**Benedictine Vows**

BT Benedictines; Rule of Benedict

NT Conversatio Morum; Obedience; Stability

RT Benedictine Governance; Obedience; Stability

The Benedictine vow of obedience is not to community consensus, nor to a General Chapter, but to one person: the abbot or abbess. True, the Church gives the community certain rights and power of decision in its official chapter meetings, but the superior’s role is to interpret the Rule, to make the decisions as to its being lived, and to see to it that the monastic life is being lived. *Dom Wulstan Mork, OSB; Benedictine Way*

The deliberately made vows of obedience, stability, and conversion of life have liberated me greatly to give fully of my best efforts and energy on behalf of the wider family of the church and state. *Fr. Eugene Dehner, OSB (1914-2004);* In *Wisdom of the Benedictine Elders, ed. by Mark McGinnis*

The specifically Benedictine vows that monks and nuns make, while made to God, are certainly conditioned by the monastery in which they live. These are *conversatio morum*, stability, and obedience, and they can in reality be reduced to one, for what the new monk or nun promises is simply is simply that he or she will henceforth live the new monastic way of life as lived in *this* monastery and interpreted by *this* abbot or abbess. *Dom Wulstan Mork, OSB; Benedictine Way*

The three Benedictine vows narrow down in focus: *conversatio* is to a life, stability is to a group, and obedience is to a person. *Dom Wulstan Mork, OSB; Benedictine Way*

“Uphold me, O Lord, and I shall live. And do not let me confounded in my expectations.” These are the words a monk sings three times in the ceremony of his solemn profession of vows. But only an extremely naive person would enter a monastery and expect it to be free of all troubles, to never be confounded. *Br. Benet Tvedten, OSB; View from a Monastery*

We are also accustomed to thinking that monks and nuns relate directly with God whereas married lay men and women relate with God by way of marriage and the family. We are forgetting, it seems, that monks and nuns have vows of obedience to a superior and stability in a community. The conclusion of Saint Benedict’s Rule is not an idle wish: “May Christ bring us all together to eternal life” (RB 72:12). Faith, hope, charity, and the Gift of the Spirit alone can bring us into direct union with God, and these gifts or virtues belong to all the baptized. Even solitude, whether in a monastic or lay context, can be filled with people, for better or for worse: for better when it allows us to be in true solidarity with all, for worse when emotional immaturity turns us in on ourselves. Dom Bernardo Olivera, OCSO; *Towards a Renewed Cistercian Mysticism*

**Obedience**

BT Conduct of Life

RT Benedictine Vows; Disobedience; Listening; Meekness; Self-Will

A truly intelligent man has only one care—wholeheartedly to obey Almighty God and to please Him. The one and only thing he teaches his soul is how best to do things agreeable to God, thanking Him for His merciful providence in whatever may happen in his life. For just as it would be unseemly not to thank physicians for curing our body, even when they give us bitter and unpleasant remedies, so too would it be to remain ungrateful to God for things that appear to us painful, failing to understand that everything happens through His providence for our good. In this understanding and this faith in God lay salvation and peace of soul. *St. A*nthony the Great (251-356); *Early Fathers from the Philokalia, trans. by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer*

A truly obedient man does not discriminate between one thing and another, or desire one employment more than another, since his only aim is to execute faithfully whatever may be assigned to him. *St.* Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

Abba Arsenius said to Abba Alexander, “When you have cut your palm-leaves, come and eat with me, but if visitors come, eat with them.” Now Abba Alexander worked slowly and carefully. When the time came, he had not finished the palm leaves and wishing to follow the old man’s instructions, he waited until he had finished them. When Abba Arsenius saw that he was late, he ate, thinking that he had had guests. But Abba Alexander, when at last he had finished, came away. And the old man said to him, “Have you had visitors? “No, “he said. “Then why did you not come? “The other replied, “You told me to come when I had cut the palm leaves; and following your instructions, I did not come, because I had not finished.” The old man marveled at his exactitude and said to him, “Break your fast at once so as to celebrate the synaxis untroubled, and drink some water, otherwise your body will soon suffer.” In *Sayings of the Desert Fathers, trans. by Benedicta Ward*

Abba Isaiah said to those who were making a good beginning by putting themselves under the direction of the holy Fathers, “As with purple dye, the first coloring is never lost.” And, “Just as young shoots are easily trained back and bent, so it is with beginners who live in submission.” In *Sayings of the Desert Fathers, trans. by Benedicta Ward*

After obedience there comes, at the time appointed by God, direction from above. *Mother Gavrila Papayanni (1897-1992); The Ascetic of Love*

Although cenobitic monks are bound by obedience to the abbot, all true spiritual progress is a matter of free will. *Fr. Terrence Kardong, OSB; Day by Day with St. Benedict*

Anticipate one another in honor; most patiently endure one another’s infirmities, whether of body or of character; vie in paying obedience one to another—no one following what he considers useful for himself, but rather what benefits another; tender the charity of brotherhood chastely; fear God in love. *St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 440-c. 528); RB 72*

As long as we are in the monastery, obedience is preferable to asceticism. The one teaches pride, the other humility. *Amma Syncletica (+c. 350); Apothegmata Patrum*

As long as we oppose our superiors, even interiorly, pride has a firm foothold in our souls, and we will never be able to get rid of it. *Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO (1915-1968); Cassian and the Fathers*

Autocrats and militarists and spiritual charlatans and abusive parents and corporate moguls want the people under them to obey laws from which there exalted positions hold them exempt. Benedict says that the only authentic call for obedience comes from those who themselves demonstrate the value of the law. *Sr. Joan Chittester, OSB (1936- ); The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*

Because obedience as virtue is a listening with the heart, training in obedience is not training in conformity. Its highest goal is not to produce puppets, but prophets. *Br. David Steindl-Rast, OSB (1926- ); Religion of the Heart*

