 13 March 2011, in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*. VII/1. 2012 (Gennaio-Giugno), Città del Vaticano 2012, 331-335; Id., Homily, 29 June 2010, *AAS* 102 (2010) 387-390; Id., Message for World Youth Day, 6 August 2011 [accessed: 02/12/2014], http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/youth/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100806_youth_en.html. N.B.: The texts published in *AAS* are originally in latin, others, published in *Insegnamenti* are in italian. Here they are translated in english. The titles don't correspond to the title in latin or italian.

change the analogy, we live in an age plagued by what Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI termed the «dictatorship of relativism» and the «isolation» of faith from reason and vice versa in pursuit of truth and man's subsequent service to it for his progress and the betterment of the world. What is more, this exaltation of human reason and its counterpart, religious fundamentalism, together with a distorted notion of tolerance, seemingly have reached the point of tyranny at which man is on the verge of destroying his innate ability to seek the truth, as well as his innate freedom to act, both of which, faith, reason, and tolerance properly understood set out to protect. Thus, having reached the heights, man seems to have barely stepped out of the depths and, in this way, is on the verge of destroying himself and the world in which he lives.

All of this, exacerbated by a culture of entitlement, leads to a distorted and erroneous understanding of power and freedom and, therefore, a heightened and improper individualism which makes obedience practically impossible to understand let alone demand with the expectation that it will be given. Added to this is the crisis of faith in the Church. As Pope Benedict XVI noted in his apostolic letter inaugurating the Year of Faith, *Porta fidei*,

Whereas in the past it was possible to recognize a unitary cultural matrix, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of the faith and the values inspired by it, today this no longer seems to be the case in large swathes of society, because of *a profound crisis of faith* that has affected many people³.

Accordingly, to many within and outside the Church, the Church seems out of date and behind the times, old-fashioned and rigid, prudishly caught up in morals and out of touch with reality. In many ways, especially in the United

³ BENEDICT XVI, Ap. Letter *Porta fidei*, 11 October 2011, n. 2, *AAS* 103 (2011) 723-734 (emphasis added).

States of America, the Church has become just another special interest group — a lobby. This attitude which affects many both within and outside the Church raises the question in the minds of many «Is the Church even necessary anymore?» and further «Why should I obey the Church?». For this reason, I believe Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, made this observation about pastoral ministry in general and preaching in particular:

If we attempt to put all things in a missionary key, this will also affect the way we communicate the message. In today's world of instant communication and occasionally biased media coverage, the message we preach runs a greater risk of being distorted or reduced to some of its secondary aspects. In this way certain issues which are part of the Church's moral teaching are taken out of the context which gives them their meaning. The biggest problem is when the message we preach then seems identified with those secondary aspects which, important as they are, do not in and of themselves convey the heart of Christ's message. We need to be realistic and not assume that our audience understands the full background to what we are saying, or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness.

Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to *concentrate on the essentials*, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing⁴.

⁴ FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 Nov. 2013, nn. 34-35 (emphasis added) [Accessed: 15/03/2014], http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html.

2. The Possibility of Obedience in the Church

In light of this, I believe the answer to the questions of whether it is possible for the Church in our day to demand obedience, in particular to her ordinary Magisterium, and whether it is possible for the faithful to obey the Church, and again, in particular her ordinary Magisterium, are brought to light⁵. Yes, it is possible both to demand obedience and to obey. Indeed, obey we must or die⁶! How-

⁵ Cf. cann. 212, 218, 752-753 CIC; cf. also CCEO cann. 15 §1, 21, 351, 599-600.

⁶ After having set forth the law of God as the path to life, Moses invites the Israelites to choose life and not the path of death (cf. Dt 30,19). Jesus, as the new Moses, came to fulfill the law (cf. Mt 5,17) and thereby open the path to life, life in abundance (cf. Jn 10,10). Cf. J. RATZINGER, «*In the Beginning*». *A Catholic Understanding of the Creation and Fall of Man*, tr. B. Ramsey, Michigan 1995 (orig. German, *Im Anfang schuf Gott*, Berlin 1986), 69-71: «We should see that human beings can never retreat into the realm of what they are capable of. In everything that they do, they constitute themselves. Therefore they themselves, and creation with its good and evil, are always present as their standard, and when they reject this standard they deceive themselves. They do not free themselves, but place themselves in opposition to the truth. And that means that they are destroying themselves and the world.

This, then, is the first and most important thing that appears in the story of Adam, and it has to do with the nature of human guilt and thus with our entire existence. The order of the covenant — the nearness of the God of the covenant, the limitations imposed by good and evil, the inner standard of the human person, creatureliness: all of this is placed in doubt. Here we can at once say that at the very heart of sin lies human beings' denial of their creatureliness, inasmuch as they refuse to accept the standard and the limitations that are implicit in it. They do not want to be creatures, do not want to be subject to a standard, do not want to be dependent. They consider their dependence on God's creative love to be an imposition from without. But that is what slavery is and from slavery one must free oneself.

ever, for this to occur what is needed is a renewed understanding of *who* we are as beings created in the image and likeness of God and called to live in relationship — communion — with Him. We need to concentrate on the essentials and what is most beautiful, as Pope Francis mentioned. Moreover, we need to do so in an effective way such that the hearts and minds of all men and women of good will, particularly those within the Church, will be enlightened by the splendor of the truth and will be moved to respond with that docility and obedience which is the mark of the sons and daughters of God. Indeed, obedience in the Church begins with and ends in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and simultaneously with his Church. Accordingly, Pope Benedict XVI noted that the

Christian faith is not only a matter of believing that certain things are true, but above all a personal relationship with

Thus human beings themselves want to be God. When they try this, everything is thrown topsy-turvy. The relationship of human beings to themselves is altered, as well as their relationships to others. The other is a hindrance, a rival, a threat to the person who wants to be God. The relationship with the other becomes one of mutual recrimination and struggle, as is masterfully shown in Genesis 3:8-13, which presents God's conversation with Adam and Eve. Finally, the relationship to the world is altered in such a way as to become one of destruction and exploitation. Human beings who consider dependence on the highest love as slavery and who try to deny the truth about themselves, which is their creatureliness, do not free themselves; they destroy truth and love. They do not make themselves gods, which in fact they cannot do, but rather caricatures, pseudo-gods, slaves of their own abilities, which then drag them down.

