

THOMAS R. KELLY
Holy Obedience
WILLIAM PENN LECTURE, 1939

William Penn Lecture 1939

Holy Obedience

Delivered at
Arch Street Meeting House
Philadelphia

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Published by The Book Committee
Religious Society of Friends
Philadelphia and Vicinity
302 Arch Street, Philadelphia

Published 1939 by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Republished electronically © 2004 by Quaker Heron Press
<http://www.quaker.org/pamphlets>
email: pamphlets@quaker.org

in breath and pant for Thee. I tasted, and hunger and thirst. Thou touchedst me and I burned for Thy peace. When I shall with my whole soul cleave to Thee, I shall nowhere have sorrow or labor, and my life shall live as wholly full of Thee.”

HOLY OBEDIENCE

Out in front of us is the drama of men and of nations, seething, struggling, laboring, dying. Upon this tragic drama in these days our eyes are all set in anxious watchfulness and in prayer. But within the silences of the souls of men an eternal drama is ever being enacted, in these days as well as in others. And on the outcome of this inner drama rests, ultimately, the outer pageant of history. It is the drama of the Hound of Heaven baying relentlessly upon the track of man. It is the drama of the lost sheep wandering in the wilderness, restless and lonely, feebly searching, while over the hills comes the wiser Shepherd. For His is a shepherd's heart, and restless until He holds His sheep in His arms. It is the drama of the Eternal Father drawing the prodigal home unto Himself, where there is bread enough and to spare. It is the drama of the Double Search, as Rufus Jones calls it. And always its chief actor is—the Eternal God of Love.

It is to one strand in this inner drama, one scene, where the Shepherd has found His sheep, that I would direct you. It is the life of absolute and complete and holy obedience to the voice of the Shepherd. But ever throughout the account the accent will be laid upon God, God the initiator, God the aggressor, God the seeker, God the stirrer into life, God the ground of our obedience, God the giver of the power to become children of God.

I. THE NATURE OF HOLY OBEDIENCE

Meister Eckhart wrote: “There are plenty to follow our Lord half-way, but not the other half. They will give up possessions, friends and honors, but it touches them too closely to disown themselves.” It is just this astonishing life which is willing to follow Him the other half, sincerely to disown itself, this life which intends complete obedience, without my reservations, that I would propose to you in all humility, in all boldness, in all seriousness. I mean this literally, utterly, completely, and I mean it for you and for me—commit your lives in unreserved obedience to Him.

If you don’t realize the revolutionary explosiveness of this proposal you don’t understand what I mean. Only now and then comes a man or a woman who, like John Woolman or Francis of Assisi, is willing to be utterly obedient, to go the other half, to follow God’s faintest whisper. But when such a commitment comes in a human life, God breaks through, miracles are wrought, world-renewing divine forces are released, history changes. There is nothing more important now than to have the human race endowed with just such committed lives. Now is no time to say, “Lo, here. Lo, there.” Now is the time to say, “Thou art the man.” To this extraordinary life I call you—or He calls you through me—not as a lovely ideal, a charming pattern to aim at hopefully, but as a serious, concrete program of life, to be lived here and now, in industrial America, by you and by me.

This is something wholly different from mild, conventional religion which, with respectable skirts held back by dainty fingers, anxiously tries to fish the world out of the mudhole of its own selfishness. Our churches, our meeting houses are full of such respectable and amiable people. We have plenty of Quakers to follow God the first half of the way. Many of us have become as mildly and as

across the fine distinctions between the several virtues and gathers all virtues into the one supreme quality of love. The wholly obedient life is mastered and unified and simplified and gathered up into the love of God and it lives and walks among men in the perpetual flame of that radiant love. For the simplified man loves God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength and abides trustingly in that love. Then indeed do we love our neighbors. And the Fellowship of the Horny Hands is identical with the Fellowship of the Transfigured Face, in this Mary-Martha life.

In this day when the burdens of humanity press so heavily upon us I would begin not first with techniques of service but with the most “Serious Call to a Devout Life,” a life of such humble obedience to the Inner Voice as we have scarcely dared to dream. Hasten unto Him who calls you in the silences of your heart. The Hound of Heaven is ever near us, the voice of the Shepherd is calling us home. Too long have we lingered in double-minded obedience and dared not the certainties of His love. For Him do ye seek, all ye pearl merchants. He is “the food of grown men.” Hasten unto Him who is the chief actor of the drama of time and Eternity. It is not too late to love Him utterly and obey Him implicitly and be baptized with the power of the apostolic life.