Benedict says monks should obey each other. Three monks should be able to arrange a room without argument, because their aim is to listen to each other and do God’s will, not enforce their own. *Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB; Essential Monastic Wisdom*

Benedictine obedience is more humane and interior than the rather rough ways of the first monks. It seeks not only exterior compliance but also compliance in the heart. This interior attitude cuts short all murmuring and implies openhearted acquiescence to the will of the superior and therefore, it would seem, to his judgment. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

Concretely, a competing mutual obedience might look like this: feeling with another, “walking in his shoes,” adjusting to his pace, adapting oneself; being open to correction from the other, to a critical work, to a different opinion; considering a correction in God’s light. *Sr. Aquinata Böckmann, OSB; Perspectives on the Rule of Saint Benedict*

Constant internal freedom and unceasing readiness and preparedness are demanded of you, that at a moment’s notice you might obey, cutting off your will, revising your plans, and coming to know the higher rationality of faith through the “irrationality” of obedience to your elder’s commandment, that you not be conquered, because of something unforeseen, by despondency, sorrow, bitterness, or anger. *Metropolitan Cyprian Kutsumbas of Oropos and Fili (1935-2013); A Manual for Coenobitic Monks, trans. by Bishop Chrysostomos*

Contemporary attempts by some to reduce all Benedictine obedience to a process of dialogue or negotiation or to make it a communal affair or a consensual one are terribly false and far off the mark. The textual evidence of the Holy Rule, as well as historical and traditional evidence simply do not support such claims. *Br. Jerome Leo Hughes, OSB; Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict, www.stmarysmonastery.org*

Each member of the monastery is assigned useful work, which gives her a sense of belonging and of contributing to the common good. Benedict recognized that obedience does not exist as an end in itself, but for the good of the individual members and the community. Obedience in the spirit of the Rule is practical, purposeful, and reasonable. It is heroic only in the sense that the sister must persevere and obeying day after day, month after month, year after year, for a lifetime. *Conference of Benedictine Prioresses; Upon this Tradition*

Except where one cannot obey for reasons of conscience—a case that few monastics every have to experience—one never goes wrong by obeying. *Fr. Terrence Kardong, OSB; Day by Day with Saint Benedict*

For a disciple of St. Benedict, fraternal obedience is the best way to make a pilgrimage, that is, to “go to God.” *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

For Benedict, stability, fidelity to the monastic lifestyle and obedience were really just parts of one intention: to be a good monk. . . . We make our promises before God, and it is he whom we offend if we do not hold fast to them. *Fr. Terrence Kardong, OSB; Day by Day with St. Benedict*

For [Pachomius], renunciation of the goods and comforts of this world was less efficacious for tempering souls than renunciation of their own will and obeying a superior and the rule. The principle of obedience is the basis of cenobitic life, which spread rapidly to become the usual form of monastic life, first of all in the East, and then – even more so – in the West. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

For Saint Benedict, one cannot be obedient unless one is also cheerful, and perhaps a bit bemused by the tremendous authority with which people, oneself included, invest their opinions and desires about almost anything, from liturgical minutiae to how to wash the dishes. *Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB; Essential Monastic Wisdom*

Four monks of Sketis, clothed in skins, came one day to see the Abba Pambo. Each one revealed the virtue of his neighbor. The first fasted a great deal; the second was poor; the third had acquired great charity; and they said of the fourth that he had lived for 22 years in obedience to an old man. Abba Pambo said to them, “I tell you, the virtue of this last one is the greatest. Each of the others has obtained the virtue he wished to acquire; but the last one, restraining his own will, does the will of another. Now it is of such men that the martyrs are made, if they persevere to the end.” In *Wisdom of the Desert, trans. by Thomas Merton*

God does not want us in charge. He can take much better care of us than we can. We might as well let him. *Sr. Miriam Pollard, OCSO;* *The Laughter of God*

Habitual negligence, laziness, carelessness, or tardiness, whether at the liturgy, at work assignments, or for other community meetings, usually reveals insensitivity towards obedience. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

He is not yet a faithful servant who bases himself on bare knowledge alone; a faithful servant is he who professes his faith by obedience to Christ, who gave the commandments. St. Mark the Ascetic (5th Century); In *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart, trans. by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer*

He who is obedient, is an imitator of Christ, and he who is proud and talks back is an imitator of the devil. So let us be careful, whom we are imitating, Christ or the devil. *Elder* Joseph the Hesychast (1898-1959)

He who remains sitting at the feet of his spiritual father receives a greater reward than he who lives alone in the desert. *Abba Rufus; Apothegmata Patrum*

He who reveres the Lord does what is commanded, and if he commits some sin or disobeys Him, endures whatever he has to suffer for this as being his dessert. St. Mark the Ascetic (5th Century); In *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart, trans. by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer*

Healthy obedience cultivates an inner and outer responsiveness. In order to be successfully immersed in monastic culture and learn the monastic way of life, the beginner must be willing to listen and follow instructions. The monastic understanding of obedience is about listening. *Sr. Laura Swan, OSB; Engaging Benedict*

Human self-will is our greatest enemy, so obedience is the way to God. *Sr. Aquinata Böckmann, OSB; Perspectives on the Rule of Saint Benedict*

Human will is at once both potentially noble and flawed. Without God and grace assisting, the prognosis is not good. For Christians, however, God's grace and aid are available, but they come at the price of cooperation and cooperation demands a certain sacrifice of our own wills, often even a total sacrifice of them. *Br. Jerome Leo Hughes, OSB;**Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict, www.stmarysmonastery.org*

I cannot make the universe obey me. I cannot make other people conform to my own whims and fancies. I cannot make even my own body obey me. *Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO (1915-1968); No Man Is an Island*

