



svd brothers
FORUM

march 2022 | volume 3 issue 1

OBEDIENT as the **SON**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

02 - FOREWORD

Br. Darwin Loro (PHS)
(SVD Brothers Forum Supervisor)

02 - A BROTHER OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE SVD

Br. Paulino Bongcaras (PHS)

04 - OBEDIENCE CHANGED INTO FOLLOWING CHRIST

Br. Simao Pedro (BRC)

04 - OBEDIENCE FLOWS FROM A HEART OF GRATITUDE

Br. Stephen Bonsu (GHA)

06 - A WAY OF LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR

Fr. Saju George (ARS)

07 - TRANSPARENCE

Br. Sebastião Tenorio (MOZ)

07 - MY LOCAL SUPERIOR QUESTIONED ME...

Fr. Gilbertus Paga Buu (CHAD)

08- THE QUESTION ABOUT MISSIONARY FREEDOM

Fr. Karlheinz Peschke (ECP)

09 - A FREE GIFT FROM GOD

Br. Justin Mau Bau (JPN)

09 - OBEY FIRST AND BE HAPPY

Br. Darwin P. Jaime (PHS)

10 - OBEY GOD FIRST OF ALL

Jonas Vazquez (GHA)

10 - A COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

Br. Juan Daton (BOL)

12 - A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS UNITY

Br. Eugenio Orog (PHC)

13 - OBEDIENCE AND ALWAYS!

Fr. Yan Djawa (IDE)

14 - I DECIDED NOT TO RESPOND

Fr. William Burt (AUS)

14 - LAST WORDS FROM THE EDITORS

SVD BROTHERS FORUM 2022

SVD BROTHERS FORUM is a digital forum written by its readers. On behalf of its Publisher, Fr. Rogelio Bag-ao, SVD-PHS Provincial Superior, we asked the member of the Arnoldus Family to reply to the questions below.

*Our theme is the following:
VOW OF OBEDIENCE*

- 1. How does my lifestyle manifest the vow of obedience?*
- 2. How does obedience fit into my relationship with Christ?*
- 3. How does the vow of obedience support my missionary freedom?*

The Editorial Team

Fr. Rogelio Bag-ao

Publisher

Br. Darwin Loro

Supervisor

Br. Bela Lanyi

Editor, Proofreader, Translator

Br. Dario Figueroa

Translator (Español)

Br. Mark Paglicawan

Art Director

Mr. Crisfer Autentico

Layout Artist



FOREWORD

BR. DARWIN LORO (PHS)

Trusting in the Lord who knows what is right for me is the best decision I have made in life. For almost 15 years now, I have dedicated my life as a Divine Word Missionary Brother. It was on the feast day of St. Patrick of Ireland, 17 March 2007, when I took my Perpetual Vows with a simple but moving ceremony. I knew I had taken the road less traveled despite the many attractive voices calling me to a different path. My response allowed me to live with humility by following God’s will. My decision became a blessing because there is freedom and joy in discovering one’s true calling.

The term “obedience” is derived from the Latin ob-audire, which means “to listen intently”. During my final vows, I remember the words of my mom when she stood in front to deliver her message on behalf of my family. She cautioned me to remain faithful to my vows. I still vividly recall what she said and I consider it now as God’s words reminding me of my commitment and fidelity. My vow was a serious adult promise to take responsibility in doing God’s mission.

Church documents put emphasis on the shepherd model as demonstrated by Jesus. By virtue of our consecration, religious people are on a mission to listen and dialogue. Regardless of our designation or role in the Society, our obedience is primarily oriented towards obedience to the will of God. We exercise our responsibility with openness, respecting each person. As disciples of Jesus, we are all equals. Let us therefore trust in God’s loving hands without limit.



A BROTHER OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE SVD

BR. PAULINO BONGCARAS (PHS)



Br. Bongcaras (cont...)

