

OBEDIENCE AND SELF-CREATION

©Robert Henman

March 2005

## INTRODUCTION

Obedience is quite often a central feature of parenting. It is usually understood as being compliant to an external authority or set of norms. In this brief article obedience is presented as a compliant characteristic with the structure of human consciousness. The question of women's ordination will be briefly explored revealing both the norms of obedience as well as the unintelligence of conformity without exercising our acts of intelligence. This development of conformity mitigates against the child's own dynamic structure of intelligence and the child's transitional period of adolescence to becoming her or him self.

Obedience is a proposed form of relationship that most of us experience perhaps first as children. The manner in which that form of relationship is mediated can range from a violent aggressive imposition to that of loving concern. The range of mediation can provide (or not) for the possibility of a cultivation of trust, of openness, of freedom to become an adult- to decide what one will make of one's life. Different facets of societies allow for different manners of mediation-different degrees of freedom. Those facets of society are institutions that develop over time, assimilating and disseminating their view of freedom. The family, the marital relationship, the education system, the polity, the marketplace, religions, all assimilate a view of

freedom and disseminate that view through the bias inherent in the mediator(s). All views have a bias.<sup>1</sup> And all views are held in the mind of the mediator(s). To have a view is to suffer the knowledge that there is, and always will be, something more to the story. The view and the bias become incarnated eventually in the character and activity of the institution, the culture, history. It is worth noting in these various forms of life that children and adults are to respond to an external force.

This particular form of obedience (often referred to as blind) to authority is best revealed in world religions and nations of dictators. This form of obedience that is requested of by religions and dictatorial governments is a stumbling block to both the cultivation and ongoing development of the freedom of people to either become adults or be adults<sup>2</sup>. This traditional style of obedience is imposed through authority.<sup>3</sup> Questions by adolescents or adults within such a context are met with resistance and often leave one feeling-why bother? Consciousness is undergoing an evolution. Classical consciousness has dissipated. To attempt to impose blind obedience is to initiate division in a family and in

---

<sup>1</sup>.Lonergan, Bernard; Insight: A Study of Human Understanding, University of Toronto Press, 1992, Ch. 7, sections 6, 7 & 8.

<sup>2</sup>. Ibid. pp. 636-644.

<sup>3</sup>.The form of obedience referred to here is one without

a community. In doing so, any aspirations of growth can be stifled, a family or community can become divided, the human spirit eclipsed and blind obedience becomes the principle of progress, the sign of growth and the way to adulthood. In religions such as catholicism this form of obedience is perhaps best manifested in the resistance to openly discuss such issues as: the role of women in the world and the church, the ordination of women, the inadequacy involved in the formation of moral precepts,<sup>4</sup> and the assimilation and dissemination of a deprived masculinity through the structures of patriarchy.

I have discussed this matter of obedience with priests, religious and laity over the past few years. The overall response is: 'What can you do?' This lack of courage and creativity are not surprising but somewhat unsettling. When obedience perpetuates what many have come to recognize as unintelligent, are we free to grow 'up', are we being adults, are we being faithful to our own inner dynamics when we say: 'What can you do?' A brief analysis of

---

questioning.

<sup>4</sup>.The reasoning supporting the mistaken position of *Humane Vitae* challenges the integrity of the magisterium. The circumstances surrounding this particular teaching appear to stand out as exceptional in the history of the magisterium's moral teachings. The encyclical expressed a reliance on credibility as grounded in consistency rather than intelligence.

'in persona Christi' will not only challenge the current position on women's ordination but also reveal the structure of obedience.

#### IN PERSONA CHRISTI

The question of women's ordination has been debated extensively over the past century.<sup>5</sup> The Roman Catholic tradition has resisted not only the practice, but more recently, the debate. In fact it has issued a statement to its theologians that the question is closed.<sup>6</sup> There has been more than sufficient research completed to respond intelligently to the reasons the Vatican has published in resisting the requests to entertain the question of women's ordination.<sup>7</sup> This research has had little effect on the position of the teaching office of the church to date. It would appear that intelligent and reasonable research is not considered

---

<sup>5</sup>.The issue of women's ordination is a major stumbling block to the evolution of Catholicism and male psychic development. The refusal to permit discussion of the question challenges the integrity of the catholic hierarchy.