I go of my free choice with the blessing of obedience. *Mother Teresa of Calcutta, MC (1910-1997)* in *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light, ed. by Brian Kolodiejchuk, MC*

“I did not come to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me.” John 6:38 compares the monk to Christ: although He was the savior of the world, he was first of all the obedient son of the Father. In other words, along with being obedient to Christ, the monk ought to be obedient together with Christ. *Fr. Terrence Kardong, OSB; Day by Day with Saint Benedict*

I know the power obedience has of making things easy which seem impossible. *St. Teresa of Avila, O. Carm. (1515-1582); The Interior Castle*

If a superior gives any order to one who is under him, which is against that man’s conscience, although he does not obey it yet he shall not be dismissed. St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

If the fallen angels had retained obedience, they would have stayed in the heavens and would glorify the name of the Lord to this day. And if Adam had retained obedience, then he and his issue would have remained in Eden. But even now it is possible to return to. Eden through repentance. The Lord loves us greatly, despite our sins, as long as we seek humility and love our enemies. Whoever does not love his enemies cannot achieve peace, even if he were placed in Eden. *St. Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938)*

If you do not get rid of “No” and “Tomorrow” from your life, you will never get to where the Lord wants you, where he grants you everything. He will give you the bodily strength when you answer “Yes” and “Now.” The prophets, the angels, and the saints all said, “Behold here I am. . . . Let it be according to your word.” *Mother Gavrila Papayanni (1897-1992); The Ascetic of Love*

In a society that depends on reputation to such a degree that people build themselves up by tearing other people down, [St. Benedict’s] chapter on obedience turns the world awry. Monastic spirituality says that we are to honor one another. We are to listen to one another. We are to reach across boundaries and differences in this fragmented world and see in our differences distinctions of great merit that can mend a competitive, uncaring, and foolish world. *Sr. Joan Chittester, OSB (1936- ); The Rule of Benedict*

In those who begin their conversion, God seeks nothing but the labor of obedience. *Apothegmata Patrum*

It is a mistake to look on obedience as if it were everything in monastic life, with all the rest subordinated to it. Doing what a superior tells you is an instrument and a sign of something greater than itself, namely, a faithfulness to monastic life. Obedience is fidelity’s most powerful and necessary weapon. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

It is better to sweep up leaves out of simple obedience than to engage in the sublime contemplation of heavenly things out of self-will. *Abbot Louis DeBlois, OSB (1506-1566); Spiritual Mirror*

It is impossible for those who have not first lived in obedience to obtain humility; for everyone who has learned an art on his own fancies himself. *St. J*ohn Climacus (c. 525-606); *Ladder of Divine Ascent, 26*

It is nothing to obey without love; Adolf Eichmann did that quite admirably. Nor does it avail us anything at all to be obedient to ourselves: we’d wind up Sarabites for sure, worshipping nothing but the idol of our own wills. *Br. Jerome Leo Hughes, OSB; Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict, www.stmarysmonastery.org*

It is now Jesus who reveals the will of the Father to us. The law of the new covenant is the person and the word of Jesus; it is the reverberation of the discovery of the love of God manifest in Christ, the joyous recognition, the way of acting the children of God, the free and attentive conformity to the good pleasure of the Father. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

It is within [the] context of a community on its way to God that authority and obedience are exercised in a Benedictine monastery. Therefore it is not simply a matter of a collection of individuals obeying a single superior. Rather it is a matter of the total community seeking what is best for the spiritual welfare of each member and of the whole body. Monastics typically refer to this interdependence as a communal effort to discern the will of God. An individual chooses to obey because she trusts that what is being asked of her is in the best interest of the whole community with which she has cast her lot. *Conference of Benedictine Prioresses; Wisdom from the Tradition: A Statement of North American Benedictine Women in Response to Our Times*

It was said of Abba John the Dwarf that he withdrew and lived in the desert at Sketis with an old man of Thebes. His abba, taking a piece of dry wood, planted it and said to him, “Water it every day with a bottle of water, until it bears fruit.” Now the water was so far away that he had to leave in the evening and return the following morning. At the end of three years the wood came to life and bore fruit. The old man took some of the fruit and carried it to the church saying to the brethren, “Take and eat the fruit of obedience.” *Apothegmata Patrum*

It was said of Abba Silvanus that at Sketis he had a disciple called Mark whose obedience was great. He was a scribe. The old man loved him because of his obedience. He had 11 other disciples who were hurt because he loved him more than them. When they knew this, the elders were sorry about it and they came one day to him to reproach him about it. Taking them with him, he went to knock at each cell, saying, “Brother so and so, come here; I need you,” but none of them came immediately. Coming to Mark’s cell, he knocked and said, “Mark.” Hearing the old man’s voice, he jumped up immediately and the old man sent him off to serve and said to the elders, “Fathers, where are the other brothers?” Then he went into Mark’s cell and picked up his book and noticed that he had begun to write the letter “omega” but when he had heard the old man, he had not finished writing it. Then the elders said, “Truly, Abba, he whom you love, we love too and God loves him.”  *Apothegmata Patrum*

Just as the result of disobedience is sin, so the result of obedience is virtue. And just as disobedience leads to breaking the commandments and to separation from Him who give them, so obedience leads to keeping the commandments and to union with Him who gave them. Thus he who through obedience has kept the commandments has achieved righteousness and, moreover, he has not cut himself off from union in love with Him who gave them; and the opposite is equally true. *St. Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662); Philokalia, 2*

Let obedience not be with misery and like forced labor. The [superior] is not a dictator. We owe them gratitude since they protect us—not complaints and disobedience. *Fr. Paisios the Athonite (1924-1994)*