I remember the first 3 lay men who promised to live evangelical obedience in the Society of the Divine Word in 1875 – the beginning of brotherhood and the SVD being called a religious society. The SVD was classified as a religious missionary society. This is because in those days only the ordained members were “the missionaries” who focused the administration of the seven sacraments. The brothers, sisters and lay members were classified as helpers. It was only in the Second Vatican council That missionaries can be lay persons (single or married), religious (sisters or Brothers), or clerics (diocesan orb religious). The focus is on collaboration and partnership.

The center of attention on the vow of obedience as I experienced during my early years of formation was doing our assigned task or work in the community. We lived with whatever was available in the house and our P10.00 (2 dollars) monthly allowance. We were given jeepney transportation every time we went out for slum or jail visits or recreation.

I remember religiously following the pre-Vatican II practices related with obedience till a few months after my perpetual vows in 1977. I was requested to work in Papua New Nuinea to journey with the “rascals” (PNG’s word for juvenile delinquents) and support the local Brothers of the Sacred Heart. I remember the words of Provincial Treasurer Br. Steve Pardy when I submitted my Manila to PNG extra travel allowance. He jokingly said “bullshit...keep it...you are the only one doing this.” Steve was very supportive to the Filipinos knowing that many of us had zero or few benefactors unlike the Americans and Europeans.

Learning from these experiences I also opened a bank account just like the other SVDs. I started looking for money to help support my involvements in liturgical music and drama, Youth and Children Antioch Movement, the blind, elderly and other ministries. I deposited the earnings of my little store, gifts and missionary support from the government and other sources. I returned to the Philippines after 15 years of beautiful and memorable elementary, high school and university teaching and grassroots experiences in PNG.

I understood my life of “Responsible Obedience” when I worked with our former General Fr. Heinz Kulueke. “Responsible Obedience” came across to me as responsible keeping and sharing of whatever I received or earned to help meet my needs and the needs of the poorest and those who were made poor, moreover our needs for survival, connection, education, and others. This way of life helped me survive in my journey with the victims and survivors of prostitution, drug use, life in jail and in the streets, scavengers, PLHIVS, Covid 19 and others.





OBEDIENCE CHANGED INTO FOLLOWING CHRIST

BR. SIMAO PEDRO (BRC)

Our topic is just the following: VOW OF OBEDIENCE.

My lifestyle and way of living express the vow of obedience if I stay in a certain community even if I don't get along with one of the community members. It is my effort to maintain harmony in the group and community life. Another yes, my availability to go where my superiors send me. Believing that if it is an SVD mission then it is my mission. Not out of obedience to superiors but to the mission of the congregation.

The vow of obedience influence my relationship with Christ when I try to follow the Gospel of Christ. When I want to be a disciple who looks like the teacher: so I have to obey the teachings of Jesus and imitate him. Only in this way can I be recognized and feel myself his disciple. This vow is difficult, even more so when they are willing to follow Jesus. Then it changes "obedience" into "following Christ". Fulfilling oneself in the teacher's mission is sometimes doing what I don't want or what wasn't in my life project.

OBEDIENCE FLOWS FROM A HEART OF GRATITUDE

BR. STEPHEN BONSU (GHA)



Image Credit: br.mnpSVD

The Vow of Obedience is a voluntary binding of oneself under oath to obey the superiors in a religious institute. My lifestyle manifests the vow of obedience by responding to the call of Jesus Christ and following him along the way of the evangelical counsels. The vow of obedience provides me with greater stability and freedom for my missionary tasks. Religious obedience is that general submission which the religious vow to God, and voluntarily promise to his/her superiors, in order to be directed by them in the ways of perfection according to the purpose and constitutions of the order. The deepest meaning of the vow of obedience is expressed in the fullness of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and Christ became obedient unto death. In professing obedience, the religious offer the full surrender of his/her own will as a sacrifice of themselves to God. In this way, they are united permanently and securely to God's salvific will. Far from lowering the dignity of the human person, religious obedience leads it to maturity by extending the freedom of the sons of God.

True Christian obedience flows from a heart of gratitude for the grace we have received from the Lord. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible has a lot to say about obedience.