Hear the words of Saint Augustine, as he rued his delay of commitment to Him. “Too late loved I Thee, O Thou beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! Too late I loved Thee! And behold, Thou wert within and I abroad, and there I searched for Thee; deformed I, plunging amid those fair forms which Thou hadst made. Thou wert with me but I was not with Thee. Things held me far from Thee which, unless they were in Thee, were not at all. Thou calledst and shoutedst, and burstedst my deafness. Thou flashedst, shonest, and scattered my blindness. Thou breathedst odors, and I drew

the Transfigured Face. Knowing sorrow to the depths it does not agonize and fret and strain, but in serene, unhurried calm it walks in time with the joy and assurance of Eternity. Knowing fully the complexity of men's problems it cuts through to the Love of God and ever cleaves to Him. Like the mercy of Shakespeare, "'tis mightiest in the mightiest." But it binds all obedient souls together in the fellowship of humility and simple adoration of Him who is all in all.

I have in mind something deeper than the simplification of our external programs, our absurdly crowded calendars of appointments through which so many pantingly and frantically gasp. These do become simplified in holy obedience, and the poise and peace we have been missing can really be found. But there is a deeper, an internal simplification of the whole of one's personality, stilled, tranquil, in childlike trust listening ever to Eternity's whisper, walking with a smile into the dark.

This amazing simplification comes when we "center down," when life is lived with singleness of eye, from a holy Center where the breath and stillness of Eternity are heavy upon us and we are wholly yielded to Him. Some of you know this holy, recreating Center of eternal peace and joy and live in it day and night. Some of you may see it over the margin and wistfully long to slip into that amazing Center where the soul is at home with God. Be very faithful to that wistful longing. It is the Eternal Goodness calling you to return Home, to feed upon green pastures and walk beside still waters and live in the peace of the Shepherd's presence. It is the life *beyond* fevered strain. We are called beyond strain, to peace and power and joy and love and thorough abandonment of self. We are called to put our hands trustingly in His hand and walk the holy way, in no anxiety assuredly resting in Him.

Douglas Steere wisely says that true religion often appears to be the enemy of the moralist. For religion cuts

conventionally religious as were the church folk of three centuries ago, against whose mildness and mediocrity and passionlessness George Fox and his followers flung themselves with all the passion of a glorious and a new discovery and with all the energy of dedicated lives. In some, says William James, religion exists as a dull habit, in others as an acute fever. Religion as a dull habit is not that for which Christ lived and died.

There is a degree of holy and complete obedience and of joyful self-renunciation and of sensitive listening that is breathtaking. Difference of degree passes over into utter difference of kind, when one tries to follow Him the second half. Jesus put this pointedly when he said, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:3), and Paul knew it: "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17).

George Fox as a youth was religious enough to meet all earthly standards and was even proposed as a student for the ministry. But the insatiable God-hunger in him drove him from such mediocrity into a passionate quest for the real whole-wheat Bread of Life. Sensible relatives told him to settle down and get married. Thinking him crazy, they took him to a doctor to have his blood let—the equivalent of being taken to a psychiatrist in these days, as are modern conscientious objectors to war in Belgium and France. Parents, if some of your children are seized with this imperative God-hunger, don't tell them to snap out of it and get a job, but carry them patiently in your love, or at least keep hands off and let the holy work of God proceed in their souls. Young people, you who have in you the stirrings of perfection, the sweet, sweet rapture of God Himself within you, be faithful to Him until the last lingering bit of self is surrendered and you are wholly God-possessed.

The life that intends to be wholly obedient, wholly submissive, wholly listening, is astonishing in its

completeness. Its joys are ravishing, its peace profound, its humility the deepest, its power world-shaking, its love enveloping, its simplicity that of a trusting child. It is the life and power in which the prophets and apostles lived. It is the life and power of Jesus of Nazareth, who knew that “when thine eye is single thy whole body is full of light” (Luke 11: 34). It is the life and power of the apostle Paul, who resolved not to know anything among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It is the life and power of Saint Francis, that little poor man of God who came nearer to reliving the life of Jesus than has any other man on earth. It is the life and power of George Fox and of Isaac and Mary Penington. It is the life and power and utter obedience of John Woolman who decided, he says, “to place my whole trust in God,” to “act on an inner Principle of Virtue, and pursue worldly business no farther than as Truth opened my way therein.” It is the life and power of myriads of unknown saints through the ages. It is the life and power of some people now in this room who smile knowingly as I speak. And it is a life and power that can break forth in this tottering Western culture and return the Church to its rightful life as a fellowship of creative, heaven-led souls.

