



Obedience, a questionable virtue

by Marie Louise Uhr

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Introduction

MY CONCERN WITH THE question of obedience as a primary Christian virtue has arisen from magisterial decisions about the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. I don't intend to pursue that issue here. But I wish to suggest that a Christian theology which preaches an obedient Christ and upholds obedience to authority as a major virtue has led to authoritarian, hierarchical church structures, which have encouraged church members to uphold obedience, rather than conscientious discernment, as the primary response to orders from both church and civil authorities.¹ And that this has had disastrous consequences for large segments of society. Hence I want to consider the theology, and in particular the Christology, of obedience; some of the social and theological problems that I think come from this Christology; scriptural foundations for dissent and disobedience, and the possibilities of a more Spirit-led, democratic church.

The theology of obedience

Hebrew religion and the religions that stem from it are religions of the word of God, which must be heard and obeyed.² Obedience, according to present definitions, is 'the action or practice of dutiful or submissive compliance' (*Macquarie Dictionary* 1981) or 'being submissive to the will of a superior, doing what one is bidden' (*Shorter Oxford Dictionary* 1970). In English as in Hebrew and Greek, the importance of hearing in the idea of obeying is discernible in the derivation of many of the words used.³ Moreover, words other than 'obey/obedient/obedience' also indicate the idea of carrying out the orders or will of another and need to be considered. The Book of Exodus rings out with cries of 'The Lord said to Moses: go . . . tell . . . rise' . . . and the freedom of the Israelites

depended on Moses' hearing and obeying the word of Yahweh. In the desert, God spoke to Moses and the Israelites: 'I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not . . . you shall . . . you shall not . . . (Ex 20:1-17; Deut 5:1-22). The consequences were clear: obedience brings blessings and disobedience brings curses (Deut 28). 'The liberating, covenantal bond of Yahweh'⁴ ensured that, if they listened to him and did his will, Yahweh would be God of the Israelites and the Israelites would be the people of God.

The Hebrew people acclaimed this in their 'origin story' in which their relationship with their God begins with a tale of disobedience which ensured that all humanity suffers. Adam and Eve disobeyed: for this they were cursed. But God blessed the Israelites and selected them from all humanity to become the chosen people because Abraham, their fore-father, was a man of obedience. When God demanded Abram to 'go from your country and your kindred and your father's house . . . and I will make of you a great nation . . .' (Gen 12:1-3), Abram went. When Sarai said to the childless Abram 'Go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her' (Gen 16:2). Abram obeyed. Later when Sarai—now Sarah—said to Abram—now Abraham—'Cast out this slave woman with her son' (Gen 21:10), Abraham calmly put bread and water and their son Ishmael on Hagar's shoulders 'and sent her away' (Gen 21:14). It does not seem important to Abraham whether Hagar and his son survived the ordeal; what mattered was that he remained 'pre-eminently obedient to God's command'.⁵ Then came the great test of this obedience, the order from God to kill his 'beloved son', Isaac. Abraham set out to obey.

The harsh story of the binding of Isaac as told in Genesis 22:1-19 cries out for softening, and 20th century interpreters

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have sought to soften it. Some read the story as that of God forbidding human sacrifice.⁶ Others, such as Von Rad and followers, see the issue as really one of faith. It is Abraham's faith in God's promise to set up a people through Abraham that God is testing, and Abraham has faith that God can do this even if Isaac is killed.⁷ But the text, as Levenson has cogently argued, will not allow it.⁸ To Abraham and to Isaac (Gen 22:15-18; Gen 26:1-5) it is made clear: Yahweh was demanding obedience, even to the extent of Abraham being prepared to kill 'the beloved son', and it was obedience that he (Yahweh) would reward with his covenant. As Levenson comments:

Abraham's willingness to heed the frightful command may or may not demonstrate faith in the promise that is invested in Isaac, but it surely and abundantly demonstrates his putting obedience to God ahead of every possible competitor.⁹

I leave it to linguistic historians to consider the changing meanings of words translated today as obedience. Whatever such obedience meant to the Hebrew people, and regardless of to what extent such a meaning may differ from its meaning today, it is this text that becomes a central one in today's Christian liturgy and theology and it is today's usage with which I am concerned.