In the story of the Ten Commandments, we see just how important the concept of obedience is to God. Deuteronomy 11:26-28 sums it up like this: "Obey and you will be blessed. Disobey and you will be cursed." In the New Testament, we learn through the example of Jesus Christ that believers are called to a life of obedience. From this perspective, the vow of obedience fits into my relationship with Christ by being obedient to my superiors. By doing this my life imitates Christ who lives the life of obedience. In Jesus Christ, we find the perfect model of obedience to his father. As his disciples, we follow Christ's example as well as his commands. Our motivation for obedience is love. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another. When we obey God, we show our trust and faith in him. And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. If someone claims, "I know God," but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. Those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did. Only Jesus Christ is perfect, therefore, only he could walk in sinless, perfect obedience. But as we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us from within, we grow in holiness.

The vow of obedience supports my missionary freedom by enabling me to create missionary stability in the worship and service of God and His people. The Catholic Church, however, teaches that obedience is a good and holy value. By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. Obedience is meant to reflect the most perfect conformity to the life of Jesus Christ. By living the vows of obedience we are not only serving the kingdom of God, but are also radically emulating the life of Jesus, our Savior. We should be docile to God's will in the exercise of our office. We should also use the authority that we have been given by the grace of God in a spirit of Service for our conferers, so that we show forth how God loves us. By obedience a person dedicates himself totally to God and his actions come closer to the vow of profession. Obedience plants the roots of self-discipline in our hearts. It is of the greatest benefit to that freedom of spirit characteristic of the children of God. The vow of obedience is an offering of one's freedom in return for a greater freedom in the service of the highest good God's will. When a Brother takes the vow of obedience he is offering himself as an instrument of God under the direction of his superiors. Through obedience, we imitate Christ in a special manner, Christ who always obeyed the Father, for the life of the world. We are thus more closely united to the Church, to whose building we are dedicated, for its common good and that of the Order.



Image Credit: br.mnpSVD



Image Credit: br.mnpSVD

A WAY OF LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR

FR. SAJU GEORGE (ARS)

As SVD missionaries, the root of our spirituality and the experience of all the vows are based on our personal, concrete and proper relationship with each of the persons of the Holy Trinity (Jn 14:15-26). As followers of the Incarnate Word, we see that Jesus always does the will of the Father (Jn 4, 34-36). Reason why the Father says "This is my beloved Son, listen to him" (Mk 9, 7). Thus, it is a "loving obedience" and nothing to do with a despotic order that has power. Intimate communion through deep prayer is needed to understand it and then bring it to life.



Image Credit: Canva.com

In other words, from a mystical spiritual experience we can only differentiate the vow from obedience and compliance with an external order. For the joyful experience of the vow of obedience we must also be inspired by the Virgin Mary. Listening to God's invitation through the angel, she replies: "Here is the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to her word" (Lk 1,38). She expresses her total disposition and her absolute emptying. From faith and unreserved love, she made a trustful delivery without limits. It is the acceptance of the heart of the will of God. In other words, it is the concrete commitment of her faith that was not limited to words, prayers and acts of piety. From the theoretical framework, obedience is the vow that today is most in crisis in consecrated life. This crisis is due to a series of factors, such as the interpersonal relationship that exists between the superior and the subject. Many have suffered traumatic experiences: infantilization, experiences of abuse and submission. In today's context, individualism has also taken root in consecrated life. Giving up one's own will to put it in the hands of others is not easy. Here also comes into play the spiritual growth and psychological maturity of both: the "superior" and the "subject". But everything is achieved with patience, perseverance and even with a great spirit of dedication and sacrifice.