Life under the vow of monastic obedience is hardly ever spectacular. It is Jesus entering our daily existence, invading our self-complacency, asking, explaining, and asking again our gift of self by means of the persons who cross our path. These persons are limited and human like us. That is often hard for us to accept, but the Gospel has not been given to us as a comfortable way of life. It leads us to the Father by way of the cross, the path of self-emptying, but that is the only way to resurrection. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

Listen when anyone asks something of you. Here is a chance to serve the Lord and to follow Jesus in his life of service. Try to grasp that what the brother or sister wants and to understand their point of view. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

Many Christian writers wax eloquently on the beauty of obedience under heroic circumstances, especially the obedience unto death of the martyrs who shed their blood for Christ. But obedience is the most challenging in the petty circumstances that we face day in and day out. Being asked to serve at table an extra time can easily set off a train of murmuring that undermines our act of service. After all, nobody gets put onto the calendar of saints just for putting food on the table. In cases such as this, we must break out of ourselves and direct our attention to those who need to be served as well as to the needs of the person whose place we are taking. *Abbot Andrew Marr, OSB; Tools for Peace*

Many live in obedience more from necessity than from love. Such become discontented and dejected on the slightest pretext; they will never gain peace of mind unless they subject themselves wholeheartedly for the love of God. *Fr. Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380-1471); The Imitation of Christ I*

Monastic obedience exists not to make yes-men and efficient bureaucrats who can be used in institutional politics, but to liberate the hearts and minds into the lucid and terrible darkness of a contemplation that no tongue can explain and no rationalization can account for. *Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO (1915-1968); Contemplation in a World of Action*

Mutual obedience is a way of ordering generous and healthy relationships among members of the community. Such obedience is a mature and adult response to—and even anticipation of—the needs of each other that brings about unity in the house of God. There is no place either for self-deprecating compliance or for efforts to prevail over others. *Conference of Benedictine Prioresses; Wisdom from the Tradition: A Statement of North American Benedictine Women in Response to Our Times*

My brethren, consider the wind: although its blast is tumultuous, it lacks any color by which it can be seen, for it is hidden in its manifestation, having no outer array or substance at all. It is both hidden and yet manifest when it is blowing. So too the abode of Paradise is both hidden and manifest: while it can be perceived to exist, what it really is cannot be perceived. The Tree of Knowledge – awareness of truth and spiritual reality – is the gate to Paradise through which the mind can enter. But the Tree of Knowledge has to be approached in the right spirit and in obedience to God; otherwise it will lead to destruction and loss as both Adam and Uzziah discovered. Further, once led astray by eating the fruit of the Tree of Disobedience, man goes on to blame the fruit rather than his greed for the consequence of his grasping. *St. E*phraim of Syria (c. 306-373); *Hymns of Paradise, 15*

Not only is the boon of obedience to be shown by all to the abbot, but the brethren are also to obey one another, knowing that by this road of obedience they are going to God. *St. Benedict of Nursia; RB 71*

Obedience, acting on this deep listening from the depths of our heart and from the very core of our being, reveals our attachments: those attitudes, beliefs, and addictions that hold us captive and keep us from freedom. The most difficult attachments to get free from are those that give us some element of joy or security. Faith requires that we let go of these attachments before we discover the intense freedom God desires for us. Obedience guards against self-indulgence and self-satisfaction that binds us. *Sr. Laura Swan, OSB; Engaging Benedict*

Obedience allows everyone to go beyond their individual interests and to insert themselves in the life of the community in a fruitful way and according to God. Obedience makes charity effective and gives a framework. It ensures the human maturity and Christian freedom of each one who gives himself to a generously and through law. The renunciations it requires come from our sin in our narrow egotism. The self-will that it kills is the voice of the person of "the flesh" in us. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

Obedience and humility are conjoined twins which share one heart: both will die if they are separated. Humility, in its healthiest perfection, is truth and that truth births bits of God into the world, confetti mosaics that the wind of the Spirit can blow into fuller, more accurate portraits. Yes, humility is the most often mentioned of connections, but the root of humility is truth and the root of truth is God. *Br. Jerome Leo Hughes, OSB; Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict, www.stmarysmonastery.org*

Obedience, Benedict says—the willingness to listen for the voice of God in life—is what will wrench us out of the limitations of our own landscape. *Sr. Joan Chittester OSB* (1936- )*; The Rule of Benedict*

Obedience has been used at times, both by the Church and by political entities, as a weapon to keep people in positions of subjection and powerlessness, in the name of fidelity and piety or in the name of patriotism and loyalty. . . . The purpose of monastic obedience, as envisioned by Benedict, is to enable the monastic to run to God with an expanded heart. Going one’s own way makes the way to God more difficult. *Conference of Benedictine Prioresses; Wisdom from the Tradition: A Statement of North American Benedictine Women in Response to Our Times*

Obedience is a relationship of cooperation. Self-will is the misuse of our personal will. We are not commanded to renounce having any will at all. We are commanded to renounce acting on our own will at the expense of others. *Abbot Andrew Marr, OSB; Tools for Peace*

Obedience is absolute renunciation of our own life, clearly expressed in our bodily actions. Or, conversely, obedience is the mortification of the limbs while the mind remains alive. Obedience is unquestioning movement, voluntary death, a life free of curiosity, carefree danger, unprepared defense before God, fearlessness of death, a safe voyage, a sleeper’s progress. Obedience is the tomb of the will and the resurrection of humility. A corpse does not argue or reason as to what is good or what seems to be bad. For he who has devoutly put the soul of the novice to death will answer for everything. Obedience is an abandonment of discernment in a wealth of discernment. *St.* John Climacus (c. 525-606); *Ladder of Divine Ascent, 4*

