

THE TWELFTH CONFERENCE

On Obedience (v1)

I would like to begin this conference by considering some questions that were given me this afternoon. Two are related to the same thing, which centered on the question: What does peace and tranquility of heart consist in and how do we acquire this? The other, which I will not discuss today, concerns whether it is permissible for a Sister to go and talk to the other Sisters when she has been mortified by the Superior or the Directress. The third deals with the question of how to let go of one's own judgment. The fourth expresses a desire that I speak about zeal and how the Sisters ought to challenge one another in charity. Our Mother told me later that she wanted me to speak about obedience and because of her rank and office as Mother I have decided to begin this conference by addressing the question of obedience.

I say that there (v2) are three kinds of holy obedience. There are others, but I don't want to talk about them. The first is a more general type with Christians, which is the obedience given to God and Holy Church by observing their proper commandments respectively. The second is religious obedience, which is of greater value than the other because it not only deals with the commandments of God but also concerns the observance of his counsels. But there is a third type of obedience, which is what I want to talk about (v3). It is called loving obedience and it is the most perfect form. Our Lord exemplifies this throughout his whole life. There are innumerable examples in the Scriptures which are truly admirable. You will understand them better if I talk about the qualities and conditions of this obedience.

The Fathers of the Church have given many qualities and conditions. Moreover, I have chosen three from among them. The first is an obedience that is blind; the second is an obedience that is prompt; while the third is an obedience that is persevering. Blind obedience has three qualities. The first is that it never regards the looks of Superiors but rather their authority; the second is that it never inquires into the reasons or motives that Superiors have in commanding this or that, suffice it to know that she is commanding it. The third quality is that it doesn't inquire about the means that must be had to do what is commanded, simply assured that God, who has inspired the command, will assuredly give her (v4) the power to accomplish it and then she gets to work. Instead of asking how to do it, blind obedience sets about doing it.

Let us now return to the first quality of this loving obedience which is a branch of religious obedience. It is blind obedience which lovingly sets about to do all that is commanded in a very simple way without ever looking to see if the command is well or badly given, as long as the one who commands has the power to do so and the commandment serves to unite our spirit with God. For without that, the truly obedient person does nothing. Many have been greatly mistaken about this quality of obedience, believing that it consists in doing at random whatever can be commanded even if it were against the commandments of God and Holy Church. They have greatly erred in this imagining folly to be present in this blindness which is not really there (v5). Relating to what is against the commandments of God, just as Superiors have no power ever to give a command contrary to them, so their subjects never have an obligation to obey such a command. Even if such a command were given, and they thought they could do this, they would sin (v6) mortally. But, I well know in fact

The Twelfth Conference

that many have done some things against the commandments of God under the guise (n1) of this loving obedience, which desires not only to obey the commandments of God and Superiors but also their counsels and their inclinations. Many, thus, have rushed to their death through a special inspiration from God which was so intense that they could not resist it (n2). Otherwise, they would undeniably have sinned mortally. It is also related in the Second Book of Maccabees (n3), it seems to me, by a person named Rasias (v7), who, having a burning zeal for the glory of God, went and exposed himself to blows which he knew would only wound him (v8). Knowing that he was wounded in the chest, he drew all of his intestines out of this wound, then he threw them up in the air while in the presence of his enemies. Saint Appolonia threw herself into the fire prepared by faithless enemies of God and of Christians to put her to death. Saint Ambrose (n4) also tells the story of three young women who, to avoid losing their chastity, threw themselves into a river and were drowned. They, however, also had other reasons for doing this, which would take too much time to describe here. There are many others who have rushed to their deaths like the one who threw himself into a flaming furnace. All these examples, however, ought to be admired but not imitated. You see that we must never be so blind as to think that we can please God by breaking his commandments. Loving obedience presupposes that we obey the commandments of God.

It is said that this obedience is blind because it obeys all Superiors (v9) without looking at their bearing, which means their person. All the early Fathers have greatly blamed all those who would not submit to Superiors, who are their inferiors. They ask them: "When you obeyed another Superior, why did you do it? For the love of God?" Certainly not! Doesn't the present Superior take God's place among you just as the other one did? Undoubtedly, for she is the representative of God and God commands you through her voice and makes us understand his will through her commands. You obey your Superiors because you feel drawn to them (v10). What a mistake! You are doing nothing more than people in the world do (v11). They not only obey those whom they love but they would not consider their love sufficient if they did not carry out as closely as possible the wishes and inclinations of the one they loved, so the truly obedient religious acts the same toward her Superiors as toward God himself. The pagans, evil as they were, have provided us with some admirable examples on this subject, for the devil spoke to them through various kinds of idols (v12): some were rats, others dogs, lions, snakes and similar things. These poor people put their faith equally in everything, obeying the statue of a dog the same as that of a man (v13) (for there were also those too), without any difference. Why is that? Because they saw all their gods in these gods. Saint Peter commands us to obey our Superiors, when he says: "Obey, I tell you, obey your Superiors even if they are wicked" (n5, v14). Here is a good example on this: for one day (v15) (being taken before the High Priest), one of the servants struck Saint Paul insolently on the cheek. The great Apostle, seeing himself struck without reason, cursed him through his apostolic authority saying: "God will strike you!" Afterward, realizing that the man who struck him had authority and rank from the High Priest, he repented and witnessed his displeasure by saying: "Certainly I did not know it," (n6) for all other Christians are taught to honor all those who have authority over them. Our Lord, Our Lady and Saint Joseph have forcibly taught us this way of obeying on the journey that they made from Nazareth to Bethlehem (v16,n7), for after Caesar issued an edict that all his subjects come to their birthplaces to be enrolled, they cheerfully went to fulfil this obedience even though Caesar was a pagan and

The Twelfth Conference

idolater. Our Lord wanting to show by this that we must never regard the person of those who command, provided that they have the authority to do so (v17,n8).

There are admirable examples of blind obedience in Scripture as I already mentioned. Amidst all the examples, there is a very outstanding one in the Gospel which deserves some small mention. It concerns the paralytic (n8). I like it so much because of the extreme simplicity with which he allowed everything that people wanted for him to be done to him.

Now I would like to move on to the second quality of the first kind of blind obedience. After it has reached the point of not paying attention to the person of the one who commands and submitting indifferently to all kinds of Superiors, it goes beyond and reaches the second, which is to obey without considering the intention and the goal for which the order is given, being content to know that it is given without wasting time to think if it is a good or bad order or whether we are right or not in following the command (v18). The paralytic was sick for a very long time. Nothing could be done for him. His friends think and make the judgment among themselves that if Our Lord would see him, he would be able to cure him. They make up their minds then to bring him into the presence of Jesus. One day, they were aware that Jesus had entered a home where he had been invited to dine. In short, he was at a banquet, but there was such a crowd, because Jesus was well known for his miracles, that everyone rushed there to see him or be cured. The friends of the paralytic thought about a way to bring this poor man into the presence of Our Lord, climbing onto the roof of the house, which they uncovered and then lowered (n9) this sick man (who was totally crippled and swollen in every joint) with ropes into the middle of the room in the presence of Our Lord. Jesus cured him immediately in light of the faith of the sick man and the charity that these good people had practiced in order to have him cured. But you still don't know what pleases me the most; this is my point: the extreme simplicity of the obedience of the paralyzed man. Do you see, he had good reason to say: "Alas! What do you want me to do? Do you want me to die, do you want me to climb onto the roof? Does my life annoy you? What have I done to you that I should suffer a martyrdom which will only make me more of a bother?" He certainly had good reason to want to consider the harm that might result (n10) from this gesture that his friends had done. Nothing like this happened at all. There is no mention in the Gospel that he said a single word only that he allowed to be done to him what others wanted for him on this occasion even though this obedience might cost him his life.