When an obedience is discussed, the difficulties could be overcome with more understanding. It is to achieve the goal, the service to the brother and the congregation, with the spirit of teamwork, like a sports team. For almost thirty years I have been in a very footballing country. The context also makes me think that each player plays from a certain position given by the DT, but jointly. Many times the camera's focus is on the "scorer". But others get him the ball, and others play quietly on defense. There we have the example of Saint Joseph who obeyed (Mt 1, 20) and committed himself, received the Virgin with affection and loved her. He carried out the responsible upbringing of Jesus. He worked to support his family. He did everything without looking for the leading role or the privilege of the husband or avoiding responsibilities and commitments. He is the model for the superior in government and does not abuse the power received. In a few words, living the vow of obedience is putting into practice the Lord's commandment: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your being. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these" (Mk 12:28-34). Thus, living the vow of obedience is a way of loving God and neighbor in daily life. It is an adult and free availability for the realization of the Kingdom of God through the Congregation and from genuine collaboration. -Saju George.



TRANSPARENCE

BR. SEBASTIÃO TENORIO (MOZ)

Image Credit: br.mmpSVD

Its is not easy but as missionary it is important to follow same principles, like our constitutions and constant dialogue with our superior confreres.

Vow of obedience are to be honesty, transparent in the compromise with Christ and His mission, as consecrated in the SVD. It is also to be responsible in the mission given by your superiors, personal action, and decision. Christ is the most recommended example in my life because He is a complete person and manifest His life in all human and spiritual aspects.

As missionary I try every day to follow His posture, attitude, moments of prayers, faith in God's Plan, and love to people.

My freedom depends on my actions and respect to other persons: not because he is my superior or older of me, but because he is my confrere or companion and we work together in the same Yard of God. May God bless us to be constant example of Christ in our mission.

MY LOCAL SUPERIOR QUESTIONED ME...

FR. GILBERTUS PAGA BUU (CHAD)

Part of being obedient is to be ready to do the will of God. Jesus came to this world not to do his own will but the will of God (Jn, 6:38). Jesus was moved by the spirit of love to discern and obey to God until his death on a cross to save humanity. This is the way how Jesus shows us to be obedient in doing God's will.

In the Society of the Divine Word, we profess the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. The theme of SVD Brothers Forum in this issue is about the vow of obedience. I am interested and grateful to share with you on how I live my vow of obedience.

“Be ready for obedience” is my engagement to live my life as an SVD missionary. The Constitutions of SVD underline that we are ready to go anywhere the Society sends us. We work at our assignments conscientiously but are prepared to hand them over to others, even after years of service (Con. 2017). I am ready to go anywhere the Society sends me and I find my life becomes more meaningful in obeying and doing the will of God.

I professed my first vows on August 15, 1998. I engaged to obey God and my superior. In 2003, I was sent to Papua New Guinea for Overseas Training Program (OTP).

I knew the mission in PNG is difficult but I obeyed and offered my life to serve others. In August 15, 2006, I professed my final vows. Before it I requested Portugal Province, Mexico Province, and Togo Province for my Petitio Missionis. Father Superior General and his Council assigned me to work in Togo Province, West Africa and it was my first assignment.



Image Credit: br.mmpSVD

In 2007, I arrived in Togo and learned French. After finishing French course, I worked in the parish as assistant. On May 2008, I received a personal letter from Fr. Superior General and his Council. They asked me personally if I am ready to go to work in the Chad mission because there is an urgent need of confreres. I sought to know and to do the will of God. I did a long discernment in prayer and I replied to them that I was a missionary and so, I was ready to go anywhere the Society would send me. Superior General and his Council requested officially the local superior of Togo province and his Council for my transfer to Chad mission. My local superior questioned me why I did not discuss with them before saying “yes” to the Superior General. I told him, it was a personal letter and I replied personally to the Generalate. I obeyed to the highest superior in the Society because they have priority for the whole society.

In 2009, I was transferred officially to Chad mission where I have been working until now. On October 2018, I was sent to study Psychology in the Philippines. I am going to finish my study this year and I will go back to work in the Chad mission.

This is my experience on how I live my obedience. I am ready to do what God wants me to do and follow responsibly the decision of my Superior. Loving obedience is the basis for all Christian life and service (Con. 214). We have different ways of life but we are called in the same way to do the will of God by loving and giving our life in the service of others especially to those who are in need. Let us be ready for obedience.