<sup>6</sup>.The teaching office of the church has stated that it now lacks the authority to revise the present practice implying that it did not initiate the practice. Historical studies have revealed otherwise.

<sup>7</sup>.Van der Meer, Haye, S.J.; Women Priests in the Catholic Church?, Temple University Press, 1973. Contemporary authors such as Elizabeth Johnson, Sr. Francis O'Connor, Mary Grey, Joan Chittister and many others have explored the spirituality and ministry of the feminine and its possible contribution to the church and healing of patriarchy.

sufficient enough in challenging the magisterium to discover just what is meant by "equal in God's eyes."<sup>8</sup>

There are biological differences between male and female, as well as psychological differences. Differences that occur in our biology and psychology can be appreciated by human understanding-through insight; however, this assimilation is a potentiality.<sup>9</sup> If the understanding, or insights, are lacking, differences that are biological or psychological become barriers to acceptance and appreciation of equality. Our equality is found and met in common human meaning-understanding. Such common meaning is created by the structure of consciousness.<sup>10</sup> Meaning can become common because the structure of consciousness is common in all people.<sup>11</sup>

Properly speaking, 'In persona Christi' can only pertain to the human 'consciousness' of a deity and to the 'consciousness' of humanity. How is this so? Notwithstanding the obvious biological and psychological differences between male and female, there are also numerous differences between males. An observation of a

---

<sup>8</sup>.We must appreciate that proper theory cannot persuade neurosis or psychosis. That is the task of the analyst and when the patient is in denial even the analyst cannot assist.

<sup>9</sup> Drage, Alexandra;? *Woman What Gives*, Axial Press, Halifax, 2005 for a discussion of the relationship between a woman's biology and its affect on the psychological development.

<sup>10</sup>. See page 13 for list of the 13 elements.

<sup>11</sup>.Lonergan, Bernard; Method in Theology; Darton, Longman & Todd, Gr. Br., 1972, Chapter 3.

random group of males reveals the differences that are intrinsic to the human male community. The psychological development of Christ would also be different from other males due to culture, historical period, parenting, education, and the entire social and environmental milieu. The experiences that Christ had in life, the manner in which he understood those experiences, the decisions he made and the actions he performed would not be identical to what other males would, might do, and perhaps have done. So what is identical about Christ and other males? The identity is not the content of one's consciousness, but the structure of one's consciousness.<sup>12</sup> This structure makes it possible to experience and transform the content and to assimilate differences. This structure is not only identical in all males but is also identical with the structure of female consciousness. Since this structure of consciousness is identical in both males and females and is the only aspect of humanity that can be identical, both male and female are 'in persona Christi'.<sup>13</sup> By virtue of this identity, all humanity are identical images of the Christ person.

---

<sup>12</sup>. See page 13 for list of the 13 elements that make up the structure of consciousness.

<sup>13</sup>. To continue to dispute this fact is, eventually, to commit theological as well as intellectual suicide. Such a burdening of the credibility of the church's teaching office, at all odds, contributes to the gradual erosion of the church's credibility in

The dynamic structure of consciousness also manifests an identity with the Christian understanding of the Trinity. Consciousness desires to express its inner meaning that once spoken, is heard. So we speak (Speaker) a word and we hear (Listener). The relations of the Trinity reveal a similar pattern of operations-in traditional language- Father, Son and Spirit, or Speaker, Word, Listener. Just as there is an outgoing of our subjectivity, our personality, so there is an outgoing, or outflowing of the deity's personality. There is not only an identity between genders but now we have an identity between the human and Trinitarian dynamics.<sup>14</sup>

There is yet a further identity. The dynamics of consciousness manifest each human person as an unrestricted desire for love and understanding.<sup>15</sup> Deities are usually understood as an unrestricted act of love and understanding.<sup>16</sup> The identity resides in the fact that the unrestrictedness of our desire can be

---

a period of history when people can read. Restricting identity to biological appearance is to manifest a naive realism and a denial of the spirit.

