

enemy of his people; let us sing praise unto him, for he is good, and his mercy is forever.

*Postcommunion.*

Through this sacrament, we beseech thee, O Lord, may that enemy be cast back whom the Blessed Mary by her virginal bearing of thee did crush; and grant that the soul of thy servant, N., being delivered out of the hand of darkness, may be received into the Kingdom of thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with thee . . .

This fine proper expresses the election of Mary (*Introit*: 'The King shall have pleasure in thy beauty . . .'), her acceptance of God's will in her regard (*Verse*: 'My heart is inditing of a good matter: I speak of my work unto the King'), her unique place among created beings (*Lesson*: 'He hath so magnified thy name . . .'), the all-embracing nature of her mediation (*Gospel*: ' . . . that the thoughts of many hearts be made manifest'), and the child-like confidence we place in our Mother's intercession, so powerful with God and hence terrible to our enemy (*Communion verse*: 'By the hand of a woman the Lord our God hath struck down the enemy of his people').

Considered as a whole, this Mass proper must certainly be given high rank among liturgical formularies for beauty of form and expression, as well as for exactitude of dogmatic content. It offers magnificent testimony to a spirit of veneration of the holy Virgin at once devout, enlightened, and solidly based upon sound doctrinal concepts. Clients of our Lady and lovers of liturgical worship alike may readily meet in the common wish that a Mass formulary of this kind were in use today. Doubtless, too, there must be many among them who would be willing to say that were one to be granted at this time, the grant would constitute a most fitting memorial of the Marian Year we have been celebrating.



## ADAPTATION IN FRANCE: II

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**S**INCE the religious life consists essentially in seeking the perfection of charity, by following the evangelical counsels, through the practice of the three great vows, and of certain observances, it is clear that vows and observances provide a convenient framework for assembling the facts and experiences

conditioning the adaptation we wish to discuss. Although this may seem a little artificial, we will nevertheless consider in succession: Obedience, Poverty, Virginity, and several of the major observances which accompany all religious life, and indeed every authentic striving towards God: silence, prayer, enclosure, study and government.

Our principal concern in this enquiry will be to examine the adaptability, the evolution, the flexibility of each of these fundamental realities. In what circumstances can one really speak of adaptation? What are its legitimate causes? What factors are favourable and what elements hinder it? What risks threaten adaptation? And having thus distinguished the conditions of adaptation, perhaps we shall then be able to notice what are the results of an adaptation well made. It often happens that adaptation is a sign of life, and also one of its conditions. We might wonder what such-and-such a privilege has cost. I do not pretend to give an exhaustive account of all the experiments made, of all the difficulties that have arisen, of all the questions raised. I would just like to put before you several typical cases arising from experiments made in France, especially concerning the *ancelles*. You could compare your own problems with theirs, or even put other questions from this starting point.

#### OBEDIENCE

Let us start with the vow of obedience. Not that it is the most prolific of examples of adaptation, but fundamentally it is obedience which engages everything else, and we see here, so to speak, the root of all the adaptations the details of which we shall note in other spheres.

The vow of obedience is in fact the most characteristic element in religious life considered from the point of view of the community. In France, where, as you know, one disputes everything, the finality and the importance of obedience have recently been questioned. This is not the place to pursue the problems raised on this occasion, and anyhow I am afraid they are often badly put. But I must remind you of the extraordinary influence of Fritz Hochwalder's play *On Earth as it is in Heaven*. The history of the Jesuits of Paraguay and the terrible submission demanded of their provincial has inflamed public opinion for months—lay opinion, even non-Christian opinion. Everyone had his views on

religious obedience. Whatever theories more or less competent, more or less orthodox, were aired as to *On Earth as it is in Heaven*, one must notice that if the play were such a success it is that it attracted the public, and especially the public of Catholic Action—always particularly sensitive to anything touching responsibility and initiative in apostolic work.

The story did not leave untouched, either, all those who in religious communities have to weigh up obedience to a superior with their responsibility for an apostolate. The mistake of a great many critics was to question the absolute of obedience on the grounds of an exceptional case, and one so romanticized into the bargain. Indeed a case as dramatic, an obedience as humanly insane, as that of this provincial, attacks all that nature can claim of liberty. Even if this leads us to the brink of scandal, it does not mean that the absolute of obedience should ever suffer an adaptation.

In fact one must insist that the absolute of obedience remains. But what one must recognize also, and what is abundantly proved by the facts, is that apart from certain cases, always possible and often dramatic, the absolute of obedience takes on certain modalities. The dependence always remains, but it does not exclude initiative.

