

that should be all joy and light and life. It is idle to look for a conscious sharing in the mystery of Christ until Christ himself be known and loved. And the Church's work is precisely ordained to that: the infinite richness of the life of grace; the redemptive work of the sacraments accompanying us from birth to death, cleansing, feeding, restoring, building up the members of the Body to the stature of Christ its Head—all this, once again, is Christ's work achieved through the mystery that is his.

The *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique*, which is doing so much in France to restore the sense of membership of the Church as demanding an active participation in her life of worship, has recently published (in the *Fêtes et Saisons* series) an illustrated album devoted to the Mass,<sup>3</sup> which perfectly expresses in a practical and most readable form the idea which animates Dom Casel's great book. One might wish that priests everywhere should consider this lively plea for the Mass to become once more in ordinary Catholic life a publicly, popularly uttered sharing in the supreme mystery of Christ our Lord.

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## O B E D I E N C E

BY

S. M. ALBERT, O.P.

*Hoc est enim corpus meum*



HE human body formed by the Holy Ghost in the chaste womb of the Virgin Mother, and the mystical body which she brought forth by her travail on Calvary are both alike the body of the Incarnate Word. Indeed, one may say in a sense that the human body was assumed for the sake of the mystical body so that the mystical body could also be formed; just as, according to St Thomas, the first effect of the Sacrament of the holy Eucharist, of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ on the altar, is the unity of the mystical body. Therefore the members of the mystical body are likened to the members of Christ's physical body, his hands and feet, etc. and therefore they must serve his purposes, be used in his work in the same way, and, if completely united to him, to the same extent as were his other members.

By the disobedience of one man sin had entered the world, and such was the injury done thereby to the infinite purity and majesty of God that a reparation and a satisfaction which would be at once *de condigno* and *de congruo*, adequate and fitting, could only be

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<sup>3</sup> Cerf; Blackfriars; 1s. 0d.

offered by a man who was also God. Therefore the eternal Word became incarnate so as to become obedient, even unto death.

Obedience was the end, and in a sense obedience was the cause, at least the dispositive cause of the incarnation. As God had created the first human body out of the dust by his word, so he could equally well have created a body for the eternal Word by his own *fiat*; but he decided to do so only at the *fiat* of the Virgin whom from all ages he had chosen to be the mother of his Son. It may be noted, too, that she gave her *fiat* not to a command, but to a wish of her God. The angel did not announce to her 'the Lord commands', as did Michael to the fallen angels; he rather exposed to her the divine plan, giving her to understand that its execution depended upon her free cooperation. Her answer was obedience: 'Be it done unto me according to thy word'. 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.'

By disobedience God has been driven from the paradise he had caused to blossom forth, from the living temples he had created for his abode; by obedience he again took possession of the new 'garden enclosed' and the heart of man became once more the home of God.

The path of obedience thus marked out was followed at every step. Unborn, the Incarnate Word made his way to Bethlehem, obedient through his Mother and St Joseph to the decree of the higher power which was but a faint image of himself, the power of God, upon whose shoulder rests the government of the world. A child of forty days, he was obedient to the law which he had come to fulfil, and which again was but a reflection of himself who is the eternal Law of God; while at the same time he was officially and solemnly consummated only on Calvary. 'Then said I, "Behold I come to do thy will, O Lord!"'

At the age of twelve he set about doing his Father's business; and then, at a word from her to whom as his Mother he owed obedience even while she owed obedience to him as her God, the fountain of eternal wisdom played no more, and going down to Nazareth 'He was subject to them', obedient during the remaining eighteen years of the hidden life at Nazareth. It is a thought worth pondering that even in the case of the onlybegotten Son of God, the Father expressed his will, not directly, but through those to whom the Incarnate Word owed obedience, who were the lawful superiors of the infinite God who had humbled himself even to the obedience of a child to its parents. It is noteworthy, too, that at this time, as if humanly, acquired knowledge alone were his. It was only when the period of tutelage was ended, when his hour was come and was heralded by the miracle at Cana, performed again at the word of his Mother, that the Son of Man went forth to his public life, when he was to be

not only his own master, but the Master of others, while being at the same time the Servant of all.