II. GATEWAYS INTO HOLY OBEDIENCE

In considering one gateway into this life of holy obedience, let us dare to venture together into the inner sanctuary of the soul, where God meets man in awful immediacy. There is an indelicacy in too-ready speech. Paul felt it unlawful to speak of the things of the third heaven. But there is also a false reticence, as if these things were one’s own work and one’s own possession, about which we should modestly keep quiet, whereas they are wholly God’s amazing work and we are nothing, mere passive receivers.

times are too tragic, God’s sorrow is too great, man’s night is too dark, the Cross is too glorious for us to live as we have lived, in anything short of holy obedience. It may or it may not mean change in geography, in profession, in wealth, in earthly security. It does mean this: Some of us will have to enter upon a vow of renunciation and of dedication to the “Eternal Internal” which is as complete and as irrevocable as was the vow of the monk of the Middle Ages.

Little groups of such utterly dedicated souls, knowing one another in Divine Fellowship, must take an irrevocable vow to live in this world yet not of this world, Franciscans of the Third Order, and if it be His will, kindle again the embers of faith in the midst of a secular world. Our meetings were meant to be such groups, but now too many of them are dulled and cooled and flooded by the secular. But within our meetings such inner bands of men and women, internally set apart, living by a vow of perpetual obedience to the Inner Voice, in the world yet not of the world, ready to go the second half, obedient as a shadow, sensitive as a shadow, selfless as a shadow—such bands of humble prophets can recreate the Society of Friends and the Christian church and shake the countryside for ten miles around.

V. SIMPLICITY

The last fruit of holy obedience is the simplicity of the trusting child, the simplicity of the children of God. It is the simplicity which lies beyond complexity. It is the naiveté which is the yonder side of sophistication. It is the beginning of spiritual maturity, which comes after the awkward age of religious busy-ness for the Kingdom of God—yet how many are caught, and arrested in development, within this adolescent development of the soul’s growth! The mark of this simplified life is radiant joy. It lives in the Fellowship of

Philadelphia and London, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make straight in this desert a highway for our God" (Isa. 40:3). These are old truths. But now is no time for enticing novelties but for a return to the everlasting truths of life and suffering and Eternity and unreserved commitment to Him who is over all.

The heart is stretched through suffering, and enlarged. But O the agony of this enlarging of the heart, that one may be prepared to enter into the anguish of others! Yet the way of holy obedience leads out from the heart of God and extends through the Valley of the Shadow.

But there is also removable suffering, yet such as yields only to years of toil and fatigue and unconquerable faith and perchance only to death itself. The Cross as dogma is painless speculation; the Cross as lived suffering is anguish and glory. Yet God, out of the pattern of His own heart, has planted the Cross along the road of holy obedience. And He enacts in the hearts of those He loves the miracle of willingness to welcome suffering and to know it for what it is—the final seal of His gracious love. I dare not urge you to your Cross. But He, more powerfully, speaks within you and me, to our truest selves, in our truest moments, and disquiets us with the world's needs. By inner persuasions He draws us to a few very definite tasks, *our* tasks, God's burdened heart particularizing His burdens in us. And He gives us the royal blindness of faith, and the seeing eye of the sensitized soul, and the grace of unflinching obedience. Then we see that nothing matters, and that everything matters, and that this my task matters for me and for my fellow men and for Eternity. And if we be utterly humble we may be given strength to be obedient even unto death, yea the death of the Cross.

In my deepest heart I know that some of us have to face our comfortable, self-oriented lives all over again. The

"The lion hath roared, who can but tremble? The voice of Jehovah hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:23)

Some men come into holy obedience through the gateway of profound mystical experience.

It is an overwhelming experience to fall into the hands of the living God, to be invaded to the depths of one's being by His presence, to be, without warning, wholly uprooted from all earth-born securities and assurances, and to be blown by a tempest of unbelievable power which leaves one's old proud self utterly, utterly defenseless, until one cries, "All Thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Ps. 42: 7). Then is the soul swept into a Loving Center of ineffable sweetness, where calm and unspeakable peace and ravishing joy steal over one.