So it is clear now that sin is, in its essence, a renunciation of the truth. Now we can also understand the mysterious meaning of the words: "When you eat of it [that is, when you deny your limitations, when you deny your finitude], then you will die" (cf. Genesis 3:3). This means that human beings who deny the limitations imposed on them by good and evil, which are the inner standard of creation, deny the truth. They are living in untruth and unreality.

Jesus Christ. It is an encounter with the Son of God that gives new energy to the whole of our existence. When we enter into a personal relationship with him, Christ reveals our true identity and, in friendship with him, our life grows towards complete fulfillment⁷.

3. How *Obsequium* can be Demanded and Offered

At this point, we need to ask ourselves how this is possible. Initially there are two responses. A third will follow. First, there is a «mechanism» within the act of obedience itself which enables the act of obedience and thereby simultaneously a true act of reverence or respect to the person of authority making the command, namely, the *obsequium fidei* by means of the *obsequium intellectus et voluntatis*, i.e., the obedience of faith by means of the obedience (or submission) of mind and will. Secondly, there is the living example of the Son of God who

Their lives are mere appearance; they stand under the sway of death. We who are surrounded by a world of untruths, of unlife, know how strong this sway of death is, which even negates life itself and makes it a kind of death». Cf. also BENEDICT XVI, *Lectio Divina* with the Clergy of Rome, 18 Feb. 2010, in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*. VI/1. 2011 (*Gennaio-Giugno*), Città del Vaticano 2012, 248-249: Here, the Pontiff describes the obedience of Christ which redeems the disobedience of man and divinizes him. Cf. also Id., Homily, 26 March 2012 [Accessed: 15/03/2014], http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20120326_santiago-cuba_en.html.

⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Message for the Twenty-sixth World Youth Day, 6 Aug. 2011 (cf. nt. 2) (emphasis added). Cf. FRANCIS, *Lumen fidei*, 29 June 2013, n. 18, *AAS* 105 (2013) 555-596: «In addition to “believing that” what Jesus tells us is true, John also speaks of “believing” Jesus and “believing in” Jesus. We “believe” Jesus when we accept his word, his testimony, because he is truthful. We “believe in” Jesus when we personally welcome him into our lives and journey towards him, clinging to him in love and following in his footsteps along the way».

did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a Cross (Ph 2,6-8).

By means of this «*obsequentia Dei*»⁸, i.e., the obedient love and reverence of God for man, we have been saved — liberated from slavery to sin — and given «grace upon grace» (Jn 1,16) and power as children of God (cf. Jn 1,12) to «work out our salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure» (Ph 2,12-13). Here, the third response arises: God continues this work on our behalf in a primary way through the sacred Liturgy, the source and summit of which is the offering of the holy Sacrifice of the Mass which represents in an unbloody, sacramental manner the obedience of Christ unto death on the Cross (cf. SC 47). Indeed, each one of us,

in accord with our state in the Church, is drawn into the priestly and saving action of the divine *obsequium humanum* of Christ. In this way, [our] own *obsequium humanum* becomes *obsequium divinum in Christo*, i.e., divine worship in Christ, sacramentally made present through the liturgical action of the Church. [Therefore, our offering of obedience] is transformed into the *obsequium rationabile* which is that spiritual worship which alone is acceptable to the Father (cf. Rm 12,1)⁹.

⁸ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 30 Sept. 2010, n. 11, AAS 102 (2011) 681-787: «This obedient love [*obsequentia*] of God [for man] is uniquely fulfilled in the incarnation of the Word». Cf. also J. RATZINGER (BENEDICT XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth. II. Holy Week from the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, tr. P.J. Whitmore, San Francisco 2011, 239. This insight regarding the *obsequentia Dei* will be developed later in this article.

⁹ J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 156-157.

3.1 *First Response: Obsequium Intellectus et Voluntatis and Obsequium Fidei*

Let us now consider briefly each of these three responses in greater depth. To begin with, within the «mechanism» whereby an act of obedience is produced, there are two essential and simultaneous parts within each personal act of obedience. First, there is the *obsequium intellectus et voluntatis*, namely,

the intellectual recognition of the truth by which the intellect perceives it as true and, therefore, as good and, therefore, as desirable. The will in turn is moved by that perceived goodness and commands the intellect to accept the truth, to assent or submit to it. Indeed, by obeying the will, the intellect in turn is obedient to the truth. Thus, there is priority given to the truth and goodness of that which is proposed or commanded which the inferior receives and then desires to have and to hold. Consequently, by means of the reciprocal roles of the *intellectus* and the *voluntas*, the individual freely makes a personal act of obedience of mind and will, to the superior who teaches, proposes, or commands¹⁰.