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This Hebraic conviction that the primary response to God is that of hearing the Word of God and obeying it probably inevitably became central to the thinking of Jewish New Testament writers such as Paul when they tried to make sense of Jesus' life and death. Again it is necessary to consider more than the direct use of 'obey/obedient/obedience'. As Longenecker notes, the concept of obedience is much more central to early Christianity than the direct usage of 'obey', 'obedient', 'obedience' in the New Testament.¹⁰ For instance, the fourth gospel may not use these words, but it speaks clearly of the Son who was sent to do the will of the Father (John 3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 36, 37; 6:29, 38, 39, 57; 7:16, 18, 29; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44, 45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21). A twentieth century Christology has no doubts about the central place of obedience in the saving work of Jesus as interpreted from such texts of John's gospel:

The Son is the person who submits himself unreservedly in *obedience* to God. Thus he is wholly and entirely transparent for God; his *obedience* is the form in which God is substantially present. *Obedience* effected and brought about by God himself is the historical mode of existence and manifestation of the divine Sonship. In his *obedience* Jesus is the setting forth of God's nature.¹¹

And if the Son of God himself is primarily obedient, what right do we have to disobey?

For Paul, and therefore for much later Christology and liturgy, the stories of the disobedience of Adam (and Eve) and the obedience of Abraham and Isaac are central to his developing Christology. For Paul, the obedience of Jesus overcomes all that followed from the disobedience of Adam (Rom 5:18-20), and it made us children of Abraham (Gal 3:14, 29). Moreover the Abraham-Isaac story is given a new twist as Abraham, the father willing to sacrifice his beloved son, becomes an icon of God who offers up his only son, Jesus; and Jesus becomes a willing Isaac, freely offering himself at his Father's bidding. So Paul develops a Christology in which the relationship of Jesus to God is that of obedient son to Father, and his obedient sonship is the essential thread of his life and death (cf. Phil 2:6-10).¹² Jesus found favour with God because he took the 'form of a slave . . . and became obedient unto death' (Phil 2:7-8). In the slave culture in which this was written, the chief virtue, essential characteristic and primary ethical requirement of the slave, was obedience.¹³

When Jesus is seen as the model of obedience and submission then his followers, to be Christ-like, must be submissive and obedient. Paul writes of Christian obedience to Christ (2 Cor 10:5-6), to Paul, to the gospel (Rom 10:16; Gal 2:14; Gal 5:7), to authorities, and of 'the obedience of faith' (Rom 1:5; 16:26) which Kittel calls 'the crowning concept of obedience which consists in faith and the faith which consists in obedience'.¹⁴ If God required perfect obedience of his Son, for Christians to be Christ-like, they too must be obedient to God as God's children. And not only to God. They are to be obedient to their teachers in the faith, like Paul, to the teachings of the Gospel — and to all in authority over them. In Romans 13:1-2, Paul writes: 'Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment'. Although it was probably inevitable that the early Christians used the social and political models around them to set up their own community structures, development by the early church of a hierarchical structure meant that in the church community, as in society, a few had power over the many. Moreover, if authority comes from God, to defy or disobey a state or church authority is to defy or disobey God. The power of authority is sacred power and must be obeyed. Early Christianity blessed the Roman household codes of behaviour with its own concept of obedience. Now the voice of household authority carries the weight

of the voice of God. Christian wives must obey their husbands, Christian children must obey their parents (and others in authority over them), and Christian slaves must obey their masters (Eph 6:1-5; Col 3:20-22; 1 Pet 3:6).