<sup>14</sup>.McShane, Philip; Music That is Soundless, University Press of America, 1977, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup>.Lonergan's works make this point continually but it is only in one's own affirmation of this experience that the point grounds the human subject.

<sup>16</sup>. See chapter 19 of Insight on the attributes of God's

identified with a reach for such unrestricted essence.<sup>17</sup> This identity is a perfect compatibility existing between our unrestricted desire to be loved and understood completely and an unrestricted act of love and understanding for us. This identity holds for both male and female of the human species. In this identity both male and female are identical images of the human experience of mystery.

I have identified three different areas of similarity between Christ's human nature, the divine nature, and male and female human consciousness. To restrict 'in persona Christi' to male is to confine expression, policy, and practice to a mythical understanding of creation and a naive (biological) 'sense' of reality. Both genders are 'in persona Christi'<sup>18</sup> and identical images of the Divine essence. Furthermore, these acts of consciousness are a structure of obedience. If we ignore the precepts of intelligence and reason, we will create a tension in our psyche. The incompatibility will create a tension in our

---

consciousness.

<sup>17</sup>. Ibid. p. 691, The 26<sup>th</sup> place: God is personal. Music That is Soundless, ch.2. Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism, University of Toronto Press, CWL 18, 2001, ed. By Philip McShane, p. 242 on exigence.

<sup>18</sup>. Other reasons to exclude the identity pertain to psychological

existence. Obedience is conformity to the intelligence and reasonableness of our consciousness.<sup>19</sup> Any incompatibility also extends to the intelligibility of creation and God's consciousness.<sup>20</sup> When the acts of consciousness are affirmed as the structure of obedience, the foundations of self-creation initiate the adult "becoming."<sup>21</sup> In outline form the acts of consciousness are that of attending, questioning, understanding, judging and deciding. To disobey these precepts is to violate the self-creative 'substance' of our humanity.<sup>22</sup> Church teaching, in defense

---

bias, and sexual and emotional underdevelopment.

<sup>19</sup>. Insight; p. 644.

<sup>20</sup>. Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism, University of Toronto Press, CWL 18, 2001, ed. by Philip McShane, p. 243: "The order of the universe and interpersonal relations are two notions that slightly tend to cover one another when the order of the universe is conceived concretely."

<sup>21</sup>. Ibid. pp. 237-240. Lonergan brings out the profound existentiality of decisions and their role in maturation and self-creation. "Becoming" is the act of self-creation-of deciding what one will make of oneself.

<sup>22</sup>. Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Wordsworth Classics, UK, 1996, p. 18, "Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him.....He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him. The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly-that is what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one's self." Wilde wrote this sometime prior to 1890 and 112 years later in our streets, in our institutions, in our

of a male priesthood, focused traditionally on Christ's practice, but more recently on its own authority. The popular literature fails to explain what is meant by equality or humanity in theoretical terms.<sup>23</sup> I have attempted here to express the foundations of that equality in descriptive terms.<sup>24</sup> Women's ordination would be a further self-creation for those individuals who intelligently, reasonably, responsibly and lovingly decide that they are called. It would be a visible expression of "equal in God's eyes." It would also open up the possibility of a series of transformations of the inadequacies of patriarchy.<sup>25</sup> Within the confines of the above discussion might it not be a violation of one's self-creation to be refused ordination? And furthermore might it not be a violation of Creation to deny self-creation? Is patriarchy restricting the collaboration of the order of this universe and humanity in the structuring of history?<sup>26</sup>

---

homes, in our schools, in our religions, we struggle to give life to just this meaning, most of the time unknowingly.

<sup>23</sup>. Method in Theology, pp. 258-259. See footnote 11.

<sup>24</sup>. The footnotes point beyond the descriptive towards an explanatory account of "equal in God's eyes."