A question naturally arises: what happens if the intellect does not perceive the truthfulness of what is taught or commanded? The answer is found in the second part of the «mechanism» within the act of obedience, namely, the *obsequium fidei* whereby the inferior «perceives the goodness and beneficence of his superior whom he trusts to have his best interests in mind»¹¹. Consequently, every act of obedience is rooted in humility and in faith in one's superior. This is exemplified in Mary at the time of the Annunciation. Accordingly, Pope Benedict XVI taught during one of his Wednesday Audiences that «the one who — like Mary — is totally open to God, comes to accept the will of God, even if it is mysterious, even if it often does not correspond

¹⁰ J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 18.

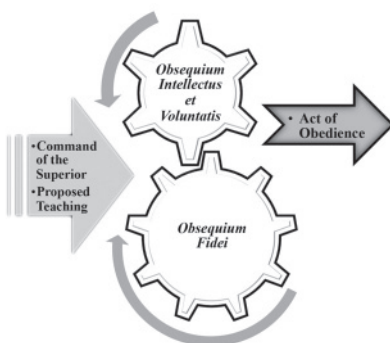
¹¹ J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 19.

to his own will and is a sword that pierces the soul»¹². In this case, the Holy Father was referring to an act of supernatural faith in God which motivates the believer to submit to or obey the will of God. Nevertheless, this obedience of faith occurs as well on a natural level in every act of obedience. One's personal relationship with his superior and his faith in the superior's truthfulness and goodness motivates him to submit to or obey the command of his superior, even if it is mysterious or not fully understood or difficult to fulfill.

Consequently, we can conclude that there is a double obedience (*obsequium*) within the act of obedience itself:

on the one hand, the reciprocal action of the intellect and the will; on the other hand, the internal natural act of faith in the superior. This «mechanism» of the *obsequium intellectus et voluntatis* and the deeper *obsequium fidei* within the acting person constitutes the free, total, and personal act of obedience of the person [*obsequium animi*]¹³.

The following graphic is offered to illustrate this «mechanism» within the act of obedience¹⁴:



¹² BENEDICT XVI, *General Audience*, 19 Dec. 2012 [accessed: 19/12/2012], http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20121219_it.html.

¹³ J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 21.

¹⁴ Cf. J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 21.

3.2 *Second Response: Christ's Obsequium Divinum*

Now let us consider the living example of Christ's obedience unto death, even death of the cross. As we already saw in citing Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians, the sacrificial obedience of Christ on the Cross revealed his obedient love (*obsequium divinum*) for the Father and remarkably his obedient love (*obsequentia*) for man, for each one of us. Indeed, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped, but rather humbled himself by «throwing off» his divine glory and, as Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his encyclical on Christian Love, *Deus caritas est*, by «turning against himself»¹⁵, the Son of God «followed after» lost and fallen man to the point of becoming like him in all things, but sin (cf. Heb 2,17-18). Thereby, he «poured himself out» for our salvation by offering himself to the Father in an obedience which began in his incarnation and was fulfilled in his death on the Cross (cf. Ph 2,6-11). Consequently, as the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* reminds us, Jesus «was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him» (Heb 5,7-9). Accordingly, as Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his apostolic exhortation on the Word of God, *Verbum Domini*,

The radical obedience of Jesus unto death on the Cross (cf. Ph 2,8) completely reveals [man's] sin. His obedience fulfills the New Covenant between God and man and also grants us the possibility of reconciliation. For Jesus was sent by the Father as the victim of atonement for our sins and those of the whole world (cf. 1Jn 2,2; 4,10; Heb 7,27). Thus, the merciful possibility of redemption and the beginning of new life in Christ is offered to us¹⁶.

¹⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 25 Dec. 2005, n. 12, AAS 98 (2006) 217-252.

¹⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini* (cf. nt. 8), n. 26.

3.2.1 Thinking with Christ

Indeed, this new life in Christ — this call to obedience to Christ and with Christ — was given to each one of us on the day of our Baptism, confirmed when we received Confirmation, and is renewed every time we assist at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Living a new life in Christ — living in obedience to Christ and his Church — means living the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of life (cf. *GS* 1) as a response of love to the infinite merciful love of God who has drawn near to us and shown us the path to life — «life in abundance» (Jn 10,10) — and thereby has set us on the path to true fulfillment and joy. Reflecting this truth, Pope Paul VI said in a speech given in 1974 to a gathering of Jesuits that «in obedience is found the substance itself of the imitation of Christ, who, *by obedience redeemed the world, lost on account of disobedience, having [himself] become obedient even unto death, death on a cross*»¹⁷.

¹⁷ PAUL VI, Speech, 3 Dec. 1974, *AAS* 66 (1974) 725 (emphasis orig.).

¹⁸ Elsewhere, Saint Paul speaks about being clothed in (*induite*), literally led into Christ and his life, cf. Ep 4,24; Col 3,12-14. What is more, Saint Peter in 1P 5,5 speaks to the younger men about their acceptance of the authority of the elders and uses the same imagery of being clothed in (*induite*) humility «for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble». Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Called to Communion. Understanding the Church Today*, tr. A. Walker, San Francisco 1996, 153; orig. German, *Zur Gemeinschaft gerufen: Kirche heute verstehen*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1991²; here, Cardinal Ratzinger, in reference to Ga 2,20, described the process and outcome of this Pauline notion of «being clothed in Christ»: (emphasis added) «I am wrested from my isolation and incorporated into the *communion* of a new subject; my “I” is inserted into the “I” of Christ and consequently joined to the “I” of all my brothers. Only from such deep renewal of the individual does the Church come into being as a *communion* that binds us together and sustains us in life and death». Here we begin to see «how *obsequium fidei* by means of *obsequium intellectus et voluntatis* is the very means by which the *communio fidei* is safeguarded, strengthened, and passed on to the next generation». J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 42, footnote 88. Indeed, it is *obsequium in communione*.