Obedience is detachment from the self. This is the most radical detachment of all. But what is the self? The self is the principle of reason and responsibility in us. It is the root of freedom; it is what makes us men. *Fr. Bede Griffiths, OSB (1906-1993)*

Obedience is indispensable for the organizational works which serve the interests of the Church. It is also the instrument of the sacrifice of self in love, which is the heart of the salvific work of Christ, continued by the Church. Both perfect in the religious the full conformity to the obedient Christ. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

Obedience is necessary not only for monks, but for all people. Even the Lord was obedient. The proud and self-assured do not let grace reside within them, and therefore they never have internal peace, whereas the soul of the obedient easily accepts the grace of the Holy Spirit, bringing with it joy and serenity. *St. Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938)*

Obedience is not a license to destroy another human being for the whims and fancies of an authority figure. To be a parent does not give anyone the right to beat a child. To be an official does not give anyone – the police, the president, the teacher – the right to vent either their force or their frustration on simple people for doing simple things. The nature of punishment is always to be weighed against the nature of the offense.  *Sr. Joan Chittester, OSB (1936- ); The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*

Obedience is not relinquishing of human responsibility for life and activity. It is a light that clarifies what the Lord wants of us, here and now, regarding our task in the fulfilment of the immense plan of God. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

Obedience is the best ornament of the monk. He who has acquired it will be heard by God, and he will stand beside the Crucified with confidence, for the crucified Lord gave obedience unto death. *Abba* *Hyperechius; Apothegmata Patrum*

Obedience is the medicine compounded of virtues, giving life to those who drink it, and the knife which, with one cut, cleans festering wounds. A man who, in faith and simplicity, has chosen to wield this knife, at once cuts off all passions, more completely than anyone. *St.* Gregory of Sinai, (c. 1265-1360); *Philokalia, 4*

Obedience is the submission of the person to the will of God, the fulfillment of the commandment whose value and meaning we can't always see. This obedience is the fruit of faith that clings to God for himself and submits to every word of God, thus entering into the pattern which he weaves in the history of the world. Faith and obedience coinhere. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

Obedience is very far from being a merely passive attitude or a kind of mutilation of one’s human personality. On the contrary, it presupposes a serious interior effort of the mind, the will, and the heart to cooperate. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

Obedience is, without a doubt, more meritorious than any austerity. And what greater austerity can be thought of than that of keeping one's will constantly submissive and obedient? *St. Catherine of Bologna, OSC (1413-1463)*

Obedience looks to the good of the community and of the individual. For St. Benedict, one cannot be obedient unless one is also cheerful, and perhaps a bit bemused by the tremendous authority with which people, oneself included, invest their opinions and desires about almost anything, from liturgical minutiae to how to wash the dishes. *Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB; Essential Monastic Wisdom*

Obedience prepares the soul for docility to the Holy Spirit and a willing collaboration with others. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

Obedience prevents pride. In return for obedience you receive the ability to pray, along with the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is why obedience is greater than fasting and prayer. *St. Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938)*

Obedience responds to obedience. When someone obeys God, then God obeys his request. *Abba Mios of Belos; Apothegmata Patrum*

Obedience was the touchstone of humility. According to St. Jerome, obedience is the privileged way of humility. The latter is the fitting enemy of pride, which is the vice shameful before God above all others, including adultery. No ascetical praxis, whether fasting or prayer, has validity where pride reigns. Woe therefore to the proud monk! It would be better if he had been married! *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

Obedience, we must insist, is not simply a means of social control; it is fundamentally an ascetical path to freedom from the tyranny of self-will and the means of living an adult life of integrity and consistency, one that conducts us toward the goal we have chosen. Without such freedom no progress in the contemplative life is possible. *Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO; Road to Eternal Life*

Obedience will have no contrary result, nor will it result in any harm or damage, indeed it will be the salvific foundation of everything fine and good. What are these? Remission [of sins], freedom, spiritual kinship, immortality, life. Remission because once and for all it will relieve you of all your sins, if the psalmist says truly, “Look upon my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins” (Ps 24:18). Freedom, because it will completely release and deliver you from the most bitter slavery of your passions. Spiritual kinship, because it will make you worthy of divine grace, because it will make you true daughters of God. Again immortality and life, because it will provide you with immortality and eternal life. *Typikon of Theodora Synadene for the Convent of the Mother of God Bebaia Elpis in Constantinople (1327–1352);* In *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents, ed. by John Thomas & Angela Constantinides Hero*

Obeying another sinful human being is hard, humiliating, and requires real sacrifice. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

*Oboedientia* according to the Rule is obedience to Christ, obedience to the Word of God, the Rule and the brothers. It means listening in all directions. *Sr. Aquinata Böckmann, OSB; Perspectives on the Rule of Saint Benedict*

Once the order was given at Sketis to fast for a week. Now it happened that some brothers came from Egypt to visit Abba Moses the Ethiopian and he cooked something for them. Seeing the smoke, the neighbors said to the elders, “Look, Moses has broken the commandment and has cooked something in his cell.” The elders said, “When he comes, we will speak to him ourselves.” When Saturday came, since they knew Abba Moses’ remarkable way of life, they said to him in front of everyone, “O, Abba Moses, you did not keep the commandment of men, but it was so that you might keep the commandment of God.” *Apothegmata Patrum*

One can express his eagerness to obey by his haste in doing so. *Fr. Terrence Kardong, OSB; Day by Day with Saint Benedict*

One reason we took obedience upon ourselves was our knowledge of our own weakness. Benedictines not only are not in charge of themselves, but, as the Holy Rule defines  
cenobitic community life, they desire this lack of control. They “desire to live under a rule and an abbot.”  *Br. Jerome Leo Hughes, OSB; Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict, www.stmarysmonastery.org*