Ensuing theologians built on these Pauline and Johannine beginnings and incorporated the idea of Jesus as the obedient one into their understandings of the triune nature of God. The pre-Nicene Christologies based on the Pauline understanding of Christ as the obedient Son who does the will of the Father, and the Johannine understanding of Jesus being sent by the father, stress the subordination of Jesus to the Father: he is the one sent, and 'the son who is sent is inferior to the Father who sends'.¹⁵ This form of subordinationism had general consensus until the mid-fourth century. With its strong Scriptural basis and 'salvation history-cosmological background, it was understood as not entailing an ontological subordinationism but rather a processional or economic subordination of Son to Father',¹⁶ and so could be distinguished from Arianism. The struggle against Arianism aimed to overcome all theologies of subordination. Although the Cappadocian emanation scheme, with everything coming from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, could still be seen as maintaining a pattern of subordination, the aim of the Cappadocians was the very reverse. Gregory of Nazianzus set out to replace the Monarchy of the Father with a 'monarchy not limited to a single person but a monarchy constituted by equal dignity of nature, accord of will, identity of movement . . .'.¹⁷ To allow this equality, the obedience of Jesus was seen as the freely willed action of the Son.¹⁸ The Trinity was the shared life of equal persons: 'Father, Son and Spirit are equally God'.¹⁹ God is persons in relationship, with no subordination, no inequality. But the idea of the monarchy of the Father-God was still prevalent and, as LaCugna has illustrated from her detailed studies of the development—and defeat—of Trinitarian theology, concern for God's inner life rather than for God's actions in history allowed theology to 'embrace the idea of a God-monarch who rules over the world that is subordinate to God's will'.²⁰ One Father-God ruled in heaven and, by the time of the accession of Leo I in Rome, at least in the view of the West, one bishop ruled on earth.²¹ It was the triumph of a patriarchal god.

Such theology inevitably influenced the development of social structures and human relationships. Both illustrative of this and significant for all later Christians is the way in which the growing monastic orders found the idea of obedience important to their way of life. The Rule of Benedict codified this. Emphasising the obedient Christ as the model of Christian life, Benedict stressed the virtue of obedience: to obey others, regardless of what is required, is the Christ-like behaviour. 'These souls', wrote Benedict of his monks in Chapter 5 of the Rule, 'because of the holy servitude to which they have sworn themselves . . . hasten to obey any command of a superior as if it were a command of God'.²² It is easy to see how this obedience to others as God's will fitted within a society developing along Feudal lines, with Roman notions of authority and clear

lines of command. It is intriguing to see how long it lasts. From the writings of Benedict to a those of a 20th century Jesuit we find the same stress on obedience: our obedience must be like that of Christ who 'submitted himself to his Father through the intermediaries of this created world . . . we are subject only to the divine Persons, but if God passes on his authority to a human person, then we have to obey God by obeying that human person'.²³ Likewise Moloney describes obedience as being at 'the very heart of a Christian life'.²⁴ Christian obedience is copying the obedience of Jesus who 'saw himself as related to the God of Israel in terms of an obedient and loving son'.²⁵ While the obedience of Religious was emphasised by their special vow, it was not seen as basically different from the obedience of all Christians, especially as the spirituality of the Religious became the model of spirituality for all.

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But the great teaching tool has been the liturgy. For centuries, liturgy has expressed the importance of the story of the obedient Abraham and the willing Isaac and has emphasised Christ as the obedient son. From a Syrian liturgy at the end of the 4th century to the Catholic eucharistic prayers of today, we pray for God to accept the newly consecrated bread and wine 'as he had accepted the sacrifice of our patriarch Abraham'.²⁶ In Eucharistic prayer IV we pray for 'man' who 'disobeyed you and lost your friendship'; the Second Order of the Anglican Holy Communion speaks of Christ who 'learnt obedience to you in all things' in Thanksgiving 2; and in Thanksgiving 4 Preface Christ 'offered his life to you in perfect obedience'. For the solemn liturgical feasts of the Passion and Death of Christ the church has chosen 'obedience' texts of Philippians, Genesis and Hebrews. On Palm Sunday we read Philippians 2:6-10, with verses 8 and 9 being used in the gospel acclamation. On Good Friday, Hebrews 4:14-16 is joined to Hebrews 5:7-9 which speaks of Jesus 'learning to obey through suffering'. The great liturgy of the Easter Vigil sets out to tell us salvation history: it starts with the creation story of Genesis, and follows this with Abraham's binding of Isaac. The Catholic Preface VII of Ordinary times sums up the centrality of the concept of obedience when it praises God because 'Your gifts of grace, lost by disobedience, are now restored by the obedience of your Son'.