The story of Abraham is well known. God said to him: "Abraham, go forth out of your country and from your kin," i.e., out of your town, "and go to the place that I will show you" (n11). Poor Abraham goes without a word. Oh, he could have said: "Lord, you told me to leave my town, but tell me, then, if you would, from which gate should I leave (v19)? For there are many gates leading to several places." He did not say a word and went where the Spirit would lead him, without considering the way. Am I going in the right or wrong direction? Why? What intention did God have in giving this rather brief command that he had not even marked out the road which he wanted me to take? Oh! the truly obedient person does not use these words; she simply applies herself without asking anything else but simply obeying.

Our Lord wanted to show us this kind of obedience was most pleasing to him when he appeared to Saint Paul at his conversion. Having called him by name, he struck him to the ground

The Twelfth Conference

and blinded him. Do you see that to become his disciple, he made him fall so that he might humble and bring him into subjection to himself. Then suddenly, he is blinded and being blinded, he commands him to enter the city to find Ananias and do everything that he should be commanded to do (n12). But why did Our Lord himself not tell him what he must do without sending him further since he had deigned to speak to him to convert him? Poor Saint Paul did everything he was told. It would have cost Our Lord nothing to tell him himself what he would say through Ananias, but he desired that we know by this example how he loves blind obedience, because it seems that he blinded Saint Paul in order to make him truly obedient (v20).

The man born blind being in the presence of Our Lord did not ask to be healed. Our Lord asked him if he wanted to be healed and receive his sight. "Well! For mercy's sake, I do want it, please." Our Lord, in response takes some mud and puts it on his eyes, commanding him to go and wash with water (n13). This poor blind man could not have been more astonished with what Our Lord used to heal him and could have said: "Alas! What are you doing to me? If I were not blind, what you are doing to me would be enough to make me blind (v21). You tell me that I should wash in such and such a place. Lead me there, for you see very well and if no one will guide me, I would not know how to get there." He truly obeys very simply; he does not think about all these things but goes forward without paying attention to what he would be able to do. For the truly obedient person believes very simply that she can do whatever she is commanded to do because she holds that all commands come from God or are given through his inspiration. They cannot be impossible to do by reason of the authority of him who commands.(v22)

On the contrary, there are two stories or two examples, about Jacob and Naaman for they fool themselves a bit by trying to find out if the commands given them are truly good, and for this reason they thought that something injurious might befall them. You know the story of Jacob; but to get to what I mean, I must tell you something about him. Isaac had two sons. The older one, called Esau, was very rough, surly, hairy and at home only in the forest and among the animals. He liked to hunt. The other son, called Jacob, was younger and very pleasant both in his good looks and in the gentleness of heart that he possessed. He was his mother's favorite. She thought of ways that she could use to make Jacob the recipient of his father's blessings. By hereditary right, this belonged to the eldest son and this blessing consisted of the preeminence of the High Priesthood and succession to the paternal inheritance. One day, she saw that her husband, Isaac, was telling Esau to go hunting and when he would bring back some of the meat, he would give his blessing on returning. While Esau was out hunting, she called her son Jacob and told him everything that she had overheard from his father about the promises that he had made to his brother. Then she told him: "Go out to the field and take a kid and bring it to me quickly. I will prepare the meat the way your father likes it. And then you will present it to him and undoubtedly he will give his blessing." With that, poor Jacob began giving her some trifling reasons for not doing it by saying: "Dearest mother, how could our father ever do it seeing that my brother Esau is very rough and hairy. I have very smooth skin. When my father comes and touches me, he will know that I would have deceived him. Instead of giving me a blessing, he will give me a curse." Jacob's mother said: "Go my son, I assure you that if there is some curse, it will be upon me." Poor Jacob left the house and did everything that he was told. His mother covered his neck and his arms with the skins of the kid and then presented him

The Twelfth Conference

with the meat that she prepared for his father. He did not recognize the deception in the least and because he was blind, he was taken in by touching the skin of the kid even though he thought he was hearing the voice of Jacob. He gave his blessing and thus Jacob became High Priest and grandfather of Our Lord. Moreover, do you see how much it would have cost him by wanting to consider what had been commanded him, for he would have lost all the graces he had received. (n14)

Naaman the Syrian (n15), a leper (n16), went to Elisha to be cured because all attempts at healing had failed. He knew that Elisha had worked miracles. So he went to him, and having come to the place where Elisha was living, sent one of his entourage to ask if he would come out and heal him. Elisha did not even leave his room but ordered his servant, or disciple, Giese, to tell Naaman that he was to go and wash in the "Jordan river seven times" and he would be healed. Then Naaman was angry and said: "Aren't the waters in our own country as good as those of the Jordan river?" And so, he wasn't going to do anything. But his servants remonstrated with him that he ought to do what the Prophet had ordered since it was so easy a thing (v23). "You would have had some right," they said, "to refuse to obey if what was asked of you was a very difficult thing." He was won over by these words and upon washing seven times as he was told to do, he was healed (v24).

The third property of blind obedience is that it does not consider and does not ask what means and what way the person ought to take to be truly obedient (v25). The person knows that the way in which she ought to go to God is the *Rule* of her religious community and the commands of her Superiors. She walks in simplicity of heart, without any questioning in the least if it would be better to do it this way or another in order to truly obey. Provided that the person obeys, it is sufficient for her, because she clearly knows what is sufficient to be pleasing to God whom she obeys unconditionally and lovingly.

This loving obedience has a second characteristic, as I have said, which is that it is prompt. For the promptness in obedience has always been recommended to religious as a very necessary part of obeying and observing perfectly what they have vowed to God. This was the quality that Eliezer (n17) took in order to recognize the young woman that God had destined to be the bride of the son of his master. He, therefore, says to himself: "The young woman whom I will ask for a drink will say: 'I will not only give you a drink but I will also water your camels.' She will be the one I know to be a worthy bride for my master's son" (v26). While he is thinking about these things, he sees from afar the beautiful young Rebecca, who was a shepherdess and was to later become a princess; at that time princesses and princes all would do some kind of work. Eliezer, seeing that she was so beautiful and gracious as she stood by the well where she would draw water so her sheep could drink, asks Rebecca and she answers him as he had planned. "Yes," she says, "not only you but also your camels." Look, I pray, how she was prompt and gracious; she spared herself no trouble, she was most generous, for a lot of water was necessary to give his camels a drink. Oh, certainly, all obediences that are not done graciously are not pleasing. There are some who obey, but only begrudgingly and unpleasantly, that much of the merit of this obedience is lost. Charity and obedience are so closely united that they cannot be separated. Love makes us obey promptly and graciously, for no matter how difficult the obedience given, those who have a loving obedience carry it out lovingly. This is because obedience is one of the principal parts of humility which loves submission above all things, and consequently, it follows that the truly obedient person loves the thing commanded above all things. As soon as the

The Twelfth Conference

person is aware of it with as pleasant a face as they can have, whether it be to their liking or not, she embraces the obedience and cherishes it tenderly and loves it as the only one of its kind.