THE QUESTION ABOUT MISSIONARY FREEDOM

FR. KARLHEINZ PESCHKE (ECP)

How does my lifestyle manifest the vow of obedience? I have always left the choice of studies and the assignment of work and tasks to my superiors, and I have done well with it. I have the impression that the superiors correctly assessed my abilities. In one case or another I have submitted requests to my superiors and left myself to their decisions, such as a visit to the Holy Land or further training courses. I have organized my life according to the framework for our religious and community life, such as the agenda for the community or the duration of vacation periods. I took part in joint discussions on these regulations.

How does obedience fit into my relationship with Christ? Christ has always inquired of, and lived and acted in accordance with the will of the Father in Heaven. Of his life in Nazareth, the Bible says: He was subject to his parents. His public life naturally demanded a great deal of independence. But here, too, he was very much involved in the religious life of the community. Jesus also instructed his disciples and all his believers to ask about the will of the Father in heaven. For us SVD missionaries, this will of God is expressed to the greatest extent in the rules of our religious life. In personal life, of course, we will always have to ask about God's will for us and pray about it.

How does the vow of obedience support my missionary freedom? Why is the question here about missionary freedom and not about the missionary apostolate?

Is freedom the primary, very first value? Service in and to the community also limits personal freedom for the sake of the greater good of the community. This is fundamental. Religious obedience will be a primary obligation for religious towards the world of civil, social or even family life. Thus for the religious, obedience will provide freedom from claims of these other areas that could interfere or even contradict religious life.



Image Credit: br.mnpSVD

Image Credit: br.mnpSVD

A FREE GIFT FROM GOD

BR. JUSTIN MAU BAU (JPN)

The vow of Obedience is a free gift from God to all who call to follow Jesus in Religious life. Always thanks God who called me to the Society of Divine Word as missionary Brother.

Individualism, selfishness are some of the obstacles for the vow of obedience. Without realizing it or not, these obstacles often grow in our life for some reasons. With continuous prayers and humble heart, good friendship and trust, the confreres in the community will be faithful to the vowed obedience. These ways can help us overcome those obstacles to be fully committed to the vowed of obedience.

Faithful to the Community prayers, Mass and other spiritual activities like recollections, annual retreat, often do frequent confession through the sacrament of penance will build up a good relationship with Christ. Private prayer is very important. It gives me strength, courage and energy to be faithful and love my vocations and the vows. Devotion to Mother Mary who unconditionally obeyed to the Word of God is the source of inspirations, strength, courage and hope. Regret to all the wrongdoings and ask God for forgiveness, helps and guidance to avoid the same mistakes. Listen to the Word God by reading the Bible every day as habit, read the SVD's documents, and recent SVD news through SVD Curia, study other spiritual readings.

Accept the tasks, responsibilities, appointments with humble, open heart, positive thinking, happiness and joy – these are the good was to support the own vocation.

Jesus is the model of obedience to God the Father. I let Jesus to lead and show me the way to be faithful to the vowed of obedience.

Image Credit: br.mnpSVD



OBEY FIRST AND BE HAPPY

BR. DARWIN P. JAIME (PHS)



Image Credit: br.mnpSVD

Since I was a kid, I have always heard of the maxim “Obey first, before you disobey.” Usually our elders - grandparents and parents alike - tell this to their children and grandchildren, to remind them of always obeying their command as parents and guardians.

“Obey first before you disobey.” This maxim echoes in me as I have entered the life of being an SVD religious missionary brother. Being religious in nature, all SVD confreres are called to practice the Vow of Obedience. And among the three vows, namely Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, the Vow of Obedience for me is the hardest to live out.

To give you a glimpse, I would like to share my experience with you. Before entering the SVD last 2017 as an Associate seminarian at Christ the King Mission Seminary, I worked and handled different positions for 15 years in the School Administration as VP for Academics, Dean of Studies, HR Manager, and Senior High School Principal. I also had my Master's Degree in Information Technology, Master's Degree in Business Administration, and Ph.D. in Educational Management. I cannot imagine how I survived inside the seminary doing housework and groundwork. And what challenged me the most was to follow instructions given by young seminarians as our leaders in the seminary. I struggled with obedience because I used to be obeyed by my staff, being their superior. But in the seminary, there are times I was assigned to clean the toilet, mop the floor, wash the dishes, join in the marketing, and be the cook. I had to deal with seminarians who are younger than me. Some of them were senior high school seminarians. I likewise had to obey my superior and respect my fellow seminarians when they assigned me to do those chores, to prove that I am worthy of becoming an SVD religious missionary.