A little while and Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem, prepared to suffer many things and to be obedient unto death, even unto the death of the Cross; and then after that the High Priest, the spiritual ruler of the Jews and therefore of the Christ, decreed that 'it was expedient that one Man should die for the people'.

The omnipotent God was bound with cords; the eternal Word by whom all things were created from nothing was hustled hither and thither by rough soldiery; he who expresses the Father and all creatures was mute before his captors until obedience bade him speak. 'He was led like a lamb to the slaughter', and was made obedient unto death. And unto death and in death he was obedient in every detail to all that the Prophets had foretold concerning him—'That the Scripture should be fulfilled'.

Yet all the while, even though the rational will was absolutely conformed to that of the Father, the will of nature could shrink from the path which obedience marked out. The Agony in the Garden with the threefold cry, 'Father if it be possible let this chalice pass from me—yet if I must drink it, thy will be done', offers much consolation to those who naturally recoil from suffering and pain. The divine Exemplar, having joy set before him, chose the cross, yet not because it was the cross, but because it was the will of his Father. Obedience looks at the thing not as desirable or repugnant, but simply as commanded; and to be able to see every detail of life simply in terms of the will of God, is to have gone far towards developing 'the mind of Christ', which is true wisdom.

Such in outline was the life of obedience which the Incarnate Word came on earth to fulfil; such in the spirit if not in the letter must be the life of his mystical body, as a whole and in every member. 'This is my body'—'You are not your own.'

If, and in so far as, we belong to Christ, as we *are* Christ, just to that extent we are not our own, and by thus denying ourselves, but giving ourselves wholly to him, we are most fully and completely ourselves. It is the same principle as in the adorable Trinity; the Father is the Father precisely because he gives himself wholly, save in his inalienable Paternity to the Son, and Father and Son give back all to each and so breath forth the Holy Spirit; it is their nature to give; did they not give, they would not be.

Thus, we belong to God; we are his instruments to be used as he wishes: therefore we are not our own, and our life must be directed not as we will, but as he wills. Obedience is the law of creation, and it remains the law even while the rational creature has the power to disregard the law. Religious profession is as it were the

acceptance of and submission to this law in all its rigour; it is quite literally the deliberate surrender of the right of self-determination, the right to direct our own lives, the right to exercise our rights. In the most literal manner it is true to say, 'You are not your own'. This is shown most completely in the religious life. In it we belong to God, to the order and to the community in which we make profession, and they and not ourselves have the right to direct our lives. Because Superiors may usually consider our wishes, aptitudes and capabilities in the allocation of duties, offices, etc., it easily becomes the natural thing to expect such consideration, to believe that we have a right to it. Yet this is a mistake—'You are not your own. By profession we surrender in the most complete and final manner all dominion over, all right of possession of external goods, our own bodies, and our will; and the spirit of this profession requires the complete surrender of all that is 'self' even in thoughts and desires. 'You are not your own'; all has been given to God, to the Incarnate Word to be used as his instrument. 'This is my Body'; for 'you are Christ's and Christ is God's'.

This absolute handing over of the whole being and therefore of all its activities, to the will of the Father is in practice the continual and complete practice of obedience to the will of the Father in every detail of life, just as it was in the human life of our Lord; 'It is nothing else but in all things, inwardly and outwardly in time and in eternity to be at the beck of God, and to be subject to his will' (*Fiery Soliloquy*). It is to welcome the instrument of the love of God just as the sacred humanity was the instrument of that love; it is to enter into life, into the life which is God himself, by denying ourselves, by losing that life in which we are ourselves—'so that self inasmuch as it is self be nothing, but God in all; yet that self in God and with God (so far as this is possible) may be everything'. It is the grain dying and thereby bringing forth fruit, springing up into a life that is far more beautiful and productive. Obedience may appear to be the surrender of all that is worth while, the death, the denial of all that is highest in man. In reality it is the gate of life, and the only one; 'If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments'.