There is an example in the *Life of Saint Pachomius* (n18) that I am going to tell you about concerning this promptness in obedience. In the community of Saint Pachomius, there was a monk named Jonas, a person of great virtue and holiness, who was in charge of the garden. There was a fig tree in the garden that bore many fine figs. However, this fig tree was a source of temptation to the young monks. Every time they passed by it, they took a little time to look at the fig tree. One day when Saint Pachomius was walking in the garden, he raised his eyes to the fig tree and saw the devil at the top of it looking down on the figs below as the monks looked at them from below to on high. The great Saint Pachomius called Jonas immediately and ordered him to cut it down the following day because he wanted to train his community in the mortification of the senses as well as the need for interior mortification of the passions and inclinations. Poor Jonas replied: "My father, surely we ought to put up with our younger members a bit. These are good young people, my Father, which is what you want. They need some kind of recreation. I don't want to preserve it for myself" (v27). He spoke very truthfully, remarking that he had been in religious life for seventy-five years and was the gardener all during that time. He never tasted any of the fruit, but he was very generous in giving it to his Brothers. Saint Pachomius said to him very gently: "Well, my Brother, you do not want to obey simply and promptly; and you are willing to wager that the tree is more obedient than yourself?" (v28) What happened is this, on the following day, the tree was found withered up and it never bore figs again.

Our Lord gave continual examples of promptness in obedience throughout his life. No one could have been more yielding and prompt than he was in giving way to the will of others. We ought to be prompt in obeying, for it is not enough for a loving heart to do what is commanded or what seems to be desired of it, if it is not done promptly. A loving heart cannot accomplish too quickly what is to be done so that it can be commanded anew to do something further. David only made a simple wish to drink the water of the well in Bethlehem and immediately three horsemen left camp. With heads bowed low, they penetrated the front lines of the enemy and went in search of the water (n19). They were exceedingly prompt in carrying out the desire of the king. So we can see that many of the great Saints have carried out the inclinations and desires of what seemed to them to be the wishes and desires of the King of Kings, Our Lord. What command I pray you did Our Lord give that obliged Saint Catherine of Siena to pick or lick with her tongue the infection from the sores of the poor woman she was caring for? And Saint Louis, King of France, from eating with the lepers the remains of their soup so as to encourage them to eat? Certainly, they were not obliged to do that. They knew that Our Lord loved them and gave proofs of his love out of self-denial. Upon thinking to please Our Lord a little more, they did these things with great love that were so repulsive to their nature. We too are obliged to help our neighbors when they are in dire need, but not any further. However, because almsgiving is a counsel of Our Lord, many freely give alms as their livelihood allows. So, loving obedience becomes grafted onto this obedience to the counsels. This makes us undertake, even to follow out more exactly, the desires and intentions of God and our Superior.

However, I must say something about a mistake that those who want to undertake the very exact practice of this virtue can fall into. They are always rushing (n20) about wanting to know the

The Twelfth Conference

desires and inclinations of their Superiors or of God himself. They are wasting their time. While I am trying to find out the desire of God, I am not concerned about keeping myself simply in peace and tranquility in his presence, which is what he wants right now, because he has not pointed out anything else. So anyone who wants to follow the counsel that Our Lord has given about helping the poor might want to go from town to town searching for the poor. Do they realize that while they are in one town, they will not be taking care of the needs in another? We must go about taking care of this need in simplicity of heart, i.e., to give without wasting time wandering the streets from house to house to see if there is someone I do not know about. Likewise, when I see that the Superior wants me to do something, I must be ready to do it without making minute investigations trying to know whether she prefers me to do something else. That would destroy the peace and tranquility of heart that is the principal fruit of loving obedience.

The third quality of obedience is perseverance. Our Lord has specifically shown us this. Saint Paul talks about it in these terms: "He was made obedient even unto death," he says, "death on the cross" (n21). In these words, "even unto death," it is presupposed that he was obedient every minute everyday, from the time he was in the womb of Our Lady, as we have said, when he went or was carried by his mother from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It seems that he was even more obedient at his death than at the beginning of his earthly life. For when he was in the lap of his glorious mother, he moved his arms and feet trying to walk. But in his death he did not move his hands or feet, thus dying motionless through obedience (v29). During his whole life we see nothing other than instances of obedience offered to his parents and many others, even to those who refused to believe in him. Just as he began his life through this virtue, he did the same throughout his earthly life (v30).

The good monk Jonas, whom I have mentioned previously, gives us two examples on the subject of perseverance. Even though he failed in the obedience that Saint Pachomius gave him, he was nevertheless a monk of great perfection. It also seems that Saint Pachomius should not have refused letting Jonas preserve the fig tree because of the perseverance that he had shown by being the gardener from the time he entered religious life until his death. He never had any other responsibility during his seventy-five years spent in the monastery. The other example was he never did any other work than making mats from rushes interlaced with palm-leaves (v31). He died doing this and was found dead on a pile, the mats between his knees. He was so used to this kind of work that he made his mental prayer while doing it without any difficulty. It is a great virtue to persevere for so long a time in one type of work. To do something joyfully, which we are commanded only once and we want to do, costs us nothing. But when you are told: "You will always do that, throughout your whole life," it is there that virtue lies as well as difficulty.

This, then, is what I have to say to you, and I add this, that obedience asks a great price, so much so that it is the companion of charity. These two virtues are the ones that reveal the price and give the value to all the other virtues such that all the others are nothing without them. If you do not have these two virtues, you have nothing; if you have them, you have all the others in sufficient abundance.

Putting aside general obedience to the commandments of God and turning now to obedience in religious life, if a religious does not obey, he or she can be said to have no virtue because it is obedience that truly makes the religious. Obedience is the proper and peculiar virtue of religious life.

The Twelfth Conference

If you have the desire for martyrdom for the love of God, it is nothing if you are not obedient (v32) just as it would have been for a religious in the monastery of Saint Pachomius (n22). I am very happy when I speak about Saint Pachomius because he was a very great Saint, the Father of all religious. He says, or the person who wrote his biography says, that one day a young man came to them to become a member of their community. He was welcomed by Saint Pachomius and persevered the whole time of his novitiate with humility and an exemplary submission. It is well known that novices do marvels in the year of their novitiate and everyone sees how mortified they are. Their eyes are always cast down. Now to return to our point, this novice, after his time of probation, came one day looking for the great Saint Pachomius and said to him, "Oh, my Father, I have a great desire which I humbly beg you to pray to God that he might accomplish in me." "Very well, my son," the good Father said, "but you must tell me about this desire." "My Father," the young religious answered, "please, you must promise me to pray and to make all my Brothers pray for it." Then, the Saint asked him what the desire was. He told him the desire was for martyrdom and that he would never be satisfied until it happened. Saint Pachomius tried in every way to diminish his zeal, but the more he said, the more determined the young religious became in his request. Saint Pachomius told him, "My son, it is better to live in obedience and to die everyday by living a life of continual mortification of self and one's passions than to suffer martyrdom in your imagination. Anyone who mortifies himself dies a martyr's death as far as needs be. It is perchance a greater martyrdom to spend one's whole life in obedience than to die in an instant with the stroke of a sword. Live in peace, my son, and calm your spirit by not paying attention to this desire." But the young monk, who felt sure that this desire came from the Holy Spirit, would not quell any of his zeal. He was always urging the Saint to pray that his desire would be fulfilled. After that, the great Saint withdrew. A short time later news arrived that uplifted the young monk's spirit. Certain Saracens who were robbers came to a mountain next to the monastery (v33). Saint Pachomius called the monk and told him: "Off with you, my son, the hour has come that you have been waiting for. Go out at once and cut wood on the mountain." The monk, who was almost beside himself with joy, went singing and chanting hymns praising God and in giving thanks that he had deigned to give him the honor of dying for his love. Finally he thought about nothing else but doing what he was doing. Then the robbers saw him, came up to him and laid hold of him. He was very valiant for a while (v34). "Kill me, I ask nothing else than to die for my God" or other words to that effect. The Saracens then brought him to where they had their gods, so as to make him adore them. When they saw that he persistently refused to deny God, they began to prepare to kill him. Alas! this poor monk, so valiant in his imagination, saw the sword at his throat and cried out: "Oh please, do not kill me! I will do what you want; have pity on me! I am still young. It would be meaningless to shorten my life." Then he adored the idols. With that, the robbers, after deriding him, seriously beat him and then allowed him to return to his monastery. Upon arriving more dead than alive, he was pale and full of shame. Saint Pachomius met him and said: "Well, my son, what's wrong? Why are you so depressed?" Then, the poor monk, confused and ashamed because he was a proud person and unable to bear the thought that he had committed such a great sin, threw himself down and confessed his sin. The Father acted quickly, asking his Brother monks to pray for him and making him ask pardon from God, then restored him to his former state and gave him some good advice: "My son, remember that it is better to have small desires about living