Inside the seminary, I've come to realize the deeper meaning of "OBEDIENCE" and the value of humility and respect. I always look for the learnings I will gain through those experiences and be happy for whatever assignment they will give to me.

I thank my parents for inculcating in me the value of obedience since I was a kid. By their simple way of saying "Obey first, before you disobey," I was gradually formed to obey them at first, then my superiors at work, and now, my superiors here in the seminary. This made me realize that when they tell me to obey their instructions, it is for my growth as a person, as a Christian, and as an SVD religious missionary.

Indeed, the will of God is manifested in what my formators are telling me to do. In response, I must obey, because it is not only for my growth, but for the people in the mission as well, that they may see, hear, and feel the presence of God in their midst.

OBEDY GOD FIRST OF ALL

JONAS VAZQUEZ (GHA)

Obedience is a key for my spiritual growth as Divine Word Missionary. Though at times it is not easy to obey to our superiors it is one of our vows to live our lives as Missionaries. It is important In light of the Word of God. Jesus obeyed his Father in everything, even to die on the cross as part of his mission. To me, obedience is obey God first of all, to listen to him and his will and if we understand this, it will be easier to obey our superiors.



Image Credit: br.mnpSVD



Image Credit: br.mnpSVD

A COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

BR. JUAN DATON (BOL)

When he was a postulant he had psychology classes. The teacher was an SVD brother from Flores Indonesia, his name is Bro. Simpli Hanavi SVD. He was a teacher in some institutes in the city of Ende, Flores, Indonesia. On one occasion Brother Simpli shared with us his experience of religious life. According to him, one of the hardest vows is the vow of obedience. Brother Simpli had important criteria about the vow of obedience. The vow of obedience strongly encompasses the other vows.

To reflect further, allow me to invite you to deepen the vow of obedience from the perspective of community life. In community life there are rules and orders. Those norms and orders have only one objective, it is to form a community with principles of religious life.

The community has schedules for prayer and lauds, the Eucharist, lectio divina, mingas, sports, meetings and being together at meal times. These hours are fixed because they have already been agreed upon at the community level. The schedules of religious life and community life help us to express and deepen our vow of obedience in a more dignified way.

The obligatory absence from the community for reasons of commitments is to obey the vow. It is a way of fulfilling the commitment according to the Gospel. The own absence that is done intentionally, means a disobedience to the vow. For example, not being in prayer and the Eucharist constantly. That attitude marks a broken relationship with Christ. It is an attitude of disobeying the call of Christ. Prayer and the Eucharist are measures to express the mutual encounter in dialogue with Christ. That is the most united closeness with Christ. That is the Gospel-based attitude. Here, one has to be subjected to unrestricted community allegiance. Because religious life is formed by the community that exists. We are the community. The vow of obedience creates clean and healthy spaces to live in the community. The vow of obedience is a vow without borders. It is a vow that does not lock anyone up. Instead, it is a very exclusive vow. Obedience has to be part of our religious culture. Our dialogue is sincere in a cultural aspect. It is one of our challenges today, because in this very modern age, there are confreres who continue to say: WE COME FROM A RICH COUNTRY. Here, our community dialogue is in danger. A danger, because the community is not in a good condition to create an intercultural dialogue based on common principles of life. It is a destructive attitude. Coming from a rich country is a saying that makes no sense.

It is a demonstration of intellectual poverty and indifference to others. It is an absolute disrespect to the community.