Our motive for obedience is awe and respect and reverence for God, loyalty to Christ, and respect for each other. Obedience is the path of returning to God. We obey Christ and we obey like Christ: we are seeking to be Christ to the world. We are letting our hearts be shaped into the heart of God. The hard and honest work obedience leads to a compassionate heart. *Sr. Laura Swan, OSB; Engaging Benedict*

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of Christian obedience to God today concerns the responsibility of the Christian in technological society toward God’s creation and God’s will for His creation. Obedience to God’s will for nature. *Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO (1915-1968); Thomas Merton, the Spiritual Master*

Place yourself as an instrument in the hands of God, who does his own work in his own way. *Swami Ramdas, Hindu Monk (1884-1963)*

Religious [monastic] obedience is only Christian obedience driven as far as it can go. It is the free and voluntary act of generosity of someone who wants to follow Christ without stopping on the way, who wants to give everything without reserve. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

Religious, obedient to the call, to the interior voice of the Spirit (the primary obedience is to God), submit themselves in faith to religious superiors as representing God, and allow themselves to be guided by them in the service of their brothers and sisters, finally, in service of their salvation, through participating in the work and sacrifice of Christ. Obedience being the substance, in some way, of Christ's redemptive act, has in us a redemptive value for humanity, like and in Christ. This is a fundamental value. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

Saint Benedict's insistence on obedience in the lives of his followers is not simply to promote the good ordering of community life. The reason for it goes much deeper than that. Obedience assimilates them to Christ in his zeal for the Father's will. . . . For them obedience is the way to accomplish the Father's will and thus to imitate Christ. By it they share in the kenosis of Christ. This emptying out of self is normally a deeply painful process as St. Benedict was well aware. He designated obedience under difficult, unfavorable or even unjust conditions as the fourth step of humility. He also knew that a monk may be assigned difficult or impossible tasks. Whatever the cost, ready obedience to the will of God is a necessary condition for prayer. *Fr. Columban Heaney, OCSO; Personal Prayer According to the Monastic Tradition*

Silence and listening and hearing and obedience, then, require trust – trust that God wants to speak a word to me, trust that God has a particular will for me, trust that God's will for me is always good even if I cannot yet see its goodness or me, trust that God does speak through some whom he calls to a special leadership, trust that my obedience even to a mistake in judgment by another will make me a better listener and a less self-willed disciple, trust that God will make a better good come from my obedience even if the abbot's direction is wrong-headed. *Fr. Mark O' Keefe, OSB;* *Priestly Wisdom: Insights from St. Benedict*

Superiors transmit the will of God to us; we owe them obedience full of reverence and humility; we receive their commands in the spirit of faith and love, as from the hand of God. Once we have received the order, we make God's will our own. We are not an inert stick in the hands of its possessor. Our obedience is the obedience of the human being, a free human being, a "voluntary submission," not constrained obedience of a slave. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

Temptation presents opportunity as well as danger. Jesus met the crisis creatively by using the experience for a renewed expression of his sonship. By practice he was gaining skill in turning danger into opportunity. “Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Heb 5:8). From repeated experience he learned that he must lose his life in order to save it, according to the Father’s will. The event on Calvary by which Jesus finally lost his life became the occasion for his final victory over death. His “lifting up” was both exaltation and crucifixion, according to the insight of the Fourth Gospel (Jn 12:32). To his followers Jesus passed on the heritage of finding within negative circumstances themselves the means to transcend them. *Fr. Charles Cummings, OCSO;* *The Best Place to Live*

The abbot or abbess receives power over you from you yourself. When you enter the monastery and make profession you give yourself freely to this particular person who “is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery” [RB 2: 2] for you. The Church cannot make this gift of self in your place. It is your own commitment. You obey because you want and choose to obey. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

The Benedictine vow of obedience is not to community consensus, nor to a General Chapter, but to one person: the abbot or abbess. True, the Church gives the community certain rights and power of decision in its official chapter meetings, but the superior’s role is to interpret the Rule, to make the decisions as to its being lived, and to see to it that the monastic life is being lived. *Dom Wulstan Mork, OSB; Benedictine Way*

The Bible does not make a sharp distinction between obedience and love. *Fr. Terrence Kardong, OSB; Day by Day with St. Benedict*

The capacity to recognize our condition before God is itself a grace. We cannot always attain it will. To learn meditation does not, therefore, mean learning an artificial technique for infallibly producing compunction and the sense of our nothingness whatever we please. On the contrary, this would be the result of violence and would be inauthentic. Meditation implies the capacity to receive his grace whenever God wishes to grant to us, and therefore a permanent disposition to humility, attention to reality, receptivity, pliability. To learn to meditate then means to gradually get free from habitual hardness of heart, torpor, and grossness of mind, due to arrogance and nonacceptance of simple reality, or resistance to the concrete demands of God's will. *Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO (1915-1968); Contemplative Prayer*

The cenobite does not follow Christ by difficult individual asceticism and hard external penances, but by obedience. *Sr. Aquinata Böckmann, OSB; Perspectives on the Rule of Saint Benedict*

The demons celebrate when a monastic disciple objects to obedience, and indeed, a monastic gainsayer makes himself the dwelling of evil spirits and all their unclean powers. *Metropolitan Cyprian Kutsumbas of Oropos and Fili (1935-2013); A Manual for Coenobitic Monks, trans. by Bishop Chrysostomos*

The entire and unfolding of the life of Jesus is the expression of this fundamental obedience to the Father's plan of salvation. His sacrifice is not an isolated act of worship, it is his life, his death, consumed by the sacred fire of obedience and pleasing to the Father. Priest and sacrifice. But human. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

The foundation of Christian obedience is the conviction that what the superior decides is what Jesus wants at the present moment. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