The Twelfth Conference

according to the *Rule* of the community and to want only faithfulness in the observance of that *Rule* than to undertake or desire anything other than what is contained there, or to foster great desires for imaginary fantasies. These only inflate one's heart with pride and make us hold others in low esteem, and fancying ourselves to be somewhat better than they. Oh! my son, how much better it is to live under the shelter of holy obedience than to withdraw from that safe shelter to search for what is more perfect! If you had been truly mortified in living your life instead of wanting nothing less than death, you would not have fallen as you have done. Now courage, my son! Remember henceforth to live in submission and be assured that God has forgiven you." The young monk lived the rest of his life with great humility.

Obedience is of no less merit than charity; for to give "a cup of water" to a poor person is to merit heaven. Our Lord himself says (n23): "If you do as much through obedience, you will gain the same reward." The least little thing done through obedience is very pleasing to God. If you eat through obedience, your eating is of far greater merit than the fasts of the hermits, supposing that they do not fast through obedience. If you rest through obedience, your rest (v35) is more meritorious and more pleasing to God than your work.

Oh, Lord! There are so many examples in the *Lives of the Holy Fathers* about the exact practice of obedience with reference to indifferent things! For instance, in the case of the friar whom Saint Francis told to plant the cabbages with the roots sticking up. This good religious did so instantly and the cabbages grew as well as those that were planted correctly. So greatly does Our Lord value obedience. In matters of little consequence it would truly be a serious imperfection to resist doing them when we are commanded to do them. Their unique worth is to keep us in the spirit of humility. Obedience, as I have said, being one of the main parts of humility, loves overwhelmingly the commands to do the most lowly things. Nothing is thought to be of little consequence by the truly obedient person because she regards everything to be a unique means for uniting ourselves to God and to Our Lord who so loved obedience. Saint Bernard tells us that Jesus lovingly accepted death rather than fail in obedience.

"But," you will tell me, "how shall I come to practice this loving obedience so precisely with its three qualities?" Remember these three qualities which consist in observing obedience like a blind person, not regarding the person who gives the command, or the end or the motive for which the command is given, as long as the one giving the command has the authority to do so. This also includes no less asking too much about the means that we must use to carry out the command. We must set ourselves to work, strengthened by the assurance that God who has given or is giving the command will also give us the power to accomplish it. Next, we must obey promptly; this is the second quality. Finally, we must obey perseveringly, not simply for a time but throughout our entire life. What will the Sister experience who will be more than happy to do what I have spoken about? She will enjoy a continual peace and tranquility of heart because she will not have to give an accounting of her actions, since they have all been done through obedience to the *Rule* as well as to Superiors. Now, to say a word about the *Rule*. The truly obedient Sister loves the *Rule*, honors the *Rule*, and holds the *Rule* in such esteem that it is the true road that she must travel to achieve the union of her spirit with God. Moreover, she will never leave this path of obedience and those things which arise from counsel or advice, just like things that are commanded. The truly obedient (v36)

The Twelfth Conference

Sister will give an account, not only of her thoughts but also of her actions done through obedience. She will live calmly and peaceably like a child who is in the arms of his beloved mother, undisturbed no matter what may happen, content to be carried on the left or the right arm of his mother. So the timely obedient Sister doesn't care what is commanded of her provided that it is a command and so long as she always rests in the arms of obedience. I mean that in the practice of obedience she is always fulfilled. To those who are obedient I can truly promise them from God's part paradise in eternal life as well as in this mortal life (v37).

But I have said too much; is there anything else? If you have experienced some difficulties with obedience, let's talk about them now.

You ask if you must do everything your Superiors tell you, if you must do it under pain of sin, as for instance when you give an account of yourself, or if you must take as a command everything the Superior suggests to you for your improvement? (v38) Oh, no, my dear Daughter, the commands of the Pope himself, when they are not concerned with serious matters, do not oblige under pain of sin except if you might want to act contrary to them through contempt or through a total carelessness by which you do not want to subject yourself to them. But there is little or no sin to commit faults at times through forgetfulness or some other reason in matters of obedience unless what is commanded would be a matter of serious import. In such cases we would be obliged to be greatly mindful so as not to forget it, say if it concerns something that is necessary for the good order of the community. In this case, even if what is commanded is not serious, for example, extinguishing the candles every night, without doubt if a Sister would not be submissive to the obedience, she would offend God. To fail sometimes through forgetfulness is neither a slight sin nor even a sin at all. To do things through habit, either from carelessness or for some other reason, there would be some sin. I would even say further that I am obliged to say the Divine Office everyday under pain of mortal sin. Even though I am accustomed to say Compline, sometimes it might happen that my mind is concerned with some affair and I forget to say it. The next day I remember that I have not said it. I have not sinned and I am not going to confess it because the whole affair was not so serious that I am always obliged to go about being preoccupied that I have not said Compline and that I am going to fail to say it.

The commandments of God and of holy Church are not as rigorous as one thinks; they do not restrain the human spirit as is believed. The law of God is a law wholly loving and gentle as David assures us (n24). Involuntary distractions do not make our prayers and our Office less pleasing to God. It is the same with what we say about being sleepy. For just as we are in no way obliged to say our Office over again because we have been distracted in saying it, so we have no obligation to repeat it when we are a bit sleepy, as long as this does not happen during a sizeable amount of the Office and that we have tried our best to keep awake. However, if we are negligent about it, there could truly be matter for Confession. I have begun my Office wide awake and with the intention of saying it well, which is my responsibility. During the Office I become a bit sleepy, nevertheless I say the verses after a fashion for the space of one or two of the psalms. What would you do in that case? It is not necessary to confess it in this case, for there is no remedy to bring to bear here nor can you avoid distractions that inevitably arise.

You now ask, suppose you have a slight dislike for this point of the *Rule* (v39) about correcting Sisters about their faults in all charity under the pretext that it is not a matter of great

The Twelfth Conference

importance, whereas in reality you dislike doing it. My dear Daughter, to this I say even though you are, perhaps, not bound to this precept under the pain of sin, nevertheless the love that you ought to have for your *Rule* would obligate you. Truly, the love of the *Rule* is of very great importance and, therefore, each Sister should renew it a hundred times a day with loving affection. And whatever there is in our *Rule* that is repugnant to our hearts and causes us to avoid practicing it, we ought to be practicing it to show our love for Our Lord. I say the same thing about the dislikes we have for one another. To overcome it we must show signs of affection more especially toward that Sister than to the others. We must frequently find the occasion to be near her so as to speak to her and offer her small kindnesses.