Consequently, Saint Paul invited the Philippians to imitate Christ and thus, to «obey», by *sentire*¹⁸ with Christ (cf. Ph 2,5), i.e., by perceiving, feeling, thinking, experiencing in themselves, and therefore making present in their own day, what Christ experienced in his life and particularly in his death, all of which revealed his obedient love of the Father and his fellowman. Thus, we can say that in slavery to Christ we become his friends (cf. Jn 15,14-15) in whose obedient love we live and move and have our being¹⁹. Consequently,

Christian joy is the fruit of *obsequium divinum* offered to God which is lived in a relationship of love in, with, and through Christ. Indeed, Jesus spoke of this relationship of love and completion of joy which comes from keeping his commands and remaining in him by living in love (cf. Jn 15,9-12). By doing so, one bears much fruit which is to the Father's glory, i.e., by which the Father is worshipped (cf. Jn 15,5-8). Moreover, by doing so, he begins to receive the glory which is his in the presence of God and which is to be revealed when Jesus comes again in glory²⁰.

For this reason, Saint Irenæus of Lyons, a second-century Father of the Church, wrote in his treatise *Against Heresies* the following:

If man, without being puffed up or boastful, has a right belief regarding created things and their divine Creator, who, having given them being, holds them all in his power, and if man perseveres in God's love, and in obedience [*subiectione*] and gratitude to him, he will receive greater glory from him. It will be a glory which will grow ever brighter until he takes on the likeness of the one who died for him. He it was *who took on the likeness of sinful flesh*, to condemn sin and rid the flesh of sin, as now condemned. He wanted to invite man

¹⁹ Cf. *Missale Romanum, Editio Typica Tertia*, Prex Eucharistica, Prefatio VI de Dominicis «per Annum».

²⁰ J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 42.

to take on his likeness, appointing man an *imitator* of God, establishing man in a way of life in obedience to the Father that would lead to the vision of God, and endowing man with power to receive the Father²¹.

3.2.2 Obedience as Power: A Christian Understanding of Freedom

At this point, ironically we begin to see the reversal of the erroneous understanding of power and freedom which plagues our modern, post-Christian world. Indeed for Christ, obedience is an act of power. Thus, could he say, «No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord, and I have power to take it again, this charge I have received from my Father» (Jn 10,18). Commenting on Christ's obedience as an act of power, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote:

The word used in the Bible for Jesus' power already provides a profound interpretation of the essence of power: it is not just the power of one's own physical or technical strength. It is not the power of an ancient or modern Goliath, but power stemming from obedience, that is, from a relationship of responsibility that is responsibility for being, the responsibility of truth and of good. As portrayed in the hymn to Christ in Philippians (2,5-11), it is humble power. Christ does not hold on to equality with God as a thief holds on to his booty, as power captured at last that can be enjoyed to excess. The thief's way of thinking, which corresponds to the conventional idea of power, is in fact the very indication of powerlessness. What has been stolen does not really belong to him, and that is precisely why he greedily uses it and selfishly defends it. Romano Guardini has very beautifully described the positive content of the fundamental act of Jesus, his crucifixion and

²¹ S. IRENÆUS, *Ex Tractatu sancti Irenæi episcopi Adversus hæreses* (Lib. 3, 20, 2-3: SCh 34. 342-344), in *Officium Divinum*, LH, I, Die 19 decembris: (emphasis added).

attendant exaltation, as it is portrayed in the hymn of Philipians: «Jesus' entire existence is the translation of power into humility [...] into obedience to the will of the Father. Obedience is not secondary for Jesus, but forms the core of his being». For his power there is therefore «no limit coming from outside, but only one from the inside [...]: the will of the Father freely accepted». It is a power that has such complete control over itself «that it is capable of renouncing itself». [...] Jesus' power is [...] the will of God, the ordering of the good and the true, love in person. Thus, Jesus' power is power based on love, love becoming powerful. It is power that shows us the way from all that is tangible and visible to the invisible and the truly real of God's powerful love. It is power as way that has as its goal setting people on their way: into the transcendence of love²².

Consequently, on account of this obedient love of Christ for the Father and for us unto death, he was highly exalted — glorified — and given the name above all names (cf. Ph 2,9). Indeed, just prior to ascending to heaven to the right hand of the Father, he directed the eleven disciples that all power in heaven and on earth had been given to him (cf. Mt 28,18).

Likewise, for each one of us true power and its free exercise is experienced to the extent that we accept the fact that we are created out of love by God and, consequently, as sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters in Christ, are called to live in love of God above all things and our neighbors as ourselves. Again turning to Cardinal Ratzinger, we read

Man is redeemed by the cross: the crucified Christ, as the completely opened being, as the true redemption of man —

²² J. RATZINGER, *A New Song for the Lord. Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*, tr. M. Matesich, New York 1996, 51-52; orig. German, *Ein Neues für Den Herrn: Christusglaube und Liturgie in Der Gegenwart*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1995.

that is the central principle of Christian faith. [...] It expresses the primacy of acceptance over action, over one's own achievement. [...] Accordingly, from the point of view of the Christian faith, man comes in the most profound sense to himself, not through what he does, but through what he accepts. He must wait for the gift of love, and love can only be received as a gift. It cannot be «made» on one's own, without anyone else; one must wait for it, let it be given to one. And one cannot become *wholly* man in any other way than by being loved, by letting himself be loved. That love represents simultaneously both man's highest possibility and his deepest need, and that this most necessary thing is at the same time the freest and the most unenforceable means precisely that for his «salvation» man is meant to rely on receiving. If he declines to let himself be presented with the gift, then he destroys himself. Activity that makes *itself* into an absolute, that aims at achieving humanity on its own efforts alone, is in contradiction to man's being. [...] The primacy of acceptance is not intended to condemn man to passivity; it does not mean that man can now sit idle, [...]. On the contrary, it alone makes it possible to do things of this world in a spirit of responsibility, yet at the same time is an uncramped, cheerful, free way, and to put them at the service of redemptive love²³.

