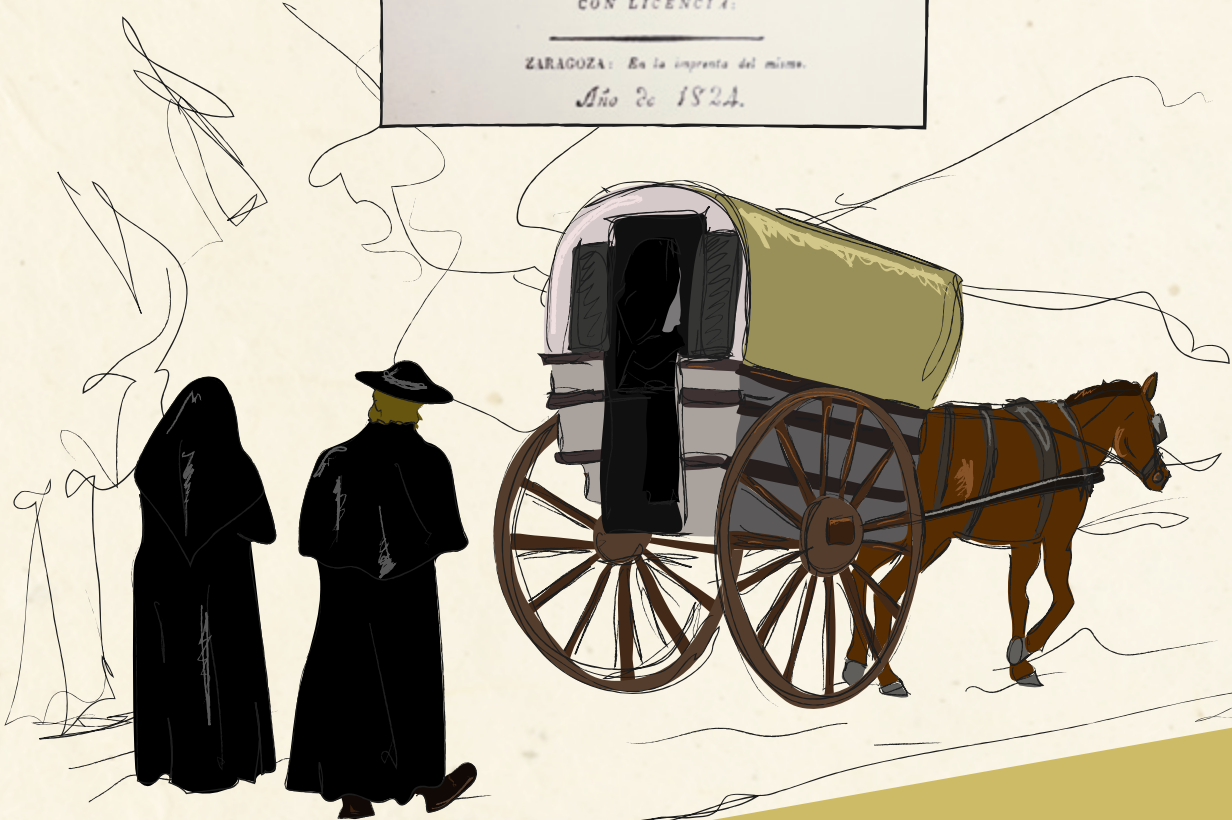
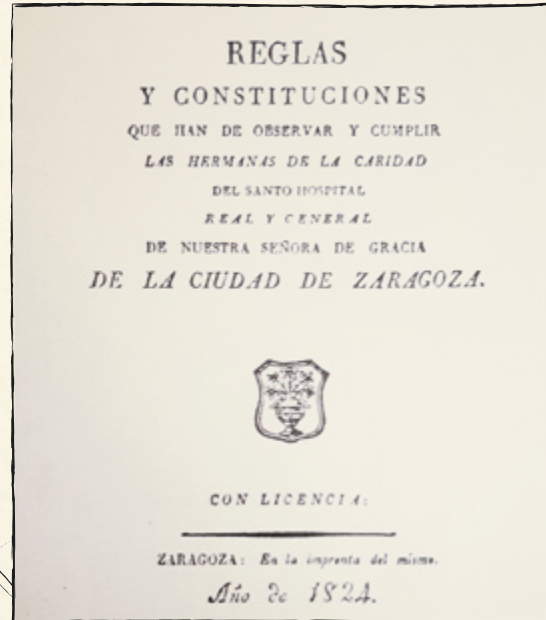


200th Anniversary of the approval of the
CONSTITUTIONS OF 1824



**THE LIFE PROJECT OF CHRIST ACCEPTED AND
LIVED FOR THOSE WHO FOLLOW HIM
EVANGELICAL COUNSELS
-THE GIFT OF OBEDIENCE, PATH OF INTELLIGENCE-**





“Obedience is a gift of the Spirit that identifies us with obedient Jesus who, in a filial attitude, accepts the will of the Father, becomes the servant of all and carries out his Plan of Salvation”

(Const. no . 22 to 27/OV no . 24 and 26).