It is hardly surprising, then, that with this theological and liturgical backing, obedience to authority, especially to church authorities, has become central to much post-reformation Christianity. In Catholicism, papal writings of the 19th and

20th centuries attest over and over again that obedience is the right and proper response of the laity to any papal command; while Reform theology has emphasised obedience to the word of God as given in Scripture. Both see obedience as fundamental to Christian life.

Some consequences of creating an obedient society

Nevertheless, it is surely impossible in the late twentieth century to be oblivious of the evil that has been wrought by those simply obeying instructions from authorities, including authorities ruling in the name of God. Rather, in a post-Inquisition, post-Holocaust world, it must be asked if it is possible to regard obedience as a virtue, no matter who commands. For a thorough-going analysis of this whole question, it would be necessary to consider the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries with its emphasis on liberty and equality and the rise of individualism, the hermeneutics of the 'masters of suspicion' Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, the advent of modern psychoanalytic theory, questions raised by post-modernism etc, all of which have made the whole concept of obedience a very difficult one for many people. Only a limited analysis of questions raised about the concept of obedience is possible here.

Although the fear and trauma of war may well have contributed to the destructive obedience demonstrated at the Nuremberg trials, experiments of Stanley Milgram suggest that the reasons lie more deeply. His experiments illuminated the power authority holds over most humans in our society even when it gives instructions which, if carried out, would cause pain to be inflicted on another person.²⁷ The experiments were an exercise in duplicity, and for that reason have been severely criticised for identifying authority with abuses of authority.²⁸ Nevertheless they raise critical issues. Volunteers were asked to give a word paired-associate learning test to a 'learner', an actor able to respond as though in pain. The 'learner' had wires attached which, the volunteer believed, would give an electric shock whenever the volunteer pressed a button. The volunteer was ordered to administer a shock whenever 'the learner' gave a wrong answer and to increase the severity of the 'shock' each time. The results showed that, under orders from an authority figure, most people would inflict pain on another human being, even though their comments indicated that such behaviour conflicted with their basic moral principles.

Very few people absolutely refused to administer a shock. There was apparently little sense of responsibility for the goodness or otherwise of the actions, but rather a sense of responsibility to the authority; such behaviour is usually associated with terms such as loyalty, duty, discipline.²⁹ Disobedience was difficult. Milgram concluded that the road to disobedience 'is a difficult path, which only a minority of subjects are able to pursue to its conclusion . . . The act of disobedience requires a mobilization of inner resources, and their transfor-

mation beyond inner preoccupation, beyond merely polite verbal exchange, into a domain of action. But the psychic cost is considerable.'³⁰ Two observations are relevant here. First is the power that authorities, including the authority of the church, have when they demand obedience; second is the great difficulty members of the church are likely to have if they contemplate disobedience.