But to return to our Lady of Sion, which we are using as a standard; as in most of the great traditional congregations, the Directory and the traditions of the teaching branch demand a strict obedience of the sisters.

To tell the truth, once her functions were decided upon and her personal time-table settled, within this routine in a normal boarding school the life of a teaching sister a few years ago offered very few emergencies and rarely provided new problems. I say a few years ago, for the evolution of courses of study and the rhythm of modern life have obliged the teaching sisters too to make adaptations in this line.

In so well regulated a life it was simple enough to foresee any changes, to estimate the initiatives one would be likely to take, and to ask the necessary permissions. And similarly it was possible to remain in contact with the Superior, to ask her advice. The daily obediences marked strictly enough, although as a matter of fact easily enough, this dependence moment by moment on authority.

One must admit that in such an atmosphere the sense of obedience remains *educative* and even in a way *restrictive*. Authority always intervened as if to shield a minor from herself and from her own weaknesses. One could thus interpret the rule as to receiving confidences. At Sion as in many ancient congregations, class mistresses are asked not to keep to themselves the children's confidences, but to share them with their Superior who is looked upon as the mother and the mistress of the life of the whole house. Such a requirement is justifiable. In any case it seems to involve two interests—on the one hand the centralization of authority and on the other the preservation of its subjects from the risk of too onerous a responsibility, or even from immoderate affections. (I draw attention to this fact the more freely knowing that, as in Sion, its absolute is considerably modified in the teaching congregations where the sisters are in charge of souls, and have professional secrets to keep.)

Clearly such a narrow demarcation is no longer possible for the *ancelles*, as indeed for most of the sisters with apostolic responsibilities. The dependence remains, nevertheless. That is the essential of the vow and it retains its absolute character. And whatever modifications be made, one must recognize that this dependence always leads one way or another to the same interior drama, demands the same sacrifices.

However the authority is not now so much educative or restrictive, as imperative, in the original sense of the word *imperium*. The *imperium* is a setting in order. The Superior gives orders. That is to say she indicates the apostolate, showing the sisters to what they are engaging themselves, inviting them to spend all their possibilities and resources. The dependence remains, radically, but it involves much more vitally the initiative of her who obeys.

Nurses, social assistants, engaged in various tasks the *ancelles* go out into the world. More precisely they are sent on mission. They have care of souls. They bear professional responsibilities, above all apostolic responsibilities. They have secrets to keep. They sometimes are dependent upon other organizations: the state, hospitals, administration—their obedience flows through this network of new demands, both those which come from the souls to whom they are sent, and also those occasioned through their jobs. There are a great many unforeseen circumstances in

their lives, visits to pay, decisions to make, things to buy, expenses, delays. And often their obedience consists far more in giving an account of permission they have presumed, or verifying initiatives they have already taken, than in asking well-regulated permissions in advance.

The daily obedience remains. The *ancelle* proposes the programme of her day to her Superior, or her 'delegate'. But it can happen that the work and the needs of souls demand new decisions. The Directory foresees explicitly this 'real order' which takes the place of the 'official order' of authority. The dependence is assured in every case by the control of the superior and by the revision of initiatives taken, or work engaged upon, which is always possible. The practice of abandonment, asceticism, sacrifice, will be assured by submitting, from time to time, to authority for judgment, and if necessary correction, of the direction which their work has taken, and the habits which they have formed in carrying it out.

If one can speak of adaptation with regard to obedience, one can say that it lies in the way of controlling, and the way of giving an account of one's movements without anything being changed in the essence of the vow of obedience itself. Finally the adaptation consists in a change of emphasis due to the apostolic aims. One keeps of course the value of holocaust, of detachment from self, of availability, but one emphasizes rather the missionary aspect whereas one used to lay stress on the aspect of observance. Nowadays to obey is above all to be sent to work as a servant in the Lord's field, as a useless servant but as one responsible for his talents.

But there is also a certain adaptation of obedience in another dimension. As in most of the present-day apostolic communities, Missionnaires de la Campagne or Berengères for example, the *ancelles* started off in a few little groups, residences for three or four sisters run by one of them—the 'responsible'—representing the Superior. This separation scatters authority. Obedience becomes at once simpler and yet more austere, according to circumstances. Sometimes it is more difficult to obey an equal—*prima inter pares*—in the simplicity of daily life. At such close quarters authority loses in dignity what it gains in simplicity. On the other hand this branching out of authority means that one can distinguish in obedience what strictly concerns the

apostolic task, and what concerns religious formation. An *ancelle* goes to the sister responsible for her residence for the ordinary permissions and organization of the daily work. But it is to the Superior who directs the residences and their 'responsibles' that she goes for the orientation of her apostolic and religious work. Here again obedience shows a missionary aspect.