INTRODUCTION

200 years ago, the Constitutions of 1824, in Chapters IX, X and XI, proposed to us the conception of the Vows at that time. They spoke to us first of all about the Vow of Poverty, followed by the Vow of Continence and ending with the Vow of Obedience.

As regards Obedience, these Constitutions, among other things, say in Chapter XI, pages 59 and 60: “Regarding this general obligation common to all Christians, the Sisters of Charity of this Holy Hospital promise, by simple vow, particular obedience to the President who is, and for whatever time, of her Brotherhood, obliging themselves to practice whatever she commands them according to the reason of her superiority and (that) is not manifestly contrary to the precepts of God.”

200 years later, the Constitutions will change the order of the presentation and will invite us to enter, into the dynamics of the gift, through the door of Obedience: “Obedience is a gift of the Spirit that identifies us with obedient Jesus who, in a filial attitude, accepts the will of the Father, becomes the servant of all and carries out his Plan of Salvation” (Const. no . 22 to 27/OV no . 24 and 26).

To contemplate the vows through the Theology of Gift is therefore our concern and also our challenge. Let us take the risk of looking at the vows “in a different way.” This will be a journey as difficult as it is exciting.



1. OBEDIENCE AS A GIFT

Let us begin with the vow of Obedience, which we are going to consider as a gift. A gift that introduces us to the path of intelligence. A gift that comes from God and that makes us participate in the divine nature. **“Man is capable of God” said Saint Thomas Aquinas.**

“Being capable of God” leads us to “being capable of his will.” Yes, being capable of seeking God’s will, being capable of finding it, being capable of accepting it, being capable of fulfilling it.

Able to always do “the will of the Father.” Why? Because of whom? **«For this is how Jesus lived».** Jesus, the man made complete, «coming from God, not to do his own will but the will of the one who sent him» (cf. Jn 6:38).

Let us note that “doing someone’s will” requires “being in communion with him.” And how could we be in communion without understanding? And how could we understand without intelligence? We are far from the old conception of the vow in which we spoke of blind obedience. **No, by the vow of Obedience, we are not called to blindness but to enlightened and lucid discernment.**

2. DISCERNMENT

2.1. What is discernment? *«To discern is to check, examine, identify, recognize to see if this or that situation really suits my situation, my identity.» «By the simple fact of knowing how to discern between several values, man shows that he passes from childhood to adulthood»¹*

2.2. Enlightened Discernment by the “power of a Word.” This Word manifests and justifies the fundamental choice to which we have committed our lives: **Christ.** And, with Him and like Him, we can say:

- “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.- Jn 4, 32-
- «For I have come from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me» - Jn 6,38-
- “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” -Mt 4, 10b-
- «It is not by saying to me, <Lord, Lord,> that one enters the Kingdom of Heaven, but by doing the will of my Father who is in heaven.» - Mt 7,21-
- «For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven is my brother and sister and mother» -Mt 12,50-

¹ Germain GAZOA « Le Discernement Spirituel », Ed. St Matthieu, Le Pain de Vie, Abidjan 2006



2.3. Lucid discernment capable of knowing and understanding the mystery of love which, born of God, takes root in humanity. Mystery of love. Mystery revealed because Mystery Incarnate. Everything is said in **Christ**.

- “Did you not know that I had to be in my Father’s house?” - Lk 2, 49-
- “Being a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being conceived perfectly, he appeared to all who obey him, the source of eternal salvation” -Heb 5, 8-9-
- «Having become like a man, he humbled himself even more, even to death, even death on a cross» - Phil 2, 7-8 -
- “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.” -Mt 6,42-

In our project of Christian life, which is Religious Life, the vow of Obedience demands that we place ourselves, without reservation, in the hands of God. If the path of Fertility, which is the Gift of Chastity, leads us to “give life,” to give ourselves to the extreme, if the path of Freedom, which is the Gift of Poverty, makes us available to fill ourselves with the only thing necessary, which is God, then the path of Intelligence, which is given to us through the Gift of the vow of Obedience, enables us to understand the will of God and to put everything in motion in order to successfully carry out the mission entrusted to us.

3. BUT WHAT IS GOD’S WILL FOR ME?

To answer this question, we must accept that, if God has made us capable of asking questions, his will for us is to see our spirit develop. And that it develops through discernment that builds personality and makes it mature.