The full maturity of the spiritual life cannot be reached unless we first pass through the dread, anguish, trouble, and fear that necessarily accompany the inner crisis of "spiritual death" in which we finally abandon our attachment to our exterior self and surrender completely to Christ. But when this surrender has been truly made, there is no longer any place for fear and dread. There can no longer be any doubt or hesitation in the mind of one who is completely and finally resolved to seek nothing and to do nothing but what is willed for him by God's love. *Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO (1915-1968); Contemplative Prayer*

The hermit ought often to visit Gethsemane, not so much to comfort Jesus, who probably will not allow your sympathy to afford him any relief, but to learn the secret of perfect obedience to God. Not everything is enchantment in the monastic life. The apostles’ hearts and feet were heavy as they climbed the slope of the Mount of Olives, even though Jesus was with them. *“A monk;” The Hermitage Within*

The hermit’s freedom is found in the obedience of Jesus. He believes that his freely accepted obedience joined to Christ makes his self-emptying love more fruitful because by giving his will to another, Christ comes within him and enables the hermit to surrender to the divine will, making the hermit pleasing to the Father. The hermit is not truly free unless he abandons himself to God's will. For in doing God's will, the hermit grows in holiness. *Fr. Eugene L. Romano; A Way of Desert Spirituality: The Plan of Life of the Hermits of Bethlehem*

The “labor of obedience” [Rule of Benedict, Prologue] is the means by which the goal of union with God is reached. Saint Benedict will later warn the newcomer that the way to God passes through harsh and rugged country; no one will complete this journey who is not robust and resilient and who is not prepared to work hard and to deal with reversals of every kind. *Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO; Road to Eternal Life*

The Lord said, “When you have done all that is commanded you, say: We are useless servants: we have only done what was our duty” (Lk 17:10). Thus the Kingdom of Heaven is not a reward for works, but a gift of grace prepared by the master for His faithful servants. *St. H*esychius the Priest (+433?); *Philokalia, 1*

The monk cannot serve God without obeying. It is the most typical act of the monk, what everyone expects from him, even more than prayer or work. Obedience is the professional virtue of the monk. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

The motivating force behind any act of true obedience will be, in one way or another, the proclamation of Christ over your entire life, which is the object of your vow of fidelity. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

The narrow and hard way is this, to control your thoughts, and to strip yourself of your own will, for the sake of God. This is also the meaning of the sentence, “Lo, we have left everything and followed you” (Mt 19:27). *St. Ammonas (fl. c. 350);* In *Oasis of Wisdom, by David G.R. Keller*

The office of a monk is to obey. If he fulfills it, all that he asks in prayer will be granted to him, and he will stand with confidence before Christ crucified, because the Lord himself arrived at his cross this way, made obedient unto death. *Abba Hyperechius; Apothegmata Patrum*

The one who obeys chooses freely to follow this light – he can refuse. He puts all his energy toward fulfilling this Will with which his own will coincides. He remains responsible for all his acts. He is not permitted to do just anything, even evil, without discernment, simply because his superiors have ordered him to do it (a justification heard so often from the mouth of war criminals in Nuremberg and elsewhere). The evil that we do, we are responsible for. This implies a judgment prior to every order received (to be sure, in religious life this judgment doesn't ordinarily pose any great problem, and the presumption is always in favor of the superior if there is any doubt; but at the same time, complex cases do arise). An obedience thus exercised leads to human maturity, as opposed to a personal anarchy which is nothing but slavery to passions and exterior influences, and as opposed to an infantile passivity that seeks in obedience an evasion from the demands of life and liberty. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

The one who has himself for a master has a fool for a disciple. *St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)*

The practice of religious [monastic] obedience was instituted to realize this: obedience to a human person and a rule of life. Thus religious obedience is only Christian obedience driven as far as it can go. It is the free and voluntary act of generosity of someone who wants to follow Christ without stopping on the way, who wants to give everything without reserve. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

The primacy given to obedience makes the ascetic life more objective and our asceticism more sane and effective. Instead of battering our own will to dominate each feeling and passion that arises within us, we submit our will to the will of God expressed by another man, and in renouncing our self-love, we renounce all our evil desires at once in their cause and root. *Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO (1915-1968); Cassian and the Fathers*

The ringing of the bell marks out the schedule of the monastic day that is broken up into periods of public and private prayer, work, rest, meals, sleep, recreation, silence, private time, and group social time. It does not matter if I want to do any of those things when its time comes, or if I feel like doing them. It does not matter if I like the psalms, hymns, scriptures, or sermons at times of public prayer, or if I like the food served at mealtimes, or if I would rather be talking at silent times or alone at times of group recreation. Since time is not ours to control, monastic life mercifully takes away that illusion of possession and expects us to be where we are supposed to be when we are supposed to be there. *Br. Abraham Newsom, OSB; [St. Gregory’s] Abbey Letter, 242, Summer, 2010*

The thief was on the cross and he was justified by a single word; and Judas who was counted in the number of the apostles lost all his labor in one single night and descended from heaven to hell. Therefore, let no one boast of his good works, for all those who trust in themselves fall. *Abba Xanthias; Apothegmata Patrum*

The young Acacius of Sinai was a novice with an evil elder in the monastery on Sinai. The foul-tempered elder daily groused and grumbled at Acacius, and often beat him, tormenting and ill-treating him in every possible way. Acacius did not complain, but bore it all patiently and with trust that it would work for his salvation. When anyone asked him how he survived, he replied, “Well, as before the Lord God.” After nine years of obedience and ill-treatment, Acacius died. The elder buried him and then went off to lament to another elder, a holy man, saying, “Acacius, my disciple, is dead. “I don’t believe it” replied the holy elder, “Acacius is not dead.” They then both went to the dead man’s grave, and the holy elder called out, “Brother Acacius, are you dead?” The obedient Acacius, obedient even in death, replied, “I am not dead; the obedient cannot die.” Then the evil elder repented and shut himself in a cell near Acacius’s grave, where he spent the rest of his life in repentance and prayer. *St. John Climacus (c. 525-606); Ladder of Divine Ascent*