Let us return to our topic and say that we must not constrain our spirits through vain scruples. I will give you a clarification about what you ask. Neither Superiors nor confessors (v40) have the intention of binding their subjects by the commands they give. When they wish to do so, they use the word "commandment," under the pain of disobedience. Subjects are obliged under pain of sin even though the command might not be of a serious nature; otherwise, no. For they offer three kinds of advice: the first is in the form of a command, the second is in the form of simple direction, and the third is in the form of a counsel. In the *Constitutions* and the *Rule*, it is the same, for there are articles that say: the Sisters may do such and such a thing, while others say: they shall do or even they shall beware of doing. Some are counsels while others are commands. Those who are unwilling to submit to either counsels or to directives offend against loving obedience (v41). But if they were only faithful to what is commanded, they should be told because they will only do what they are obliged to do. Even though this might be very difficult, the Sister who willingly commits small faults runs the risk of being unfaithful in more important things. Undoubtedly, you are not bound to correct Sisters about their faults if you do not have the responsibility to do so because the *Rule* says they may. But, my dear Daughter, there is a command from God about correcting one another that is of still greater authority than the *Rule*. It is true that this refers to sin, for it would be too annoying to correct them for all of the small imperfections to which we all are subject because of our weakness. But to return to what we were saying, would it not, I pray you, show a great lack of courage and very little love for God if we were willing to do only what was commanded of us and nothing more? It is true that whoever would keep the commandments of God but would do nothing else would certainly not be damned. But it would definitely show that this is not done for God nor for his love by the person who obeys by keeping them, but for the self so as not to be damned. It is as if that person is boasting that she is not a thief. Well! If you are not a thief, you will not be hanged; that's your reward. You obey the commandments of God which are made for you. Well, you will not be thrown out of the monastery, but you will also not be accepted as a faithful servant of God but as a mercenary if you do nothing more. A servant who will not serve his master beyond what he was hired to do would be thought of as a minimalist. "Well," the master would say to him, if he was not told to leave the house, "you may hold back on the service for which I have hired you, but I will also hold back on the wages which I promised you, and you will get nothing more."

You say that you also want to do what is advised and even what is offered in the form of direction, but you would like to know whether, while acknowledging your failures at times, you are bound to confess them as you would do in the case of a commandment. No. When a person

The Twelfth Conference

confesses to me and tells me that he gambles and that when he does he ordinarily swears because he gets upset, I command him at once in the name of God to give up gambling and this command that I give him he is bound to obey. But when I ask him: "Do you swear every time you gamble?" And he answers: "No, not ordinarily." Then I say to him: "My son, I am advising you not to gamble any more because this is an idle and unprofitable form of recreation. He is not bound by this to obey under pain of mortal sin. But when I speak to him in the form of direction: "My son, you ought to refrain from gambling" (since I am not obliged to forbid his gambling, if it only rarely upsets him or causes him to swear), then he is not bound to refrain from it. It is the same when the Superiors say something that doesn't contain a command, even though the perfection which we aim for should make us esteem and embrace everything that can help us be united and conformed to the Divine Majesty. This union should be the unique object of our lives and the focus for doing everything we do. Even though we don't act contrary to the obedience we have vowed, which belongs to the form of commandment, when we do not subject ourselves to follow counsels and direction, we do indeed act contrary to the loving obedience to which we and all who belong to the Visitation aspire. May God protect us from not having the courage to embrace the practice of loving obedience, such as we have described it!

You now ask: "How can a Sister who doesn't have a total love for obedience obtain it?" Alas, my dear Daughter, there is no other way to do it than by striving to love it. I mean, when you are commanded to do something, you do it by embracing, caressing, coddling (n25) and kissing this command. And when something else is commanded, we do the same thing as if it were a very precious and pleasing thing, realizing the good toward which we are directed is union with God. Then we move on to another. Thus, by doing the same, our hearts become accustomed to loving it.

But now you ask what if you cannot think positively when your Superior is changed, perhaps the new one is not as capable as the previous one you had, she is not as knowledgeable about the way along which you should be led. Oh! Certainly, you cannot prevent the thoughts that pop into your head. You must not dwell on them. For if Balaam was well instructed by an ass (n26), it is all the more reason that we ought to believe that God who has given us this Superior will enable her to teach us according to his will, even though it may perhaps not be according to ours. Our Lord has promised that the truly obedient person will never be lost (n27); and certainly not those who follow without distinction the direction of Superiors that God will place over us. Even though a Superior would be ignorant and lead her subjects according to her ignorance, even on difficult and dangerous paths, subjects should be submissive in everything that is not manifestly against the commandments of God and of holy Church. I can assure you that they will never go astray (n28). The truly obedient person, Scripture tells us, will be given several wonderful victories, i.e., she will come out the victor in every difficult situation where she is taken by obedience and she will come forth from the ways that obedience has led her with honor, no matter how dangerous they may be. It would be a very pleasing kind of obedience if we would only obey Superiors who would be pleasing to us (v42). Today if you had a Superior who is happy or well-thought of, as much for her disposition as her virtue, you would obey her. And tomorrow if I would have another who would be unpleasant and less thought of, you would not want to obey her. You would obey her as you would the first, you say, but you do not hold in as high esteem what she tells you, nor do you do it with as much satisfaction. My God! Who

The Twelfth Conference

doesn't see that you obeyed the first because of your feelings and not purely for God? And if that were so, you should do with as much pleasure and esteem what she tells you as you would do with what the first would tell you.

I have often said, and it is always good to say it again, since it must always be observed, I am referring to the activities of the higher part of our spirit. We must live in this community and we must never live according to our sensible and lower nature. No doubt I would have more satisfaction, as far as the lower part of my nature is concerned, in doing what a Superior whom I like asks me to do than in doing what another, whom I do not like at all, tells me to do. But provided that we obey both in the same way in the higher part of our spirit, that is enough; and our obedience is worth more when I have less pleasure in doing it because then we show that our obedience is done for God and not for our own pleasure. There is nothing more common in the world than this latter kind of obedience. The first type of obedience is rare and is only practiced in religious life (v43). If Superiors could only be made of wax or cast in the same mold in accord with what we expect, we would most probably be pleased, for we would be able to shape them according to our will. And in so doing, they would only command us to do what we want to do.

Is it ever permitted to disapprove of how the latter type of Superior does not give permissions as readily as the first type? Or talk about it? Or at least think about it, because the latter type gives such orders that the first did not? Oh! Certainly not! Never, my dear Daughters! We must approve everything that Superiors do, order or forbid, provided, as I have said before, that it is not manifestly against the commandments of God. Then, we must not obey, and even less, give approval. Outside of that, subjects must always believe and make their own judgment acknowledge that Superiors do things very well and have very good reasons for what they do. Otherwise, we would make ourselves the Superior and the Superior the subject (v44) by sitting in judgment on their actions. How often it happens that a Pope forbids something that his successor allows? Should we say: "How can he do that?" No, never. We must bend our backs under the yoke of holy obedience, believing that both have good reason to give the commands they give, no matter how different and opposite they may be.

You ask if it is permissible for a Sister who has been a member of the community for a long time and has given great service to the community to relax a bit in her observance of obedience, at least in little things? Oh! What would that be except being like a master pilot who, having brought his ship to port and having worked hard and with great difficulty to save it from dangerous winds, would want finally, while being on board, to scuttle his ship and throw himself into the sea? Wouldn't that be judged to be foolish? For if he wanted to do that, he ought not to have worked so hard to bring her into port. A religious who has begun well has not done everything if she does not persevere to the end. You must not say that only novices have to be exact. Although in all religious communities, novices are found to be so exact and mortified, they are not obliged more than the Professed. No! They are not, but the Professed are indeed. Novices are exact and persevere in obedience so that they may attain the grace of profession. The Professed, however, are obliged in light of the vows they have made. But it is not enough to have made them to be a religious (v45) if they do not observe them. They would be like those who appear to be so mortified on Easter because they go to Confession, and the next day are as worldly as before.