3.1. Philosophy says that the human person is defined by his intellectual capacity to ask questions and to make a responsible choice. If Philosophy is not mistaken, we are here in the ideal framework of intelligent Obedience. This lucid Obedience puts us in the position of the “watchman.” Of the “watchman” yes, that person who, remaining attentive to what comes from elsewhere, understands the scope of what arrives and makes the intelligent choice, both of the adequate interpretation of the sign that appears on the horizon, and of the transmission of the meaning of that sign. **The Religious, having received the Gift of Obedience, is therefore the “Watchman” on the journey who watches the will of God.** This will will be manifested through the **Mediations** and in view of the **Mission** that must be fulfilled.

3.2. What are these mediations ?

Let us reread the formula of Vows. By this formula (*Const, 15*), we committed ourselves before God and before men. We will find, without any doubt, the Superior, in whose hands we pronounced our vows, and the Constitutions according to



which we committed ourselves. These two ways will be for us, **and this forever**, the safeguards of our intelligently oblation Obedience.

3.3. What does the Second Vatican Council tell us about this?

«Religious, then, should listen to their superiors with respect and humility, according to the Rules and Constitutions, in a spirit of faith and love for the will of God, bringing the strength of their intelligence and their will, and all the gifts of grace and nature, to bear on the fulfillment of orders and the execution of the tasks entrusted to them, with the certainty that they are working for the edification of the Body of Christ according to God's plan. In this way, religious obedience, far from diminishing the dignity of the human person, leads it to maturity by making it grow in the freedom of the children of God» (*Perfectæ Charitatis* , n°14 §2).

3.4. The Superior!

This term was missing from our discourse. One cannot deal with the contemplation of the Gift of Obedience without entering into the field of **Authority** and without considering the place **of the “sent one”** in the dynamics of that path of Intelligence which is the Gift of the vow of Obedience.

Intelligent and Wise , two words that go hand in hand in defining the one who obeys and, at the same time, in describing the one who has been temporarily entrusted with the mission/service of authority.

He is Intelligent and Wise who, **by obeying or leading** , knows and puts into practice “the art of good living”:

- Curious about things in nature: IR 5.13
- Seeing the hand of God in everything: Job 36:22 to 37:18; Sir 42:15 to 43:33
- Expert in his craft: Is 40,20; Jr 9,16; I Ch 22,15
- With a lucid gaze on the lucid world: Pr 13,7; Si 13, 21 ff.
- As a good psychologist, he knows what is hidden in the human heart: Pr 13,12; 14,13; Eccl 7, 2-6
- A born educator, he lays down rules for his disciples: Si 7, 32 ss ; Tb 4, 7-11; Pr 11,1; 17,15; Pr 14,31; 17,15; Pr 14,31; 17,5; If 4.1-10,
- Having acquired wisdom at the high price of hard work, he desires nothing more than to pass it on to others: Sir 51:13-30,
- He invites his disciples to undertake the difficult learning with courage: Sirach 6:18-372

2 Xavier LEON - DUFOUR «Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique», 8th^{edition} , CERF, Paris 1995



CONCLUSION

He who has roots remembers. He who looks to the horizon lives history. He who has enough wisdom to believe, hope and love what is coming builds the future.

And in this vital dynamic, Obedience makes us capable of understanding God, of accepting his will and of serenely discerning its realization.

Whoever receives the gift of Obedience sees the will of God that is manifested through Mediations and in view of the Mission that is presented.

The Second Vatican Council challenges us to listen with respect and humility to our superiors, and to do so in accordance with the Rules and Constitutions.

And in all, the Holy Scripture describes who is Wise and Intelligent, obeying as leading or, what is the same, knowing and putting into practice “the art of good living.” We also take into account that, in Hebrew, the word “obey” – *SHEMA* – means: **to listen**. Yes, to listen intelligently.³

What we have said so far seems to open the door to reflection on leadership. We all know that a true leader is one who gives himself, in his moment, to generate leaders more capable than himself and to fertilize the future that he promises, both among those who obey and among those who lead. Do we dare?

Work of reflection and internalization that helps us personally and communally to be a visible image of the One whom we have followed:

- In the light of the biblical texts, draw the profile of the intelligent and wise Superior.
- Do the same work to obtain the profile of the obedient and wise Religious.
- **In what way, and how, would each profile favor or hinder the understanding of Religious Life in our world today and in that of tomorrow?**
- We remember in which of the experiences of the Community Project we considered the **Gift of the vow of Obedience**.

³ Annick de SOUCENELLE “LA LETTRE CHEMIN DE VIE”, *DERVY-LIVRES* 26, rue Vauquelin. Paris V 1987

Listen to the Podcast by clicking on play





Sisters of Charity of Saint
Anne