Failure to comply with the vow of obedience ruins the other vows. The constant absence in prayer and Eucharist does not help to express the vow of obedience in a more pleasant way. That disobedience is a deadly source for the other vows. If one disobeys his vows, then he falls into a deep trap. Disobedience is a main tool to create other personal crimes that put other votes at risk. For example, going out without permission for endless hours without clear goals. It is a danger, because one can take advantage of their absence from the community to create other problems that dirty the other votes. Creating too many reasons to be absent from the community is to disobey the vows because it puts community life at risk. A religious must be with his community for a longer time. That is to say that there is a normal and balanced balance between commitments and community life. Being with the community in prayer and Eucharist is a commitment to Christ. Failure to comply with this duty prevents a personal relationship with Christ and with the community. The personal relationship with Christ increasingly forms innumerable distances. There is a void in the spiritual life. Religious walking feels like a desert, without water, without shade, and without breath. One is alone, without anyone. At this stage the temptations already come. Bitter life without light leads one towards endless spiritual crisis. Christ is the Light of life. He, he is my cane, source of my path and my hope. Religious life has to be led by Christ.

The vow of obedience means being loyal to the confreres. There is always interpersonal dialogue within the religious community. There is a horizontal relationship between confreres, and the vow of obedience prevents vertical dialogue, because this type of vertical dialogue creates distance and marks the difference between one another. The horizontal dialogue is the most pleasant, because it is about being confreres. The vertical dialogue, in another aspect, is not about the fact that we are confreres, but it is about a more formal dialogue: between the boss and the other: (the one who is not a boss). If this type of dialogue is created, the boss becomes a type Superman, Batman, arrogant to intimidate and discriminate against the other. Thus, the boss is absolutely right and puts the other in a corner without end.

Jesus and the twelve lived in unity in a community of prayer and mission. Jesus himself was the main model of the disciples. He was the angular center of the life of the twelve. Jesus taught the twelve as Master, but in fraternal dialogue. The obedience of the twelve was a Light that shines for the world. This is the way to be disciples of Jesus. Christ is the figure that teaches us a perfect model of obedience. His life was a life in dialogue and in loyalty with his Father. Christ died on the Cross, it was a sign of obedience to his Father. It was an endless commitment. A pledge of eternal salvation.



Image Credit: br.mnpSVD



A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS UNITY

BR. EUGENIO OROG (PHC)

Image Credit: br.mnpSVD

Jesus said: "My food is to do the will of my Father who sent me." (Jn 4:34) This is the Obedience that Jesus hold on. He was obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8). Our SVD Constitution #214-220 has expounded this out beautifully.

Part of my reflection is from the book of Sandra Schneiders, *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious in Mission to the World*, Vol 3. On obedience she said: "God created human intelligence and freedom. We are not within our rights to renounce our God-given freedom any more, than we may be immobilize by our intelligence or terminate our own life. God not only does not demand the suppression of our own faculties, God is not pleased or honored by the rejection of these gifts. We must exercise our intelligence and freedom: the faculties we have being created into his image and likeness... Obedience is always and only something we do with our freedom not a way of abolishing it or escaping from it or sacrificing it." (p447)

"If religious obedience is to be prophetic today it has to find a way to criticize, challenge, and propose effective alternatives to both false autonomy that rejects all authority and a blind obedience that abandon all moral responsibility before the will of those in power. Formation for such obedience in today's sociocultural context require the development in candidates of an uncommon moral maturity in judgement and action." (p 364)

A mature obedience therefore is not a sacrifice, a suppression or a surrender of our freedom but the effort to maximize it by disciplining our spontaneity, educating and forming our free will towards the love of God and neighbor with our whole being. With this understanding it is not a tool for career opportunities and advancement. Being a religious missionary we must avoid careerism but rather use our giftedness to serve as "BROTHERS TO ALL."

This demands humility which is the foremost virtue counteracting selfishness, pride and a strong psychological tendency towards narcissisms. It s the foundation of all other Christian virtues. This begins when we value and appreciate that God is the Creator and we are only his creature. It is a radical dependency and obedience to God above all. From this we can have an honest estimate as to who we are and what we can be in our mission in life.