<sup>25</sup>. It would challenge patriarchy to face its psychology leading to transformations in the use of authority and power. It would also challenge the intersubjectivity of the genders.

<sup>26</sup>. Shute, Michael; "Emergent Probability and the Ecofeminist Critique of Hierarchy", Loneragan and Feminism, ed. Cynthia

The exclusion of women to priestly ordination would, on this analysis, manifest an abuse of authority and power rooted in a complex integration of ignorance and neurosis.<sup>27</sup> In both cases obedience without questioning is expected. It is interesting to note that not only are those who obey denying their own self-creation, but also those who demand such a form of obedience are denying their self-creation. They administrate without questioning.

#### THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCE

The experience of a child's growth is not unlike the form of obedience that is demanded by religious leaders or dictatorial governments. As child dependency slips away parents quite often maintain the same form of relationship by shifting the activity of providing needs to providing answers or imposing decisions on their child's way of life. This transference of control prevents the child from developing the necessary growth for meeting the transition of adolescence, the process of becoming an adult. Education may not be so imposing; its format is somewhat more subtle. It relates more to a lack of cultivation of the inner

---

Crysdale, Univ. of Toronto Press, 1994.

<sup>27</sup>. There are implications in this paper that call for a revisiting of the meaning of the doctrine of Infallibility in its dogmatic definition. See Lonergan, Method in Theology, Chapter 12, and Section 9 on "The Permanence of Dogmas." for a discussion

dynamics. In both parenting and education it is not a neglect nor is it intentional in any way. What we do not know, we cannot cultivate or express. The child is a quest for self-creation. That is its natural dynamic and any inhibition to that process is offset by the adolescent by rebellion or a fragmentation of consciousness, what social science refers to as neurosis. Unfortunately, such neurosis becomes widespread since the ignorance regarding the dynamics of self-creation is a global and historical reality. No one survives childhood. Some simply a bit better than others. If one was fortunate enough to have a loving person in their early life, it can offset to some degree the damage of a lack of cultivation of our inner dynamics and some degree of emotional stability can be maintained.

#### THE PROBLEM

The question for each individual might be: Does obedience to a person, a policy, a law, even a tradition that emerges out of a culture grounded in the ignorance referred to above or a deprived masculinity,<sup>28</sup> increase the probabilities of healthy formation, a cultivation of freedom, or the becoming of an adult? If not, what good can come from enabling a bias of ignorance, of patriarchy? In

---

on historical context and meaning.

<sup>28</sup>.McShane, Philip; "Towards A Future Spirituality", Lectures (unpub.)given at St. Beuno's College. Wales, 1970. p. 4.

terms of a view of history we still believe we can “muddle through the crises of history.”<sup>29</sup> “No solution that remains ignorant of the dynamics of history will be adequate to the problem. For the problem consists in the fact that evil and decline become “concretized in the historic flow” in ways and at levels almost past understanding and so almost past remedying.”<sup>30</sup>

I once attended a conference where the facilitator posed the following question: “What would you do if you were not afraid?” The question provided an interesting experience of reflection. Fear is the opposite of love and when fear grows it can turn to anger and often violence as well as restrict the intellectual flow. If anger and fear are forced to be repressed by obedience to a distortion of our inner dynamics, these feelings and emotions will often manifest themselves in a turn to control and manipulation, and/or a loss of self-worth and self-love. Our global cultural structures, be they religious, educational, political or economic, presently maintain their existence, superficially through authority or power and an unquestioning belief, but also through the fear of those who can see no other way—who fear the adult ‘becoming’. The cultivation of our self-creative inner dynamics is

---

<sup>29</sup>.Lonergan, Bernard, “Analytic Concept of History, in Blurred Outline”, unpub. 1937-38 p. 14.