Having first been loved by God and his fellowman, man can «love and do what [he] wills»²⁴ as Saint Augustine taught. We have been given the «glorious liberty of the children of God» (Rm 8,21) and, thus, «on the path of our life it means following the “signposts” that God has communicated to us in the Ten Commandments, interpreted

²³ J. RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, tr. J.R. Foster, San Francisco 2004, 266-268; orig. German, *Einführung in das Christentum*, Berlin 1968.

²⁴ S. AUGUSTINE, *In Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos*, 7.8, *Patrologia Latina* 35, Paris 1845.

with Christ, which are merely the explanation of what love is in specific situations»²⁵. For this reason Saint Augustine wrote: «If you keep silent, keep silent by love; if you speak, speak by love; if you correct, correct by love; if you pardon, pardon by love; let love be rooted in you, and from the root nothing but good can grow»²⁶.

3.3 *Third Response: Obsequium Rationabile*

This redemptive, obedient love is received and given in the ordinariness of our lives. However, it is made present and active, received and offered in a particular way in every offering of the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Indeed, «the Eucharist draws us into the act of oblation of Jesus. We do not merely statically receive the incarnate Logos, but we are involved in the dynamic of his oblation»²⁷. Consequently, each one of us, during the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, is invited to actively and consciously participate in this *obsequium divinum* of Christ by uniting our own free and personal act of *obsequium* to his (cf. SC 2, 14, 47)²⁸. Accordingly, Pope Pius XII specified that this act of *obsequium* is the act of *rationabile obsequium* which, although offered generally in the ordinariness of life, acquires a particular significance and weight during the sacred Liturgy. Indeed, he observed that

it is clear that the faithful offer the Sacrifice by the hands of the priest from the fact that the minister of the altar, in offering [the Sacrifice] in the name of all the members, acts in the person of Christ, the Head; by which, indeed, the whole Church is rightly said to offer the oblation of the victim

²⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Udiienza generale, 13 aprile 2011, in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*. VII/1. 2011 (Gennaio-Giugno), Città del Vaticano 2012, 449-460.

²⁶ S. AUGUSTINE, *In Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos*, 7.8 (cf. nt. 24).

²⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est* (cf. nt. 15), n. 13.

²⁸ Cf. J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 174.

through Christ. [...] [This is established] on account of the fact that their offering of praise, impetration, expiation, and thanksgiving unites together with the offerings or intention of the mind of the priest, indeed of the High Priest himself, with the result that by one and same offering of the victim, even by the external rite of the priest, they may be presented to God the Father. Indeed, it is necessary that the external rite of sacrifice, by its very nature, should manifest the internal worship [*cultum*]. What is more, the supreme Sacrifice of the new law signifies that worship [*obsequium*] by which the principal offerer himself, who is Christ, and, together with Him and through Him, all the members of his Mystical [Body] pursue and venerate God with due honor²⁹.

Consequently, he noted that

especially when the faithful take part in the liturgical service with such piety and intention, in order that it can truly be said of each of them: «whose faith and devotion is known to Thee»^[30], then they cannot but have their faith be exercised more ardently through charity, [their] piety flourish and enflame, and [that] each one should consecrate himself to the furthering of divine glory and, passionately desiring to assimilate himself most closely to Christ by bearing His most grievous sufferings, offer himself as a spiritual sacrifice [*spiritualem hostiam*] with the High Priest himself and through him³¹.

For this reason, the Holy Father went on to invite each member of the faithful to

strive almost as if to lose [himself] in the most holy soul [of Christ], having united [himself] most closely to [Him], and to be so united to Him that [he] may participate in those acts by

²⁹ PIUS XII, *Mediator Dei*, 20 Nov. 1947, *AAS* 39 (1947) 521-595.

³⁰ Here the Holy Father cites the Roman Canon (cf. *Missale Romanum*, Canon Missæ).

³¹ PIUS XII, *Mediator Dei* (cf. nt. 29).

which Christ adores the Blessed Trinity in a pleasing and most acceptable worship [*grato acceptissimoque obsequio*], and by which he offers to the eternal Father highest thanks and praise³².

3.4 *The Virtues of Obedience and Homage (Reverence)*

Here, we begin to see an intimate connection between the virtues of obedience and homage, or reverence. According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, the virtue of obedience is a specific virtue within the moral virtue of justice because it gives to a superior that which is his due (*iustum*)³³. Moreover,

the virtue of obedience is a specific virtue within the moral virtue of reverence (*observantia*) which is intimately connected to the virtues of religion and piety, all of which are annexed to the principal virtue of justice. The intimate connection between these three annexed virtues stems from their being grounded in a relationship of an inferior to his superior³⁴.