The consideration of the surrender which is effected by and expressed in religious profession, which is as it were the consecration of that Mass which is our whole life; a consecration—'This is my Body'—which is at the same time an offertory and a communion; an offertory like the Presentation in the temple—'Behold I come to do thy will', a communion because the Bridegroom and the Bride are united. As the whole of the life of Christ and the whole of the

Mass is unified and expressed on Calvary—'Father into thy hands I commend my spirit'—so is the whole of our life expressed in the Mass, and it is only on condition of our obedience, i.e. our self-surrender, that this likeness to the mystery of this transubstantiation can take place, when we become fully his body, members of his mystical body. Thus with us as with the Incarnate Word, obedience is at once the end and the means. Nor is this surprising seeing that the Incarnation is a continuous reality, for just as the eternal Word took a body in the womb of Mary, so that human nature might once more be perfected by submission to its end, which is God, so he takes flesh, as it were, in every individual who is born again by grace, so that each one separately may be united to its end. The sacred humanity was absolutely obedient to and dependent on the Person of the Word, without whom it had no existence; the humanity of the mystical body in each individual member must exhibit a similar obedience. 'For this is my body. . . .'

A realisation of the truth contained in this idea could bring in its train many virtues. 'This is my body.' It is his body, obedient to his will. Therefore anything that is done is his work—'There is no doer but he'. Where, then, is there room for vainglory or self-complacency? The instrument does not claim credit for the masterpiece, although on the other hand if the work of the master is marred, a defective instrument is most likely to blame.

Detachment and liberty of spirit, too, should follow. The 'Spirit moveth where he will', and the head directs the hands where he will. Any work we do, any office, is not ours but his. It is only too easy to assume an attitude of proprietorship towards our work, to think that some particular office is, or should be, the reward of our merit, our particular preserve. 'There is no doer but he' and he works with whatever instrument he chooses and for as long as he chooses, but no one can have any right in the matter. The instrument, too, is there to be used; the body cannot take a holiday from the spirit; if it refuses to work, the soul is handicapped, immobilised. Our duties are limited only by his will; we have given all, and he may take us at our word and ask for all—time, energy, leisure; it is his, and we have no right to complain. We must give all. Any refusal to give is to place a limit to *his* work, to *his* giving, to *his* love; it is as if it were to make finite his Infinitude at least in its act: and this because he has willed it thus, willed to be dependent upon us, willed to do only what we allow him—'For *this* is *my* body which shall be given for you'. We give not ourselves but him, he gives not us but himself.

The whole point is always to see ourselves in relation to him. Essentially God can receive nothing from us, from creation; acciden-

tally, he can receive all. He has nothing to gain, since he has himself and 'He is All'; yet he made all things only for himself.

*Omnia ad semetipsum Dominus operatus,  
et gloriam meam alteri non dabo.*

I will give my glory to no other.

He, then, is the end, for which all that is done by us is done; and when and in so far as we do what we do, for ourselves, we deny him the glory that is his due.

He is the doer too, for 'there is no doer but he', but he acts through us. Whatever is done by us, is done by and in him, he begins and directs and perfects it, and there is no credit due to us; and whatever we refuse to do, is a refusal to let him act, a denial to him of our hands and head and body; as if Mary had given a refusal instead of a *fiat* to the angel's announcement.

All that we have to give is our *fiat*, our surrender, our obedience, but that is all he asks and it is everything. Without it, according to the plan decreed by divine wisdom, he is impotent; with it, infinite light and power can communicate itself to the world. 'A body thou hast fitted for me' declared the eternal Word, but it was to be fitted in the womb of the Virgin, and it was only after she had given her consent, had become obedient to the will of the Father, that the eternal Word became the Incarnate Word and was able to say 'This is my body'. Born once in time, he wishes to be born every moment in us; having emptied himself and subjected himself to the limitations imposed by a material body, he seeks compensation in the multitude of members of the mystical body scattered through time and space, in each of whom he wishes to be, to live, to act. 'I live, now not I but Christ liveth in me.' He has already said to us 'Thou art always with me, and all my things are thine'. When we can reply the same to him, the transformation will be complete; 'For this is my body'.