The Twelfth Conference

Religious who would think that after their profession they could lighten up in everything, even if they have been a member of the community for a long time, are greatly mistaken. Our Lord revealed himself to be more exact in his death than in his childhood, when he allowed himself to be handled and touched, as I have already pointed out (v46). While he was on his mother's lap, she wanted to wrap the swaddling clothes around him when he moved his little hands and feet a bit. However, on the Cross he made no movement, he just allowed himself to be nailed as his executioners pleased. This is enough said on obedience to make us want to do it.

Let us go on. I am going to say something on a question put to me last evening, i.e., whether it is permissible for a Sister to tell another Sister when she has been mortified on some occasion by the Superior or the Mistress of Novices. There are ways that this can happen. The first is that a Sister can go to another and say, "My God, Sister, our Mother has just thoroughly mortified me!" She is joyful that the Superior has given her something that will be of some small profit for her spirit by speaking of her fault without sparing her feelings. She shares this joy with her fellow Sister so that she can help her bless God for it (v47). The second way of talking about it is by way of relief. She finds mortification or correction very hard and she goes to her fellow Sister to place a little of the burden on her, who while complaining will remove some of the burden on herself. This is not as honorable as the first way because it involves an imperfection in the complaining. However, the third is thoroughly wrong. It is to talk about it in a spirit of murmuring and resentment so that it will become known that the Superior was in the wrong (v48). I am certain that by the grace of God this will never take place in this community.

With reference to the first, even though there is nothing wrong in telling the mortification, it would be infinitely better not to talk about it, but busy oneself with rejoicing in God. In the second, we must certainly have nothing to do with it, for by our complaining we lose the merit of the mortification. Do you know what we must do when we are corrected and mortified? We must take the mortification in full hand, as a token of love, and hide it in our heart, kissing and caressing it as attentively as possible. But what am I going to say: "I went to speak to Mother. I am as dejected as I was before. I must unite myself only with God; there is no consolation for me in creatures. I come away less consoled (v49) than before I went." Your fellow Sister ought to say very gently: "My dear Sister, why were you not firmly united to God as you told me we should be, before going to speak to Mother? Then you would not have been as discontent because she did not console you." (v50) What would you say, my dear Daughters, about the meaning of "must be firmly united to God"? Take care in seeking God because of the weakness of creatures. Sometimes he refuses to be found. He wants to be sought after ahead of all created things and in spite of them. Because created things do not satisfy me, I seek out their Creator. The Creator deserves that we leave everything behind for him alone; He also wants us to do all things for him. When we leave the presence of the Superior totally dejected, without having received any drop of consolation, we ought to carry our sadness away with us like a precious balm, as I told you to do with the affections that we receive in holy prayer. I say "like a precious balm" so that we take great care not to spill any of this heavenly liquor that has been sent from heaven like a precious gift. We must anoint our heart totally with the deprivation of the consolation that we expected to receive from the words of the Superior. But there is one point I want to make on this subject. Sometimes we carry a (v51) heart as hard and dry as a rock when we go

The Twelfth Conference

to speak to the Superior. It is incapable of being softened and refreshed with the water of consolation any more than being touched by what the Superior says. Even though she speaks well to the present need, it does not seem so to you. At another time when you are more pliable and well-disposed, she will speak three or four words to you much less useful to your perfection than the others were. These console you. Why? Because your heart is ready for it. You seem to want Superiors to have consolations on the tips of their tongues and that they will easily pour them into the hearts of those who want them. This is not how it happens. They cannot always be in the same mood, any more than others. Happy indeed are those Superiors who can keep their hearts on an even keel amidst all the upsets of their subjects! At one moment (v52) we will be consoled, the next we will have a bit of a dryness suchwise that the words of consolation may exact a very high price. You have asked me again to speak about what method is best to put to death our private judgment. I can only answer that the best method is to cut off faithfully all kinds of talk on occasions in which it tries to be Master, letting it clearly know that it is only a valet.

My dear Daughters, it is only through repeated acts that we acquire virtues, although there have been some to whom God has given them in a moment (v53). Such a one is Saint Catherine of Genoa, who was converted in a moment in the presence of her confessor and so completely that another servant of God who lived in the same town wondered how Saint Catherine had so quickly made amends for all of her imperfections. For her part, Saint Catherine wondered how, after spending so much time to make amends, she had still been unable to do it. When you become anxious to judge whether something that is commanded is really rightly or wrongly ordered, curb your private judgment and instantly say to yourself: "I must do this in such a way." Do not waste time discussing (v54) whether it could be done better than the way I was told to do it. If you are given some exercise to perform, don't allow your judgment time to discern if it will be suitable for you or not. But take care that, even though you do the thing just as you have been told to do it, your own private judgment very often does not obey, for it does not approve of the command. This is what ordinarily causes the disagreeableness that we experience in submitting to do what is asked of us. Because our understanding and judgment present to our will what it ought to do or that we must use other means to do what we have been told than the ones shown us, our will cannot submit itself all the more so since it always thinks highly of the reasons that our private judgment gives than those proposed by another. Everyone believes that their own judgment is the best. I have never met a person who did not value their own judgment more, except two (v55); one is from this city, and I don't know where the other is from. However, these two (n30) confessed that they had no judgment at all; and one of them, when he came once to see me, told me: "My Lord, I beg you, please tell me a bit about such and such a thing, for I have no judgment at all so that I can understand it." This really surprised me.

In our own times, we have a very remarkable example of the mortification of one's private judgment. It is that held by a great theologian, a very renowned theologian (n31) (v56) who wrote a book entitled *On Dispensations and Commandments*. After it was finished it fell into the hands of the Pope. The Pope made a judgment that there were some erroneous propositions. He wrote to this theologian so that they could be removed from the book (v57). However, it was well known that the Pope found nothing heretical there but only some erroneous opinions. The theologian on

The Twelfth Conference

receiving the command of the Pope, submitted his private judgment so absolutely that he would not clarify his position in order to exonerate himself. On the contrary, he believed that he was wrong and had allowed himself to be deceived by his own private judgment. Climbing into the pulpit, he read what the Pope had written in full. He then took his book, tore it into pieces, then told the people that what the Pope had decided on the matter had been a good decision and that he accepted with his whole heart the judgment and the fatherly correction that the Pope had deigned to give him. It was most just and gentle for one who deserved a rigorous condemnation. He was greatly amazed that he had been so blind as to allow himself to be deceived by his own private judgment in a matter so manifestly wrong. Now, he was in no way bound to do this because the Pope had commanded nothing like this (v58), only that he remove certain things from his book. He thus showed very great virtue and mortification of his own private judgment (v59).