stifled in the neurotic interplay. If you question, you may be psychologically outside the institutional world. If you obey blindly-why? "Pre-human nature functions perfectly in blind obedience to intelligible law."<sup>31</sup> Is the human species in a pre-human state? "History is the making of man (*persons*) by man (*persons*)."<sup>32</sup> (Italics my own) Is the resignation of acceptance displayed in blind obedience a creating of the self by the self? What is the making of a person? Should we obey blindly or listen to advice from those people we deem worthy to give it and then decide whether or not the advice is intelligent? Should we divide our sources of advice between those we will deliberate about and those we will accept without question? In the year 1240, the Zen Master Dogen wrote: "You must cease to concern yourself with the dialectics of Buddhism and instead learn how to look into your own mind in seclusion."<sup>33</sup> We might substitute for Buddhism the words obedience, authority, parenting, educational research, or hierarchy. Thomas Aquinas knew that authority was not a sign of

---

<sup>30</sup>.Ibid., p. 23

<sup>31</sup>.Brown, Patrick, System and History in Lonergan's Early Historical and Economic Manuscripts, Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis, 1(2001):p.66. Website [www.mun.ca/jmda/](http://www.mun.ca/jmda/).

<sup>32</sup>.Lonergan, op. Cit., p. 8.

<sup>33</sup>. R. Philip Kapleau, The Three Pillars of Zen, Anchor Doubleday, N.Y., 1989, p. 308-9.

wisdom. But let us not accept his word, or any of the above, on that matter-What do you think?

#### THE STRUCTURE OF OBEDIENCE

What does it mean to create ourselves? The question 'What do you think?' initiates our self-creation. Questions initiate a conscious direction of attention toward understanding, decisions, and eventually deeds. Decisions are made on our own understanding<sup>34</sup> of our experiences be they words, sounds, pictures, touch, smell, or the interior acts of consciousness. These decisions set us on a course of action. Decisions may also be influenced by feelings, repressed or otherwise. Regardless of the influences or the degree of objectivity attained in a decision, we are creating ourselves by each decision. The structure of consciousness moves through transformations from experiencing to questioning, to understanding, to decisions, and finally action.<sup>35</sup> This process is one of self-creation. It is the natural self-creative process in action. Its autonomy is a freedom of the subject that, when in the context of self-appreciation, cultivates the freedom of the other.

---

<sup>34</sup>.We cannot experience someone else's understanding. Their expression of their understanding is an experience for us. Our experience is then one to be understood. We can create experience for others. We cannot create understanding for them. And as receivers of experience, the element of attention is of course a factor.

<sup>35</sup>. Insight, p. 299.

What follows is a diagram listing the names and order of occurrence of the acts of consciousness- the structure of obedience.

DATA (Experience). What (question) is it? Insight (understanding). Definition. Is it so? Insight. Judgment. What to do? Insight. Options. Is it to be done? Insight. Decision and finally Action<sup>36</sup>

There are in fact 13 elements, or acts of consciousness, that occur in each and every one of us every day, all day. Naming these acts or elements and becoming familiar with them can be a difficult task in our culture, which is dedicated more towards neglecting consciousness. Familiarity is a beginning. Over time one slowly and gradually begins to recognize these elements as the self, as one operating and experiencing the structure of consciousness, the structure of obedience-our natural growth dynamic.

Are we afraid of trusting the self-creative process? Are we afraid we will misinterpret ourselves? Our inadequacy is our hope. Mystery is our way and is born from our concrete inadequacy, our potentiality. *We mustn't expect people's lives-concrete living-to*

---

<sup>36</sup>. Philip McShane, Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations, Exposition Press, 1975, N.Y., pp. 15 & 48. See also Insight, p. 299.

*be coherent. It's a tendency towards coherency.*<sup>37</sup> That fact reveals that we are called to be set free to cultivate our natural self-creative process, our inadequacy, and our potentiality toward adulthood. The form of obedience that is promoted in Catholicism, other religions, education, parenting, dictator-styled governments, and other aspects of global society are an impediment to adulthood, to personal growth, to the freedom of people to express more objectively, their deepest subjectivity. We are responsible for our decisions but ignorance or fear can leave us blind to even having the experience of making our own decisions. Is the decision of blind obedience a responsible one? Does that approach offer hope? Is there a cultivation of our natural dynamic, when one's liberty to question, to grow, to become an adult, to reflect, not only on the possible mediated wisdom of others but also on our own wisdom, is restricted? As Socrates has coined: "The unexamined life is not worth living".