What is more, the virtue of obedience habitually moves the inferior to be more prompt in submitting to his superior and, thereby, perfects his submission which in no way limits the freedom or merit of the inferior. Rather, because it is a virtue, it makes the inferior prompt and willing to submit, to turn over, even to give up or offer his will to that of the superior, especially, when the superior's demands are disagreeable or mysterious to him³⁵. In fact, Saint Thomas notes that the greater the subjection, i.e., the greater the

³² PIUS XII, *Mediator Dei* (cf. nt. 29).

³³ S. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, *Ila-IIæ*, q. 80; q. 104, a. 1, ad 3; q. 104, a. 3, co.

³⁴ J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 23. Here, I cite S. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, *Ila-IIæ*, q. 104, a. 2, co.; q. 104, a. 2, ad 3.

³⁵ Cf. S. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, *Ila-IIæ*, q. 104, a. 1, ad 3; q. 104, a. 3, co.

breaking of one's own will, the greater is the merit and praise which are due to the inferior³⁶. The Angelic Doctor can make this assertion since, as he notes,

the more preferable something is, so much the greater is that by which one sacrifices it in order that he may adhere to God. [...] [Among the goods of the soul which are supreme of all goods,] the will is the highest inasmuch as truly by the will, man uses all other goods. And, therefore, the virtue of obedience, which sacrifices the will on account of God, is considered in itself more praiseworthy than all the moral virtues, which on account of God sacrifice some other goods³⁷.

Accordingly, Saint Thomas considers the connection between the virtue of obedience and the virtue of homage, or reverence. He distinguishes the virtue depending upon to whom the homage is given or the reverence is shown. When shown to superiors in general, it is a general act of reverence (*observantia*)³⁸; when it is shown to one's parents or to one's country, it is an act of piety (*pietas*)³⁹; and, when it is shown to God, it is an act of religion (*religio*)⁴⁰. Expounding upon the act of homage, or reverence, due to God, Saint Thomas distinguishes as follows:

by the same act man serves God and worships him. For, worship [*cultus*] regards the excellence of God, to whom reverence [*reverentiam*] is due; service, however, regards the subjection of man who, on account of his condition [as a creature], is obliged to offer reverence [*reverentiam*] to God. And, to these two [acts] pertain all acts which are attributed to religion, since, by all of them, man bears wit-

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 104, a. 3, co.

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, q. 102.

³⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, q. 101.

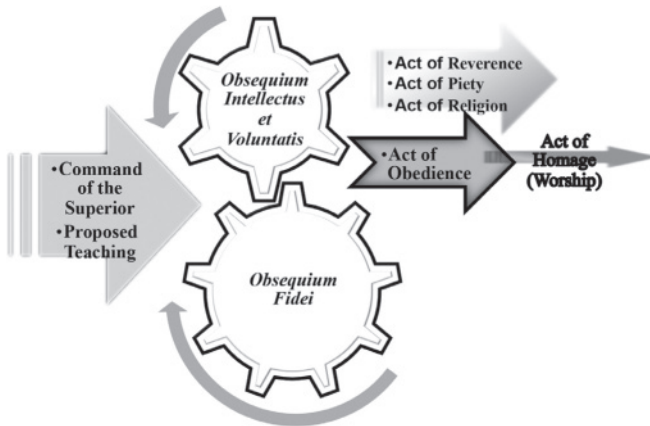
⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, q. 81; q. 82; q. 83.

ness to the divine excellence and to his own subjection to God, either by offering something to him, or by assuming something divine⁴¹.

As we just observed, it is precisely man's will, that which is most dear to him, which is offered, we could say sacrificed, to God. Moreover,

the greater the sacrifice asked and willingly made, the greater is the sacrifice actually offered because it actively manifests the individual's recognition of God's superiority and priority. This act of sacrifice constitutes the essence of worship⁴².

The following graphic is offered to illustrate this connection between the act of obedience and the act of homage due to a superior⁴³:



⁴¹ *Ibid.*, q. 81, a. 1, ad 4.

⁴² J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 31.

⁴³ Cf. J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 29.

4. Practical «Theoretical» Conclusions

At this point, we are prepared to offer some practical «theoretical» conclusions as to *how* the Church can demand, in our own day, *obsequium* of her members and *how*, in turn, her members can offer *obsequium* to the Church, particularly to her ordinary Magisterium. It is possible and more necessary than ever. However, it is possibly more challenging than ever since «in vast areas of the world the faith is in danger of dying out like a flame which no longer has fuel»⁴⁴.

4.1 *Lead Men Back to Faith and Obedience (obsequium) to Christ*

Consequently, in order for the Church to demand *obsequium* she must have as her priority, as Pope Benedict XVI reminded the bishops of the world, making

God present in this world and to show[ing] men and women the way to God. Not just any god, but the God who spoke on Sinai; to that God whose face we recognize in a love which presses «to the end» (cf. Jn 13,1) — in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Letter to the Bishops, 10 March 2009 (cf. nt. 2). Cf. also, BENEDICT XVI, Homily, 28 Oct. 2012, *AAS* 104 (2012) 888-891: «Bartimaeus could represent those who live in regions that were evangelized long ago, where the light of faith has grown dim and people have drifted away from God, no longer considering him relevant for their lives. These people have therefore lost a precious treasure, they have “fallen” from a lofty dignity — not financially or in terms of earthly power, but in a Christian sense — their lives have lost a secure and sound direction and they have become, often unconsciously, beggars for the meaning of existence. They are the many in need of a new evangelization, that is, a new encounter with Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God (cf. Mk 1,1), who can open their eyes afresh and teach them the path».

⁴⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Letter to the Bishops (cf. nt. 44).