Persons as mortified as this are rarely found. To acknowledge what is commanded is good, to love it and hold it in high regard as something very profitable and very valuable is even better. It is here that the judgment comes to a halt. There are even many who say: "I will in fact do what you asked but I see very well that it would be better done otherwise." Alas! What should you do? If you build up your own judgment, without a doubt it will intoxicate you with yourself. There is no difference between a person who is intoxicated and one who is filled with his own private judgment (v60), for you will accomplish very little trying to get either to let go of their fantasy world. One day, David (n32), while in the hills with his soldiers (v61), who were exhausted and unable to find anything to eat, sent to the home of Abigail and her husband, asking them to send food for himself and his soldiers. But the soldiers who were sent found this poor man drunk. He understood what David was asking for and began speaking like a drunk, for he refused to give them anything, saying that David, having eaten all that he had stolen, sent them to him to ruin him like the others, etc. These men did not fail to recount everything that had transpired between the drunken man and themselves. David exclaimed: "By the living God, this man will pay for this; he doesn't understand the good that I did for him by saving his flock" (v62). Abigail, knowing David's plan, went to him the next day with presents to appease him, using these words: "My Lord, what would you want to do to a drunk? Yesterday, when my husband was drunk, he spoke insolently like a drunk and a fool (v63). If you would come today, he certainly will receive you cheerfully and respectfully. My Lord, calm yourself and don't lay hold of him, for you will only regret having laid your hands on a fool for the rest of your life." We (v64) must make the same excuses about our own private judgment as for a drunken person, for no one is more capable of reason than the other. We must take great care to prevent our minds from making such considerations (v65), especially in what concerns obedience.

Finally, you would like to know if you ought to have a great trust and a great care so as to correct one another about your faults in all charity. Understand, my dear Daughter, you must do it, for how could I see fault in my Sister without trying to remove it by some type of correction? (v66) You must be very discreet in this matter, for it would not be a good time to challenge or give a correction to a Sister if I would see her in a bad mood or overcome with sadness. She might instantly reject the correction if I would give one. We must wait a while and then correct her with confidence and charity. But if a Sister would say something that appears to be murmuring and yet her heart seems to be filled with gentleness, undoubtedly you ought to say to her confidently: "That isn't right."

The Twelfth Conference

But you should not say it if you notice that some passion is stirring in her heart. You must change the subject as skillfully (v67) as possible.

Without doubt you can correct your fellow Sisters about mistakes made during the Office, even though it is part of the responsibility of the Assistant Superior. You must not wait to see if a Sister continues to commit the same fault for a whole week. If it should happen a second time, and if you think that she has not been corrected about it the first time (n33), you ought to tell the Assistant. And I would approve of someone speaking to the Assistant about it than to the Sister who has committed the fault, even though it could be done with charity, if one wanted to. If the Assistant has already corrected her about it, it would hardly be painful if you were to speak about it very gently, for it isn't necessary to spare one's words.

You say that you very often are afraid to correct any Sister for committing faults at the Office because that deprives her of confidence and makes her more fearful about falling. Oh, God! You must not judge our Sisters this way! For that only happens to women in the world who lose confidence when they are made aware of their faults. Our Sisters love their own lowliness too much to do that; however, when they are troubled by them, let them take hold of the occasion to gain greater courage and be more attuned to making amends. They do not try to avoid being corrected because I presuppose that they love with the greatest love possible everything that can make them humble and lowly in their own eyes, so that they might better fulfill their responsibility and be more suited for their vocation.

NOTES

1. spontaneous movement.
2. They could do nothing to resist it, or oppose it.
3. 2Mac. 14:37-46.
4. Saint Ambrose, *On Virgins*, Book III, chapter 7.
5. 1Peter 2:8.
6. Acts 23:2-5.
7. Lk. 2:1-5.
8. Lk. 5:17-26; Mk. 2:3-12.
9. go down.

The Twelfth Conference

10. follow.
11. Gen. 12:1.
12. Acts 9:4-8.
13. Jn. 9:6-7.
14. Gen. 25:19; 27:45.
15. 2Kgs. 5:9-14.
16. leprous.
17. Gen. 24:14-20.
18. Surius, *The Lives of the Saints*, "The Life of Saint Pachomius," on May 14.
19. 2Sam. 23:15-16.
20. Seen until out of breath.
21. Phil. 2:8.
22. Surius, *The Lives of the Saints*, "Life of Saint Pachomius," on May 14.
23. Matt. 10:42; Mk. 9:40.
24. Ps. 118, v. 97, 103.
25. carefully touching.
26. Num. 22:28-30.
27. Mt. 10:42; Mk. 9:40.
28. Prov. 21:28.
29. cf. the beginning of the conference.

The Twelfth Conference

30. One of these might be Jean Pierre Camus, Bishop of Belley, cf. *The Spirit of Saint Francis de Sales*, Part I, ch. 34.
31. In all probability, the "great theologian" is none other than Pierre de Villars, Archbishop of Vienne. He had published a book entitled: *Remonstrances, Warning and Exhortations on the main things that need to be reformed, established and observed in the Canonical Hours, etc.* (Roussin, Lyon, 1598). In the "conclusion of this book, certain propositions were formulated on the subjects "Commendations" and "Exemptions" that displeased Pope Clement VIII. The Sisters who recalled the present *Conference* confused "Commendations" and "Exemptions" with *Dispensations and Commandments*.
32. I Sam. 25:4-25
33. A mistake.

VARIANTS

1. E1629. The *Eleventh Conference* on the same subject of Obedience. *On the virtue of obedience*.
E1933. The *Twelfth Conference, on the Virtue of Obedience*.
2. E1629. The Beginning of the *Conference*: "There are three kinds of holy obedience. The first is generally for all Christians, which is the obedience we owe to God..."
3. E1629. "...I wish to speak as being the most perfect. This is called loving obedience. It is about this that Our Lord gave example throughout his entire life.
The Fathers have assigned to this kind of obedience several properties and qualities, but from among them all I shall choose only three. The first is that, as they say, it is blind; the second is that it is prompt; and the third is that it is persevering. Blind obedience has also three properties or qualities. In the first place..."
4. E1629. "...will assuredly give her the power to accomplish it. Instead of asking how it should be done, blind obedience sets to work to do it." The text skips down to the second sentence of the next paragraph and begins: "Religious obedience, then, which ought to be blind, lovingly undertakes..."
5. E1629. "For in all that concerns the commandments of God, just as Superiors have no power whatever to give any contrary commandment, the subjects..."

The Twelfth Conference

6. E1629. The text does not contain the word "mortally."
7. The Rouen manuscript. The Third Book of Kings contains the name Jurith. We correct the error in the manuscript from E1629.
8. E1629. "wounded and killed."
9. E1629. "...Superiors intensely." The remaining phrase is not present in the text of 1629.
10. E1629 adds "and have respect for their person."
11. E1629 adds "for they do exactly the same..."
12. E1629 has "...idols: some were statues of men, others were rats, dogs...."
13. E1629 adds "that of a rat as that of a lion, without any difference,"
14. E1629. "...wicked. The text then skips down to "Our Lord, Our Lady and Saint Joseph...."
15. Rouen Manuscript. Taken through a proconsul. We correct this error in the manuscript according to the *Colloquies*.
16. Rouen Manuscript has only "from Nazareth." We correct the text using the 1629 manuscript.
17. E1629. The next paragraph is not part of text of 1629.
18. E1629. The example of the paralytic is not part of the text. The text skips down to the beginning of the next paragraph and begins with: "Abraham is greatly to be admired in this obedience. God called him and said Abraham...."
19. E1629 does not contain the remainder of the sentence.
20. E1629. The next paragraph begins: "When Our Lord wanted to restore the sight of the man born blind, he made some mud."
21. E1629. "Make me blind." He did not consider these things but obeyed very simply. The text resumes with: "The truly obedient person...."
22. E1629, E1933 do not contain the story of Jacob in the next paragraph. The text resumes with the story of Naaman the Syrian. "Naaman the Syrian did not behave in this way, because he thought that such obedience would bring him harm. Being a leper, he went to...."