The young monk must learn that when he is not able to see things in any other way than his way, he is seriously handicapped. One who can only see things his own way is really not capable of being a monk because he is not capable of genuine obedience. *Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO (1915-1968); Cassian and the Fathers*

There is no doubt that you will encounter many difficulties, since the path of virtue is hedged in by thorns and Satan makes every effort to thwart your pious intentions; cut to the quick by this glorious, meritorious virtue [i.e., obedience], he rages at seeing you . . . practicing it with every requisite condition. . . . But take heart!  You hope in the Lord; he will not fail to lend you his divine assistance. *St. Vincent Ferrer, OP, (1350-1419)*

Those who struggle, regain their original state by keeping two commandments— obedience and fasting; for all evil entered into the generation of mortals through practices opposed to them. Moreover, those who keep the commandments through obedience ascend to God more quickly, and those who keep them through fasting more slowly. Besides, obedience is more suitable for beginners, and fasting for those on the way, who possess courage and vision of mind. But in fulfilling the commandments it is given to very few always to obey God undeceived, and even for the most valiant this achievement is very difficult. *St.* Gregory of Sinai (c. 1265-1360); Philokalia, 4

True zazen [contemplative prayer] is surrendering every moment. But surrendering to what? It really does not matter what we call it: God or the Tao or the Dharma or the Buddha or our true nature. . . . It is the act of letting go, of surrendering, that matters. The very act of letting go opens us up completely. *Abbot* *Dennis Genpo Merzel, American Zen Buddhist Monk (1944- ); The Eye Never Sleeps*

True Zen is not to follow your own desires, not to follow your own dreams, your ego mind, not to follow your thoughts, nor all the influences we're bombarded with in modern civilization. True Zen practice is to follow the cosmic order—not just to follow your thinking, not to follow your ambition, not to look for status or wealth, power, position, or career. *Robert Livingston, American Zen Buddhist Monk (1933- ); American Zen Association, www.nozt.org*

We are at Jesus' disposal. If he wants you to be sick in bed, if he wants you to proclaim His work in the street, if he wants you to clean the toilets all day, that's all right, everything is all right. We must say, “I belong to you. You can do whatever you like.” And this . . . is our strength, and this is the joy of the Lord. *Mother Teresa (1910-1997); Essential Writings*

What matters most is a good and ready will to obey God. *Fr. Johannes Tauler, OP (1300-1361)*

What we need is not a false peace which enables us to evade the implacable light of judgment, but the grace courageously to accept the bitter truth that is revealed to us; to abandon our inertia, our egoism and submit entirely to the demands of the Spirit, praying earnestly for help, and giving ourselves generously to every effort asked of us by God. *Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO (1915-1968); Contemplative Prayer*

When God wishes to take pity on a soul and it rebels, not suffering anything and doing its own will, He permits it to suffer things it does not want, in order that it may seek Him again. *Abba Isaiah; Apothegmata Patrum*

When someone who is just has turned to God, God by grace, dwells and rests within him, so that by receiving His commands with reverence and being obedient to Him, he might, through obedience, be worthy to rest [in God]. The rest we desire is prepared by obedience to His commands. *Abbot* *Baldwin of Ford, O. Cist., (c. 1120-1190); Tract 5*

When we ask something of our elder, his first word is from God; if we do not accept this with faith, the second word will be that of a man, and the third that of demons. *Metropolitan Cyprian Kutsumbas of Oropos and Fili (1935-2013); A Manual for Coenobitic Monks, trans. by Bishop Chrysostomos*

When we ask what Christian wisdom has to say about coping with negativity and human limitations, we have on the horizon this example of Christ who always did “the works the Father has given me to accomplish” (Jn 5:38). Christ freely chose to carry out the Father's will which was a mystery to him in his humanity. *Fr. Charles Cummings, OCSO;* *The Best Place to Live*

When you live in a cenobitic community, you must prefer obedience to asceticism. The latter teaches pride, the former humility. *Amma Syncletica (+c. 350); Apothegmata Patrum*

Whoever carries in him even a small amount of grace will submit to leadership with great joy. He knows that the Lord controls heaven and earth and the netherworld, and his own self, and his affairs and all that exists in the world, and for this reason he is always at peace. *St. Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938)*

Why did the Holy Fathers place obedience above fasting and prayer? Because asceticism without obedience leads to vanity; if a novice merely does what he is told, he has no reason to be proud. Moreover, the obedient has cut off his will in everything and listens to his spiritual father, and for this reason his mind is clear of any concern and his prayer is pure. The obedient has in mind only God and the word of his elder, while the disobedient’s mind is full of various business and condemnation for his elder, and for that reason he cannot see God. *St. Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938)*

Willing obedience is an action which shows more courage and strength of spirit than subjugating great kings and ruling over them. *Dom* Lorenzo Scupoli (c. 1530-1610); *Unseen Warfare*

You can have the desire to be a good monk, you can keep the obligations of chastity and poverty (up to a certain point) and be faithful enough to the community exercises, but without the humiliation of obeying another human being, the result of the observances will only be the satisfaction of self-love, the reinforcement of hypocrisy, and a spirit of criticism. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

Your obedience should be offered with eagerness, with complete faith and understanding, such that you find joy, experiencing the mystery of faith and liberating yourself from the slavery of self and from the tyranny of the insalubrious, common way of thinking. *Metropolitan Cyprian Kutsumbas of Oropos and Fili (1935-2013); A Manual for Coenobitic Monks, trans. by Bishop Chrysostomos*