In short it is this word 'mission' which seems best to characterize what one might call—as long as one knows what one means—the adaptation of obedience. Obedience itself, as regards the absolute of dependence and of sacrifice that it implies, suffers no adaptation. As to the mode of this dependence, one might say that the necessities of an apostolic vocation demand more and more a change from the relation of master to disciple, or rather master to novice (to which relation traditional obedience was too often limited) to the relation of leader to minister, that is to say person to person, man to man.

But I hasten to add that this change of tone in no way makes true obedience easier. It avoids neither the discussions nor the struggles of an abandon which remains fundamentally the same. One must above all be clear that such obedience demands fully formed consciences capable of serious responsibility, capable of real human and religious maturity. And whatever one may say, it is not so certain that the present generation is ready for a mature obedience, the obedience of an adult. That is another question. But let us conclude nevertheless with the remark that the adaptation of obedience to the necessities of the apostolic task demands equally an adaptation of recruiting.

#### POVERTY

We have treated the subject of obedience more or less on general lines. This has meant emphasizing at a deep and decisive level, that of their very conception, a certain evolution in the manner of understanding and regulating values. All that we shall now notice with regard to the other subjects will only show, through actual facts, what we have thus distinguished. Poverty offers the most concrete and suggestive applications, from this point of view.

The essence of the evangelical counsel, or of the vow, of poverty lies in the renouncement of earthly possession to follow Jesus in his poverty and to abandon oneself to the Providence of the Father. 'Go sell all that thou hast, give to the poor and then come, follow me.' Each religious institute brings its own special

mentality to this renouncement. There is the poverty of the Benedictine monk, and that of Saint Francis, that of the Jesuits and that of the Prado. But whatever form it assumes, religious poverty can be reduced to three elements: it always implies a sharing of goods in common, dependence in their use, and moderation in the way of living.

New communities such as the *ancelles* of Sion question none of these three aspects. Exactly as we noticed over obedience, and as we shall see with regard to virginity, the absolute of poverty remains in its entirety. In substance the vow suffers no adaptation. But, as was true even for the old orders, communities of a more recent inspiration bring their own interpretation to the practice of poverty. Even while carefully maintaining the union of these three component parts they conceive a different balance, and this by stressing deliberately one of the possible aspects of religious poverty—its essentially evangelical and apostolic value.

Here one must draw attention to a relatively superficial but nevertheless significant detail. Amongst the three vows, poverty is doubtless the one most attractive to a young religious. For generous young people it is certainly poverty which at first sight seems to characterize any serious religious aspirations. Hence the great success of foundations insisting on this aspect—such as the Prado or the Brothers and Sisters of de Foucauld. All the orders and congregations of our time have more or less been influenced (indeed fortunately) by this youthful inspiration. Nobody likes polished floors nowadays any more, nor armchairs, nor complicated habits. Our young monks and nuns like a simple and sober way of life—or at least they say so. Experience proves that this is not always a sign of real renouncement, and that they may stop at a superficial enthusiasm. Too often there is in young people considered as one of the fine arts, which may remain on the what one might call a lyricism, an aesthetic of poverty, surface poverty. Nevertheless even if superficial the fact is worthy of attention. For this urge, often sentimental, can lead to a real adaptation of outlook, in the judgment of religious values. One must give poverty its fundamental significance and importance.

But true adaptation is more deep-seated. It is realized under the impulse of apostolic needs and desires.

As to dependence in the use of goods, first of all one can verify what concerns poverty with reference to what we said



about obedience. Dependence implies a certain initiative; it consists in the act of giving account of oneself. In this direction the *ancelles* have to take a great many decisions, assume many personal responsibilities. Their charity is a personal affair, but much more than that, they have a job, they earn their own living, they have professional expenses, they are sometimes responsible for considerable and necessary expenditure. Poverty consists first of all in submitting one's expenses, one's initiatives, to the Superior, in all their materiality but also in the way of personal life that such a liberty may involve.

But it is above all with regard to community of goods and moderation in way of life that one finds the most striking adaptations. The *ancelles* live in little groups, and in each residence two out of three sisters, three out of four, sometimes all of them earn their livings and that of the group. Because of this they become much more conscious of their mutual dependence. Respect of the common good is for them neither a meaningless expression nor an edifying subject.