The Twelfth Conference

23. E1629. The following sentence is not part of the text.
24. E1629 adds: "Do you see the danger he put himself into of never recovering his health by thinking too much about what was commanded?" It then resumes with "The third..."
25. E1629. "By what means it can do what it is commanded." It then resumes with "It knows...."
26. E1629. "...of my mother. And as he goes on thinking about it, he sees from afar the lovely Rebecca." The text then skips the remainder of the sentence and begins with "Eliezer..."
27. E1629. "I do not want to preserve it for myself." The text then skips down to "Saint Pachomius spoke to him very gently."
28. E1629. "And so it happened. The next day it was totally dried up and never bore fruit again. Certainly, poor Jonas spoke truthfully when he said that it was not for his sake that he wanted to save the fig tree, for it was remarked that during the seventy-five years that he spent in religious life as the gardener he never tasted any fruit from his garden though he was very free with it for his Brothers. He learned how excellent promptness is in obedience. Our Lord..."
29. E1629. "He was obedient throughout his entire life during which we see nothing..."
30. E1629. "The good monk Jonas provides us with two examples on the subject of perseverance, for although he did not obey very promptly the command that Saint Pachomius gave him, yet he was a monk of great perfection. From the time he entered religious life until his death, he continued his work as gardener without any interruption during the seventy-five years he spent in the monastery."
31. E1629. "...interlaced with palm leaves, he died making them." The text then picks up with "It is a very great virtue...."
32. E1629. "It is nothing if you don't have obedience. We read in the life of Saint Pachomius that one of his monks having persevered through his novitiate in a spirit of humility and submission came one day to Saint Pachomius and said to him, possessing great fervor, that he had a great desire for martyrdom, that he would never be satisfied until that happened, then he very humbly begged Saint Pachomius if he would pray to God so that it might come to pass. The holy Father tried to assuage this fervor, but the more he said...."
33. E1629. "near the monastery"
34. E1629. "...he was very valiant." "You are dead," they said. "I ask nothing...."

The Twelfth Conference

35. E1629. "...is more meritorious and more pleasing to God than voluntary labor. But, you will tell me, what shall I gain by practicing this loving obedience so exactly with all the above-mentioned qualities of blindness, promptness and perseverance? Oh, my dear Daughters, anyone who will do it will enjoy in their spirit a continual calm and the very holy peace of Our Lord which surpasses all understanding. Such a person will not have to make an account of their actions because they all will have been done in obedience, both to the *Rule* as well as Superiors. What greater happiness can be desired than that? Certainly, the truly obedient person, I may observe in passing, loves the *Rule*, they honor it..."
36. E1629. "The truly obedient Sister..." The remainder of the sentence is omitted but picks up with the next sentence "...will live..."
37. E1629. "...during the course of your mortal life. She will enjoy true peacefulness; there is no doubt about it." The next paragraph is dropped. It picks up with: "Now you ask if you are obliged under pain of sin to do everything Superiors tell you to do; like when."
38. E1933. "...for your improvement. Oh, no, my dear Daughter." The text then skips down to "For to commit faults through forgetfulness."
39. Rouen Manuscript. "of the *Rule*," we have supplied in the parenthesis the omission of the Rouen Manuscript in light of the Caen Manuscript.
40. E1629, cf variant 38. The text of 1629 skips from "for your improvement. Oh! No, my dear Daughter..." and then resumes "...Neither Superiors nor confessors..."
41. E1629. "...offends loving obedience and this would show a great cowardice of heart and very little love for God to be willing only to do what is commanded of us and nothing more. And, even though they do not offend against the vow of obedience which concerns only commands and counsels, when they do not submit to following simple direction, they do indeed offend against loving obedience to which all Daughters of the Visitation ought to aspire." The text resumes two full paragraphs later with "...you ask what if you are unable to think positively."
42. E1629. "...pleasing to us. If today you have a Superior who is highly thought of both for her solid character and her virtues, you will obey her cheerfully; but tomorrow you, if you have one who is not so highly thought of, you will not obey her as cheerfully as the other. You will give her a similar obedience but you will not esteem what she says and does with as much satisfaction. Alas! Who doesn't see that you obeyed the first one..."
43. E1629. "...in the world than this way of obeying those whom everyone loves, but as for the other kind of obedience, it is extremely rare and is practiced only in religious communities."

The Twelfth Conference

"But you may say, isn't it permissible to disapprove of what a Superior does or to say or to think why she gives orders...."

44. E1629. "...and make the Superior the subject by sitting in judgment upon their reasons." The text does not contain the next sentence but resumes with, "No, we must bend our shoulders under the yoke of holy obedience."
45. E1629. "...to have made them if they do not observe them." The text does not contain the next sentence but resumes with: "The religious...."
46. E1629. "...as I have already pointed out." The text does not contain the remainder of the sentence. It resumes with: "This is enough said...."
47. E1629. "Joyful that she has been worthy of this mortification and that the Superior...."
48. E1629. "in this way I know in fact that...."
49. E1629. "...less consoled than I was. That is not correct. The Sisters...."
50. E1629. "...consoled. But when you say that we must..."
51. E1629. "...a heart that is hard and dry when we go to the Superior who"
52. E1629. "...varieties of circumstances at one moment...."
53. E1629. The example of Saint Catherine of Genoa is not part of the text. The text resumes with the next paragraph.
54. E1629. "...to discover or discern if it could be done better in some other way, but compel your judgment to believe that the matter can not be done better than the way you have been told. If you are...."
55. E1629. The text skips down to the beginning of the next sentence and resumes with: "...who confessed."
56. The Rouen Manuscript. A great theologian at Louvain. We correct the manuscript with the 1629 text, cf. the corresponding note.
57. E1629. The next sentence is not part of the text. It resumes with "...the theologian...."

The Twelfth Conference

58. E1629. "...but only that he remove from his book certain things which did not seem good; for what is remarkable is that they were not heretical nor so clearly erroneous that they could not be defended. He showed...."
59. E1629. "We fairly often see people whose senses are mortified because their own will lends itself to mortification. It would be shameful to rebel against obedience. What would be said about us? It is a rare thing to find people in which private judgment is really mortified. To acknowledge...."
60. E1629. The remainder of the sentence is not part of this text. It resumes with "...one day."
61. E1629. "...his soldiers, who were weary and exhausted with hunger, and finding nothing to eat, sent to the husband of Abigail, asking him to furnish them with provisions. Unhappily, this man was drunk, and speaking like a drunkard, said that David, after having consumed his plunder, had now come to ruin him like the others and that he would give them nothing. David hearing this exclaimed: 'As God lives, he said, he will pay for this....'"
62. E1629. "...his flocks and preventing any harm from being done to him. Abigail...."
63. E1629. "...fool. My Lord, calm your indignation and do not lay hands on him, for you will only regret having laid hands on a fool."
64. E1629. "...must make the same excuses for our own private judgment as for a drunkard, for one is more capable...."
65. E1629. "...considerations in order that it may not intoxicate us with its reasons, especially...."
66. E1629. "...How could you possibly see a blemish in your Sister, without trying to remove it by means of an admonition? You must however be discreet in this matter; for it would not be a good time to admonish a Sister when you see her indisposed or depressed, for there would be the danger that she might instantly reject the admonition if you were to do it. The text resumes with: "We must wait awhile...."
67. E1629. "...as skillfully as you can." The text then skips the next paragraph and resumes with the beginning of the last paragraph: "You say that you are afraid to admonish any Sister very often about the faults she has committed because it...."