This pastoral program is nothing new. Long before Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Saint Paul exhorted the church in Corinth that they must

destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and [...] *take every thought captive* to obey Christ [*obsequium Christi*]⁴⁶, being ready to punish every disobedience [*inobædientiam*], when your obedience is complete [*obædientia*] (emphasis added) (2Co 10,5-6).

In order to take every thought captive to obey Christ, the Church must, as we saw in the introduction of this article when we cited Pope Francis, focus on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. This means that the Church must seek, as the Second Vatican Council Fathers taught, to «lead men back to faith and obedience [*obsequium*] to Christ» (*DH 11*)⁴⁷. In doing so, the fuel of faith,

⁴⁶ N.B., the Latin version of the text utilizes the word *obsequium* which in the English is translated with the verb obey: «Consilia destruentes et omnem altitudinem extollentem se adversus scientiam Dei, et in captivitatem redigentes omnem intellectum in obsequium Christi et in promptu habentes ulcisci omnem inobædientiam, cum impleta fuerit vestra obædientia».

⁴⁷ «homines ad fidem et obsequium Christi reducendos». This is a difficult phrase to translate. I have here chosen to translate *obsequium Christi* as the «obedience to Christ» by using *Christi* in the objective genitive case. Doing so reveals that the proclamation of the Gospel is oriented to the awakening of the intellect to the reasonableness of the faith which in turns elicits the command of the will to the intellect to assent which, in its turn, commands the will to submit to Christ. Thereby, the entire person gives to Christ allegiance and serves him through his personal act of *obsequium*. Moreover, the message of truth is Christ Himself who is the way, the truth and the life (cf. Jn 14,6). Thus, one is led to faith in Christ and his love first and, then, to placing himself under the headship of Christ — under his reign. Furthermore, this obedience in love of Christ becomes the very means of worshipping him and assimilating oneself to him and, thereby, of worshipping the Father and, thereby, offering *obsequium rationabile*.

which «by its specific nature is an encounter with the living God — an encounter opening up new horizons extending beyond the sphere of reason»⁴⁸, will begin to be replenished.

Indeed, as we have seen, this light that comes from faith and the encounter with God illumines the *intellectum*. In a particular way, it does so for all men and women of good will, especially those who are restless and searching for meaning to life and for lasting happiness. This may explain why, in part, so many have flocked to the universal shepherd of the Church in recent days. Moreover, this focus on essentials and what is most beautiful — this focus on the *obsequentia Dei*, i.e., the obedient love of God for us, his restlessness for us⁴⁹ — strikes the *voluntatem* and awakens it to command the *intellectum* to obey the truth which comes to it from faith. In this way, the *obsequium fidei* occurs by means of the *obsequium intellectus et voluntatis* and, thereby, produces an act of obedience to Christ and his

⁴⁸ BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est* (cf. nt. 15), n. 28; cf. also BENEDICT XVI, Homily, 28 Oct. 2012 (cf. nt. 44).

⁴⁹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Homily, 6 Jan. 2012, *AAS* 102 (2010) 74-77: «Our heart is restless for God and remains so, even if today, with very effective “narcotics”, one searches to deliver man from this unrest. But not only are we human beings restless for God, the heart of God is restless for us. God waits for us. He seeks us. Even He is not at calm, until he should find us. The heart of God is restless, and for this reason he set out on the path toward us — to Bethlehem, to Calvary, from Jerusalem to Galilee and finally to the very ends of the earth. God is restless for us, He is in search for people who are willing to allow themselves to be caught by his unrest, by his passion for us». Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Homily, 6 Jan. 2013 [accessed: 06/01/2013], http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20130106_epifania_it.html: «Man is not alone in having in himself the constitutive restlessness for God, but this restlessness is a participation in the restlessness of God for us. Since God is restless for us, he follows us even to the manger, even to the Cross».

Church, particularly to her ordinary Magisterium, which simultaneously will also be an act of homage or reverence shown again to Christ, and his Church, particularly to her ordinary Magisterium.

4.2 *Reason illumined by Faith properly understands Freedom and Power*

It follows that the erroneous understanding of freedom and power in our times will thereby begin to be corrected. In view of this, Pope Benedict XVI noted that

if reason is to be exercised properly, it must undergo constant purification, since it can never be completely free of the danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests. From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly⁵⁰.

Building upon this thought, in his encyclical, *Spe salvi*, the Holy Father taught that

reason is God's great gift to man, and the victory of reason over unreason is also a goal of the Christian life. But when does reason truly triumph? When it is detached from God? When it has become blind to God? Is the reason behind action and capacity for action the whole of reason? If progress, in order to be progress, needs moral growth on the part of humanity, then the reason behind action and capacity for action is likewise urgently in need of integration through reason's openness to the saving forces of faith, to the differentiation between good and evil. Only thus does reason become truly human. It becomes human only if it is capable of directing the will along the right path, and it is capable of this only if it looks beyond itself. Otherwise, man's situation, in view of the imbalance between his material capacity and the lack of

⁵⁰ BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est* (cf. nt. 15), n. 28.

judgement in his heart, becomes a threat for him and for creation. Thus where freedom is concerned, we must remember that human freedom always requires a convergence of various freedoms. Yet this convergence cannot succeed unless it is determined by a common intrinsic criterion of measurement, which is the foundation and goal of our freedom. Let us put it very simply: man needs God. [...] There is no doubt, therefore, that a «Kingdom of God» accomplished without God — a kingdom therefore of man alone — inevitably ends up as the «perverse end» of all things. [...] Yet neither is there any doubt that God truly enters into human affairs only when, rather than being present merely in our thinking, he himself comes towards us and speaks to us. Reason therefore needs faith if it is to be completely itself: reason and faith need one another in order to fulfil their true nature and their mission⁵¹.