In the name of poverty the ideal of each residence is to be self-supporting. And since most of the sisters have jobs which are not highly paid, and indeed often choose those of the poor, the debit column in the account book is rarely more than balanced by income. Since on the other hand it is an agreed thing that they do not economize on their welcomes, their hospitality, their charity, the result is that the communities don't run on gold—and often they have no money in advance. The sisters understand this and are obliged like the real poor, the poor they live and work side by side with, to live very modestly. They have to make effective and merciless renuncements, controlled by the reality of the budget, give up any illusory need, all easy habits and all the little comforts life in the world offers.

Thus the *ancelles* earn their livings. It is neither more surprising nor more scandalous than the fact of having an account book, a balance sheet, debts or credit in a hospital or a boarding school.

They earn their livings and they live modestly. This doesn't mean they confuse evangelical poverty with the virtue of economy. Listen to what their Directory says: "The mystery of poverty is not limited, far from it, by the virtue of economy. Economy is however the means, and the sign. You will be poor effectually, and you will possess the soul of a poor person if you are concerned



to avoid wastage and useless expenditure.'

This way of life, deliberately poor, and often poor by necessity, clearly does not solve all the problems that the practice of a vow of poverty imposes. In fact it raises new ones. For example there is the problem of elegance in dressing, and that of decoration and comfort in furnishing. The *ancelles* are dressed like people in the world. They live in houses like the others. But one can be poor in attire without necessarily being ugly or ridiculous, and the poverty of a small or unassuming room certainly does not consist in untidiness, bad taste or dirt. A balance has to be found. Experience shows that the solution of these problems of adaptation lies in simplicity. Of course there will always be bohemians for whom poverty means heedlessness or something vaguely romantic. But one must allow everyone his own opinion, his own temperament—which in community amounts to another form of poverty.

Poverty is thus for the *ancelles* the apostolic means of sharing the lot of the poor, 'to communicate in their fate' . . . as it has suggestively been put. And that can go so far as to know material insecurity, as the poor know it. There are days when certain residences really do not know what they will be able to live on tomorrow. Such an anxiety for the next day is not indeed a stranger to religious communities more numerous and more traditional—it is becoming more and more common. Everything is expensive, donations are rarer, life is hard and becoming more so. Even our most well-established convents know such uncertainties. But we must admit that it is a worry we leave lightly, unwittingly, to the Father Bursar or the Sister procurator. In these new communities, more restricted and with a living less assured, such an uncertainty is a permanent and very real invitation to true abandonment.

But Providence often responds and frequently the *ancelles* recognize his hand in unexpected presents. One could relate a whole host of incidents at this point: a food parcel arriving just when one has someone to dinner; gifts from folk in the neighbourhood; touching signs of gratitude coming sometimes from where it is least expected. The more freely one welcomes, the more Providence takes charge of the debts. That is one of the truths of Christianity which the *ancelles* are experiencing in their turn.

Thus they discover the real substance of the vow of poverty

through a vital and living abandon. And in addition it is precisely the example of Christ's own disciples that they bring to those whose lives they share, and whom care for tomorrow often leads almost to the brink of despair. Their Directory draws attention to the paradox of their poverty: 'Be glad when insecurity comes into your life, but remember that for Christ's poor, uncertainty for tomorrow means above all abandon to Providence. . . . "When I sent you forth, did you lack anything?" . . . "Take nothing in your wallet . . ." Your poverty will thus be, like your obedience, a mystery of faith. The apostle believes in Providence, and he is sure of the hundred-fold. As a matter of fact this cancels out insecurity. Don't worry if because of this you never feel the anxiety for tomorrow that thousands of your contemporaries, the poor, all know. A freely accepted stripping of yourself, abandon in the hands of Providence, life in community, all protect you from a great deal of misery. But this must not blunt your sense of justice, and of human suffering. An apostle who is truly poor and driven by the love of Christ cannot live alongside the poor without being hurt by their despair, and without sharing deeply their wretchedness.'

Such observations are not peculiar to the *ancelles*. This extract from their Directory is the expression of a philosophy of life. Poverty is looked upon quite naturally as a means of apostolic life, in the fully technical sense of the word. And this not only because it allows life in the gospel sense, in abandon and in moderation, but also because it means meeting the poor in their own lives, and bringing Christ home to them, there. That's why the *ancelles* go out to work. However paradoxical it may seem, it is really by poverty that they earn their livings.

To put it briefly, as we have already said about obedience, here again it is the apostolic inspiration which leads everything back to the Gospel, and determines efforts at adaptation. And thus what we said of the requirements of an adult obedience applies also to the new modalities of poverty. Beneath an exterior dependence resembling freedom, and under a way of life apparently similar to that of people in the world, the essence of the vow remains. One might even say that its inner meaning is perceived in a more exacting manner. Clearly this requires subjects capable both of realism and of abandonment, of detachment and of responsibility.

(To be continued)