If we are strongly conditioned to obey authorities, whether for good or ill, an examination of the part the Christian emphasis on obedience has played is imperative. The New Testament Pauline injunctions to obey, injunctions which the church has defined for so many centuries as part of the unchanging and unchallengeable word of God, have had terrible consequences for wives, children, slaves, and all under authority. For hundreds of years women have lived under 'divine' authority to obey their husbands in all things. Papal teachings such as that of Pius XI in his 1931 encyclical *Casti Connubii* insisted on it. Obedience was incorporated into the very words of the marriage vows in which wives promised to obey their husbands—who did not reciprocate. The untold misery of innumerable lives is only just beginning to surface. And if under the impact of the feminist movement marriage vows have changed, texts such as Ephesians 5:21-32 and Colossians 3:12-21 requiring submission of women and children, are still prayed and preached liturgically as 'the word of God'.³¹ Moreover, generations of children, particularly girls, have been inculcated with the belief that being good is equated with being obedient.³²

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In addition to the uses of Pauline texts, Christian Trinitarian theology has been used to teach subordination and obedience. The principle image of God, the roots of which go back to Ignatius of Antioch, has been that of a monarchical Father-God, with a subordinate and obedient Son. In spite of the official defeat of Arianism by the Cappadocians, this Christological model based on Pauline and Johannine understandings of Christ as the obedient Son of the Father has been used to insist that subordination and obedience to authorities is essentially Christian. Such Trinitarian theology has been used for centuries to justify the subordination of women, by insisting that 'the husband stands in relation to wife as God the Father does to God the son, coequal in dignity, but as Initiator to Responder. The wife, holding the position analogous to the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, thus is characterised by response, submission, obedience.'³³

Furthermore, this theology of the monarch-God has allowed the creation of distorted theologies of atonement, with a tyrant father-king demanding the terrible death of his obedient son before he can be reconciled to humanity. In this atonement theology, the death of Christ is not only a death willed by the Father, but it is a death of great suffering as required by a juridical and authoritarian Father. Therefore, the image of the perfect Christian becomes one who carries out whatever 'The Father' (or The Authority) orders, in spite of the suffering that may be entailed. It is the image of a God who, like Abraham, wills to kill his 'beloved son'; an authoritarian God, who gives orders, even orders of death.

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When church authorities take on the authority of this God, to what extent have images of a god-monarch ruling subjects, and a father-god requiring the death of his son, influenced the manner in which they rule? Society is only beginning to see the consequences of the violence and abuse that have been carried out by clergy, teachers, spouses and parents under the belief that they had the God-given right—even the duty—to command. Church authorities need to acknowledge publicly the terrible evil that has been done, and continues to be done, by authorities, including church authorities, demanding obedience and using biblical texts and theology to support this. Neither scripture nor authorities can be blindly obeyed. It may be wise for small children to be taught to obey their parents, but they need to learn that some orders must be disobeyed.

Dorothy Soelle has asked the hard questions. First in 1970: 'Is it actually possible, in the realities of daily life, to distinguish between the obedience which is due God and that obedience toward men which we can and ought with good reason refuse?'³⁴ Then, in 1984, she challenged anyone who still believed that obedience remains the essential response to God, even if it could not be accepted as the primary response to earthly authorities, with the even more difficult question: 'Can one want and develop an attitude toward God that one criticises in people in their attitude toward other people and human institutions?'³⁵

The need for dissent or disobedience for a healthy church

An authoritarian insistence on obedience seems based on an anthropology in which human beings are seen principally as

individuals with a will-to-power which has to be controlled, so that pride is the besetting sin, and obedience the way to virtue. Obedience, self-abnegation and an ethic of self-sacrifice become the centre of personal worth. Yet as Valerie Saiving wrote over thirty years ago, self-sacrifice only makes sense if there is a self to sacrifice.³⁶ Feminist and liberation theologians have pointed out that a lack of sense of self rather than pride is the lot of most poor women and men throughout the world today. A more humanitarian religion 'would make self-realization a virtue and resistance to growth a cardinal sin'.³⁷

Those who try today to retain the religious value of the word obedience do so at the price of reconstructing its meaning. They go back to the Latin roots of the word, to 'hearing' and declare that obedience means to hear, consult, and consider, and perhaps come to a community decision as to what is best for the community. For example, for Schmitz:

Obedience is listening to the call of God in our own hearts: it is following the inner authority of ourselves as experienced, expressed, and revealed in community . . . To obey Christ, to obey my bishop, to obey God—all are rooted in being true to who I am in the image of God.³⁸

Or Joan Chittister, for whom real obedience 'stands ready to serve at all times, but independent and critical of every structure that makes uncritical claim upon it'.³⁹ Other scholars try to get around the problem by speaking of 'discerning' obedience or 'radical' obedience, but 'conscious discernment and radicality give rise to a spontaneity which the concept of obedience is no longer able to contain'.⁴⁰ We cannot play like Alice with the meaning of words. The word has a clear meaning and it is not 'communal decision making' or 'critical choice of action' or 'conscientious discernment'. It is, as mentioned earlier, 'being submissive to the will of a superior, doing what one is bidden'. Perhaps it would be better to admit that what is being discussed by authors such as Schmitz and Chittister is not obedience but is, rather, critical, adult, decision-making, or freely-chosen service, and that such responses are of higher value than that of obedience.

I am arguing, then, that church authorities not only need to hear criticisms of their rulings such as that on women's ordination, they also need to question basic assumptions about the virtue of obedience. Questioning the theological basis of decisions made by Catholic Church authorities is necessary, as Kennedy has clearly argued, for the health both of the church and of the theological community.⁴¹ Challenging the assumption that obedience (whether to God or to church pronouncements) is fundamental to a Christian identity is equally necessary for the health of our church. Furthermore, it is clearly consonant with our scriptural tradition.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, side by side with the stories of the public heroes of the Jewish people such as the obedient Abraham, we find a few small stories of disobedient women, such as that of the midwives Shiphrah and Puah (Exod 1 & 2), and that of Queen Vashti (Esther 1:12).

Moreover, Israel's prophets spoke out again and again against ruling authorities. They cried out against Royal misuse of its monopoly of power and against priestly misuse of its monopoly of the sacred. When under Solomon, the temple became the site of God's holiness and its priests became 'the guardian, custodian and eventually gatekeeper of holiness, it was the priests who determined who has access', just as the magisterium today decides who has access to the priesthood.⁴² Neither monarchy nor temple turned out to be disinterested wielders of power. Hence the priesthood, no less than the monarchy, became an object of prophetic criticism for abusing power and lacking compassion (e.g., Micah 6:2-8; Hosea 6:6; Amos 4:1-5; Jer 23:1). Authorities always need to be subject to questioning.

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Jesus was the great dissenting prophet, the great challenger of ruling authority. He broke sexual and purity taboos about women (Mt 9:18-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-48); discussed theology with them (Jn 4:1-42); dined with outcasts (Mt 9:10). He never made light of the Law, yet insisted that even religious laws were for humankind's benefit, and thus was prepared to break even the solemnity of the Sabbath if need be (Mt 15:1-10; Mk 12:38-40). He caused offence and scandal by his attitudes to the ruling regulations about cleanness, fasting and the Sabbath, and was a radical critic of much traditional religious practice. During his life, he did not found a group of disciples to control God's kingdom, but called them to follow him and to call others to the same journey.⁴³ And in the final post-resurrection commissioning given to us at the end of Matthew's gospel, the disciples are sent to teach what they have been taught. The response to teaching is not to obey: it is, one hopes, to learn.

From an obedient laity to a Spirit-filled People of God

If we refused to place obedience as first of all the virtues, we could then re-claim a triune God, re-emphasise the Spirit-filled Christ of the Synoptics, and re-awaken a Spirit-filled Church.

The God of Jesus Christ, who challenges all power structures, gets lost in the presence of powerful authority structures demanding submission and obedience. A renewed emphasis on a Trinitarian theology with God recognised as equal and loving persons in relationship would not only allow us to acclaim God as love but would also allow the trinity to model 'a community free of domination'⁴⁴ in which all both give and receive. How can a Christian community which sets out to be in the image of this triune God create churches and societies of inequality,

of domination and control? If the Church truly worshipped a Trinity of equal persons in loving relationship, could it institute a stratified church, enforced by a hierarchy silencing prophetic critique?