#### CONCLUSION

Blind obedience is not an inroad to self-creation or to learning the art of living. It is survival in a culture, in a period of history, that has yet to acknowledge that it does not know itself<sup>38</sup> and fears the journey into its own abyss. Self-

---

<sup>37</sup> Lonergan, B; *Philosophy of God, and Theology*; Westminster Press, 1973, p. 36.

<sup>38</sup>. Lonergan, The Subject, The Aquinas Lecture 1968, Marquette

creation is living out of the dictates of consciousness in mystery, knowing we live always in the aura of mystery so exemplified in the child's whatness towards the world. We live within a complex series of relationships of mysteries- you and I and everyone going forth appreciating our own and everyone else's inadequate reaching into the darkness for light- our natural created desire to create ourselves correctly and lovingly. Does that final image excite you or frighten you? Are we afraid of ourselves?

Challenges to traditional beliefs, bias, teachings, and institutions can frighten the human spirit. Confronting such challenges can, over time, convert or revise traditional perspectives. The solution to our problems of parenting, education, politics and economics and our general global axial fragmentation is one of an openness to grow in understanding and at first we may have to admit, we do not understand ourselves.

If I may be somewhat personal, permit me to relate a story that may aid in the reader's understanding of my expression. My daughter, at the age of eight, came to me in the month of August and said to me; "Dad, I don't know about this Santa Claus thing, but I'm not going to think about it anymore until after Christmas." What was going on in that child's mind? At the age of 20, my

daughter finally told me the origin of her statement. It dawned on her that Mommy and Daddy were Santa. (My apologies to some readers!) That statement expressed an inner struggle of growth. She eventually moved from a mythic view of life to a more concrete manner of living out her life—an appreciation and acceptance of understanding. Take note of her earlier reluctance to accept her understanding. But she did eventually make the break, the conversion to adulthood—to understanding. She obeyed her structure of consciousness because she “knew” her insight was true. But the mystery was not emptied out by her growth. “What is primary in history, even without sin, is silent darkness. Even late in life, or in history, there cannot be more than illusory twilight, and the foundational search is an endless asking for greater depth in the same questions.”<sup>39</sup>

What occurs in every child is called for in every adult, and in every institution at some point if there is to be growth. That possibility of growth in understanding is always present to us in our own structure of consciousness, in our potentiality, our desire for understanding. This article has been a brief exploration of what I believe to be a major problem in the creation of persons, culture, and the making of history. The

---

<sup>39</sup>. McShane, Philip; “Metaphysics THEN”, Cantower V, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002, <http://www.Philipmcshane.ca> p. 20.

beginning of a child's self-creation is in the form of questions.<sup>40</sup> Is such a beginning too formidable for the individual, the group, the culture, social scientists, a world religion? Questions do not disappear. Their hibernation becomes a dialectic of psychic tension.<sup>41</sup> They are an authentic expression of the human spirit. Questions cannot be judged until they have been answered. Answers cannot destroy mystery or the self-creative process, but the negation of potency towards self-creation can become neurotic and spend its adult years in futile attempts to sort out a childhood long over. There will be no answers to the many questions I have raised until there is the freedom in history to create them. In that freedom and trust resides the possibility of our self-creation, adult growth, the dissolution of patriarchy and a slow developing appreciation for the art of living.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>.Henman, Robert; The Child as Quest, Univ. Press of America, 1984, ch. 2. See also Insight, Ch. 1, sections 2.4 and 2.5.

<sup>41</sup>.Method in Theology, p. 32.

<sup>42</sup>.Obviously self-creation pertains to the entire human community. It is the challenge of parenting, education and society. If we are to come of age and heal the brokenness of this planet we will have to eventually face the challenge of our self-creating process.