St. Benedict includes humility in his twelve rules for religious and likewise, St. Ignatius of Loyola in his Spiritual Exercise. Both of them emphasizes that obedience will make no sense unless it is lived in joy and self giving to God and for others.

So as we journey towards self knowledge and wholeness we need to be visible people not just as a different logo or brand name. The power of our presence and witness lies in the meaning of what we do and are. OBEEDIENCE AND ALWAYS!



FR. YAN DJAWA (IDE)

Heartfelt thanks for inviting the members of Arnold Janssen's family in this fellowship. I am Yan Djawa SVD, from IDE Province. SVD is my second family. Since my childhood in parish life, then my initial formation in elementary school, minor and major Seminary I was educated by the SVD team works. It consisted of SVD Priests, Brothers, lay collaborators and SSPS sisters. Later on in my ongoing formation, I met and lived in the same conducive situations marked by the living out of the religious vows, especially the vow of obedience.

Trying to elaborate your first question, let me share my experiences. In the 60s, our minor seminary was run by the SVDs and had a solid team of Brothers (Europeans and Indonesians). In daily activities, they were faithful to the community's spiritual exercises. They used to come earlier to the chapel. Most of them were joyful and prayerful fellows. It was attractive and convincing for the students in the first grade to follow Jesus in their spiritual journey.

They were responsible for the sustainability of the formation in extra-curricular domain. They were available for the seminarians who asked for their help. For example, the student came with a reminder note from the formator, to repair the water pipe, or to mend the chairs/tables, to replace the electric bulbs, etc. The Brothers would be willingly and as soon as possible fulfill the requests. Their lay collaborators in the workshop (carpentry, iron and machine) were also agile and helpful in their work, trained by the Brothers.

The Brothers who were responsible for musical instruments exercise, or football training were always on time waiting for the formandees to start the programs. So were the Brothers either of dental service, or cassock sewing/tailor. They were happy, ready and dispoible in giving hands to help you.

The same experiences and impressions I got in the SVD Generalate in Rome, in middle 80's, during my study extension. The winning team of Brothers was in charge of kitchen, laundry, mail, cleaning service, driving cars, door keeping/guest serving, garden/swimming pool taking care, office employer, etc. The tasks were well done saintly neat and precise. Sometimes I even thought, what if this solid team was on strike? What would happen to our main headquarter?! All of us might considerate their motivations in taking up the responsibility and how to maintain the dedicated commitment.

I wonder if this group of prayerful religious men had a deep rooted and nourished anchor in their vocation. They seemed to live out the same spirit of calling inherited by the first apostles of synoptics (Mk 1,16-20; Mt 4,18-22). How the fishermen reacted to Jesus' calling. They acted out their responses. Their obedience was expressed in action.

Special gratitude and appreciation for long range of Brothers, the living testimonies of actual obedience. Woow!! The valuable roots that support and inspire the SVD calling. It's worth re-learning and re-vitalizing. Praise the Lord of vocation!

I DECIDED NOT TO RESPOND

FR. WILLIAM BURT (AUS)

I have just received your latest questionnaire. I am constantly amazed by your dedication to being of service to our SVD community world wide! Thank you for being such an inspiration!

I have, however, decided not to respond to your questions, as I feel that my time for such input is over! I am an old pensioner, now. I think your readers need to hear comments from young people who are actively involved in ministry.

I will continue to support you with my prayers.

LAST WORDS FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Confreres,

Peace!

Thank you for reading and contributing to this issue. The next issue will be published in June 2022. The guide questions will reach you on April 30, 2022.

For the meantime, you can write comments on the present issue and/or suggest topics for the coming issues. We will be very happy to publish your insights. Moreover, we would deeply appreciate it if you could also attach some photos of you as you send us your articles.

Please, do send your comments and suggestions to this email addresses: blanyi@usc.edu.ph

You can write in any of the following languages: English, Spanish, Bahasa Indonesia, German, and Polish.

May we all have a blessed Lent and a happy Easter celebration.

In the Divine Word,

Your SVD Brothers Forum Publisher and Editors