4.3 *The Centrality of the Sacred Liturgy and of Private Prayer*

At this point, the centrality of the sacred Liturgy, particularly the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and personal, private prayer comes to light as the means *par excellence* of replenishing the fuel of faith. In this light, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught:

«God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him» (1Jn 4,16). Now God has poured out his love in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (cf. Rom 5,5); therefore the first and most necessary gift is charity, by which we love God above all things and our neighbour through love of him. But if charity, like a good seed, is to grow and fructify in the soul, each of the faithful must willingly hear the word of God and carry out his will with deeds, with the help of his grace. He must frequently receive the sacraments, chiefly the Eucharist, and

⁵¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Spe salvi*, 30 Nov. 2007, *AAS* 99 (2007) 985-1027, n. 19.

take part in the holy liturgy; he must constantly apply himself to prayer, self-denial, active brotherly service and the exercise all the virtues. This is because love, as the bond of perfection and fullness of the law (cf. Col 3,14; Rom 13,10) governs, gives meaning to, and perfects all the means of sanctification (*LG* 42).

The holy Sacrifice of the Mass merits a particular observation since it is «the source and summit of Christian life» (*SC* 47). Indeed, every offering of holy Mass is «an act of going to meet the one who is coming»⁵². As we have seen, in the Eucharist, Christ comes to us and draws us into his *obsequium divinum* — his obedience unto death on the Cross. By our participation in this *obsequium rationabile* we are set free from sin and restored to right relation with God⁵³ and with one another. Indeed, Christ offers himself to us, both in word and in sacrament, in order to make our hearts like unto his — to re-form us in his image and likeness. Thus, as we begin more and more to *sentire* with him, we begin to offer more readily our wills in obedience to the Father's will and his ways and, in doing so, we begin to more perfectly offer him that worship which alone is acceptable (cf. Rm 12,1), namely the offering of our very selves in union with the self-offering of Christ to his Father. By means of this human formation, we are enabled to imitate Christ in our daily lives by living in love for one another. «If we allow the love of

⁵² BENEDICT XVI, *Light of the World. The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times. A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, tr. M.J. Miller – A.J. Walker, San Francisco 2010, 180; orig. German, *Licht der Welt: Der Papst, die Kirche, und die Zeichen der Zeit. Ein Gespräch mit Peter Seewald*, Vatican City 2010.

⁵³ Cf. S. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Catechesis* XIII, par. 1, in *Patrologia Græca*, 33, Paris 1886: «The glory of the Cross illuminated those who were blind through ignorance, freed those who were held captive by sin, and redeemed the entire world of man».

Christ to change our heart, then we can change the world. This is the secret of authentic happiness»⁵⁴.

For this reason, to the extent that the holy Mass is offered well and in accord with the rubrics, we are drawn more efficaciously into the truths of the faith presented by the Word of God and the homily and thereby are led into greater *obsequium in comunione* — communion with God and with one another⁵⁵. In this way, we are able to more fruitfully make a sacrificial offering of ourselves and our lives to the Father both within holy Mass itself and also in our daily lives — in our homes, workplaces, and places of recreation. This means that the priest needs to disappear so that Christ can become visible through him and his words and actions. The focus of the Mass always must be on God who is coming. This requires intense preparation on the part of both the priest and the faithful. What we are about at holy Mass is serious business and how often we arrive unprepared. Studying and praying with the readings of the Mass, indeed, growing in our understanding of the Mass itself and its sacramental actions, prior to our arrival would be the first step toward a more fruitful offering of oneself and reception of the grace offered. The homily needs to be restored to its proper role of presenting the faith first and morals second — focusing on the essentials, what is most beautiful and what is most necessary, namely, our relationship with God and who we are in relationship to him. Everything else flows from this. Indeed, if one cannot «drop» the text of the homily into the Missal, it is probably well-intended but misguided. What is more, sacred music must

⁵⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Address, 24 March 2012 [accessed: 31/03/2014], http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2012/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_sppe_20120324_bambini-guanajuato_en.html.

⁵⁵ Accordingly, the law of the Church sets forth the right of the faithful to the proper celebration of the sacred Liturgy (cf. can. 214 CIC; can. 17 CCEO).

be restored as well as sacred silence. When we enter the church, we depart the world and its sounds, smells, and ways — indeed, we enter eternity as eternity opens unto us and enters into us. Finally, the orientation of the Mass *ad orientem vel Deum* must be restored: Everything is oriented to God who is coming to us; the priest is merely the instrument by which God speaks to his people, and they to him, by which they offer themselves to God, and he to them. If this is not possible then the use of the altar crucifix and six candles is essential, for they focus both the priest and the people on Christ and his holy and perfect sacrifice made here and now present and active in their lives.

5. Conclusion

If these practical «theoretical» conclusions are acted upon, I believe, the Church can still demand *obsequium* of her members and they can still offer it to her. Thereby, she will continue to be a light to the nations and the sacrament of salvation in our own times. In this way, she will fulfill her mission to lead all men and women of good will «to the faith, the freedom and the peace of Christ, such that there may lie open before them a firm and free path to full participation in the mystery of Christ» (AG 5).

This full participation in the mystery of Christ is, as we have hoped to show in this article, a life lived in *obsequium Christi* (cf. DH 11) and the certain and free path to it is the personal offering of *obsequium fidei* by means of *obsequium intellectus et voluntatis*⁵⁶.

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⁵⁶ J. WACHS, *Obsequium in the Church* (cf. nt. 1), 220.