A de-emphasizing of Jesus as the obedient Christ could allow a resurgence of a Spirit-Christology celebrating Jesus as one fully alive, divine because, as human, he was filled with the Spirit of God. When Jesus is seen as the Christ whose Spirit empowers all people not to dominate others but to enliven them, we could create a church of people living in community, rather than a hierarchical church in which a few have power over the many.

Karl Rahner called for those who feel the presence of the Holy Spirit empowering them to challenge the official church to be of great courage and accept that the Spirit might be entrusting them with gifts and responsibilities for the whole church. He called for them to cease hiding behind a comfortable obedience and speak out boldly, proclaiming what they believe to be true: 'For this may be the truth of the Spirit of God'.⁴⁵

The Spirit of God demands no less. This is not obedience to specific commands; it is faithfulness to the Spirit of God in our midst. It is this faithfulness that God calls us to, to be fully ourselves. To achieve this, we need to listen to a great deal more in life than magisterial authorities. We have to listen to the Spirit. We have to listen to life. We have to listen to one another.

References

1. As a leader of a pro-women's ordination group, I have received a number of (usually anonymous) letters accusing us of disobedience. The authors seem to consider it quite unnecessary for them to consider the reasons we have for our stance; it is simply enough to tell us that we are disobedient: that is to be understood as the height of wickedness.
2. Gerhard Kittel, 'ακουα, ακοη, ειζ-, επ-, παρακουα, παρακοη, υπακουα, υπακοη, υπηκοοζ' in Kittel G.W.B. ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol 1* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1965) 216-225; p 218.
3. In English, the word obedience comes from the Latin, ob = towards, against, in the way of; and audire = to hear. The Greek words translated as obey, obedience, obedient in English translations such as NRSV are also words based on 'hear'. So, ακοη, in Rom 10:16, Heb 4:2 and Jn 12:38; εισακουω for prayers heard, in Lk 1:13, Mt 6:7; Ac 10:31. Heb 4:7; and επακουω in 2 Cor 6:2 for God's listening. Likewise, υπακουω—is used in Eph 6:1-5, Col 3:20,22; 1 Pet 3:6 for children or wives or slaves to obey their fathers, husbands, masters, and so the related υπακοοζ is used in Phil to describe the obedient Jesus, and by Paul to describe those to be obedient to him. (2 Cor 2:9). The Greek word πειθαρχω is also translated in English as obedience, and derivatives are used by Paul in Gal 5:7 'obeying the truth', by the author of Titus in describing obedience to state authority, and in Acts 5:29 'we must obey God rather than any human authority'.
4. Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience: From faithful reading to Faithful Living* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p 145.
5. Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son. The transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p 105.

6. *Ibid.*, p 362. Levenson examines the analysis of Walther Eichrodt who considers that the text teaches Abraham that from now on God does not allow killing of the 'first-born' son. Such sacrifice is to be understood as an abominable perversion of religion (note that Eichrodt refers to the first-born, and commentators forget that Isaac is not the firstborn, but the favoured son, and that Abraham had already offered up Ishmael). See also Marsha Wilfong, 'Genesis 22: 1-18' *Interpretation* 45 (1991) pp 393-397.
7. *Ibid.*, p 396.
8. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, pp 125-142.
9. *Ibid.*, p 126.
10. Richard N. Longenecker, 'The Obedience of Christ in the Theology of the Early Church,' in R.T. Banks (ed.), *Reconciliation and Hope. New Testament essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L. L. Morris on his 60th birthday* (Grand Rapids Michigan: W B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), pp 142-152 at p 142.
11. Walter Kasper, *Jesus The Christ* (London: Burns and Oates, 1976). p 166 (my emphasis).
12. See, for example, Brendan Byrne SJ, 'The Letter to the Philippians' in R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990). p 795; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp 169-177.
13. One wonders how Christian slaves heard this? Did it bring hope of liberation through Christ? Or did the on-going acceptance of slavery among Christians force a conclusion that somehow Jesus' free choice of slavery separated him from themselves who had no choice? This point has been considered by Shiela Briggs in her paper 'Can an Enslaved God liberate? Hermeneutical reflections on Philippians 2:6-11,' *Semeia* 47 (1989), pp 137-153.
14. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 220.
15. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us. The Trinity and Christian Life*. (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991). p 23.
16. *Ibid.*, p 24.
17. Quoted in Catherine Mowry LaCugna, 'God in Communion with Us' in LaCugna (ed.), *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp 83-114 at p 87.
18. Longenecker, 'The obedience of Christ in the Theology of the Early Church,' p 151.
19. LaCugna, 'God in Communion with Us,' p 87.
20. *Ibid.*, p 93.
21. See for instance Leo, Sermon LXXXII.1-3 in which he speaks of being 'head of the world'. Printed in *Creeeds, Councils and controversies. Documents illustrating the history of the Church AD 337-461*, (ed.) J Stevenson, revised with additional documents by W. H. C. Frend (London: SPCK 1991), p 327.
22. Anthony C. Meisel & M. L. del Mastro, *The Rule of St Benedict*, (Garden City New York: Image Books, Doubleday and Company Inc, 1975), at pp 54, 55.
23. Ladislav Orsy S.J., *Open to the Spirit: Religious Life after Vatican II* (London: Geoffrey Chapman 1968). p 132.
24. Francis J Moloney SBD, *A Life of Promise, Poverty Chastity Obedience* (Homebush: St Paul Publications, 1985), p 119.
25. *Ibid.*, p 133.
26. Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1943), p 556. Also Eucharistic Prayer I.
27. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974).
28. E. D. Watt, *Authority* (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1982), pp 22-25.
29. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, p 146.
30. *Ibid.*, p 163.
31. Marie Louise Uhr, 'The Portrayal of Women in the Lectionary,' *St Mark's Review* 135 (1988), pp 22-5.
32. For a child at a Australian Catholic girls school, to be good was to be obedient; obedient, attentive and polite were marks of excellent conduct. We knew that to be good was to do as we were told. Likewise, a 1959 report card of a Grade 2 student at a US convent school began with an assessment of 'Citizenship, character and health', a list of seven 'performance indicators' (to use 90s jargon) of which the very first was 'obedience'. The student was given a grade for their conduct in each area. Under 'Obedience' the young student was assessed according to whether or not she 'cheerfully obeys rules and regulations both of church and school; is at the right place at the right time, ready for work; has work completed on time' (P. Ezekiel-Moor, personal communication). Courage and Perseverance were listed will below Obedience.
33. Quoted in LaCugna, *God For Us*, pp 268-9.
34. Dorothee Soelle, *Beyond Mere Obedience* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), (trans.) Lawrence W. Denef, p 20.
35. Dorothee Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), p 109.
36. Valerie Saiving 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View' in C.P. Christ & J. Plaskow (eds.), *Womanspirit Rising* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), pp 25-42.
37. Soelle *The Strength of the Weak* 110.
38. Barbara Schmitz, 'A feminist reworking of Obedience,' *Daughters of Sarah* 17 (1991), p 22.
39. Joan Chittister, osb, *The fire in these ashes A Spirituality of contemporary religious life* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), p 129.
40. Soelle, *Beyond Mere Obedience*, p 63.
41. Philip Kennedy, 'Catholic Theologians and the Ordination of Women,' *The Allen Review* 15 (1996), pp 9-14.
42. Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience*, p 187.
43. Moloney, *A Life of Promise*, p 160.
44. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, (London: SCM Press, 1981), p 202.
45. Karl Rahner in Geoffrey B Kelly (ed.), *Karl Rahner, Theologian of the graced search for meaning* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p 249.