And one knows now why Pascal wrote, in the center of his greatest moment, the single word, "Fire." There stands the world of struggling, sinful, earth-blinded men and nations, of plants and animals and wheeling stars of heaven, all new, all lapped in the tender, persuading Love at the Center. There stand the saints of the ages, their hearts open to view, and lo, their hearts are our heart and their hearts are the heart of the Eternal One. In awful solemnity the Holy One is over all and in all, exquisitely loving, infinitely patient, tenderly smiling. Marks of glory are upon all things, and the marks are cruciform and blood-stained. And one sighs, like the convinced Thomas of old, "My Lord and my God" (John 20: 28). Dare one lift one's eyes and look? Nay, whither can one look and not see Him? For field and stream and teeming streets are full of Him. Yet as Moses knew, no man can look on God and live—live as his old self. Death comes, blessed death, death of one's alienating will. And one knows what Paul meant when he wrote, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 220).

One emerges from such soul-shaking, Love-invaded times into more normal states of consciousness. But one knows ever after that the Eternal Lover of the world, the Hound of Heaven, is utterly, utterly real, and that life must henceforth be forever determined by that Real. Like Saint Augustine one asks not for greater certainty of God but only for more steadfastness in Him. There, beyond, in Him is the true Center, and we are reduced, as it were, to nothing, for He is all.

Is religion subjective? Nay, its soul is in objectivity, in an Other whose Life is our true life, whose Love is our love, whose Joy is our joy, whose Peace is our peace, whose burdens are our burdens, whose Will is our will. Self is emptied into God, and God in-fills it. In glad, amazed humility we cast on Him our little lives in trusting obedience, in erect, serene, and smiling joy. And we say, with a writer of Psalms, "Lo, I come: in the book of the law it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God" (Ps. 40:7-8). For nothing else in all of heaven or earth counts so much as His will, His slightest wish, His faintest breathing. And holy obedience sets in, sensitive as a shadow, obedient as a shadow, selfless as a shadow. Not reluctantly but with ardor one longs to follow Him the second half. Gladly, urgently, promptly one leaps to do His bidding, ready to run and not be weary and to walk and not faint.

Do not mistake me. Our interest just now is in the life of complete obedience to God, not in amazing revelations of His glory graciously granted only to some. Yet the amazing experiences of the mystics leave a permanent residue, a God-subdued, a God-possessed will. States of consciousness are fluctuating. The vision fades. But holy and listening and alert obedience remains, as the core and kernel of a God-intoxicated life, as the abiding pattern of sober, workaday living. And some are led into the state of complete obedience

religion has always said so, but we haven't believed it. And some of us Quakers are not yet undeceived, and childishly expect our little cushions for our little bodies, in a world inflamed with untold ulcers. Be not fooled by the pleasantness of the Main Line life, and the niceness of Germantown existence, and the quiet coolness of your well-furnished homes. For the plagues of Egypt are upon the world, entering hovel and palace, and there is no escape for you or for me. There is an inexorable amount of suffering in all life, blind, aching, unremovable, not new but only terribly intensified in these days.

One comes back from Europe aghast at having seen how lives as graciously cultured as ours, but rooted only in time and property and reputation, and self-deluded by a mild veneer of religious respectability but unprepared by the amazing life of commitment to the Eternal in holy obedience, are now doomed to hopeless, hopeless despair. For if you will accept as normal life only what you can understand, then you will try only to expel the dull, dead weight of Destiny, of inevitable suffering which is a part of normal life, and never come to terms with it or fit your soul to the collar and bear the burden of your suffering which must be borne by you, or enter into the divine education and drastic discipline of sorrow, or rise radiant in the sacrament of pain.

One comes back from Europe to plead with you, you here in these seats, you my pleasant but often easy-living friends, to open your lives to such a baptism of Eternity now as turns this world of tumbling change into a wilderness in your eyes and fortifies you with an unshakable peace that passes all understanding and endures all earthly shocks without soul-destroying rebelliousness. Then and then only can we, weaned from earth, and committed wholly to God alone, hope to become voices crying in this wilderness of

matters.” It is a key of entrance into suffering. He who knows only one-half of the paradox can never enter that door of mystery and survive.

There is a lusty, adolescent way of thought among us which oversimplifies the question of suffering. It merely says, “Let us remove it.” And some suffering can, through more suffering, be removed. But there is an inexorable residue which confronts you and me and the blighted souls of Europe and China and the Near East and India, awful, unremovable in a lifetime, withering all souls not genuinely rooted in Eternity itself. The Germans call it *Schicksal* or *Destiny*. Under this word they gather all the vast forces of nature and disease and the convulsive upheavals of social life which sweep them along, as individuals, like debris in a raging flood, into an unknown end. Those who are not prepared by the inner certitude of Job, “I know that my Avenger liveth” (Job 19: 25), must perish in the flood.

One returns from Europe with the sound of weeping in one’s ears, in order to say, “Don’t be deceived. *You* must face *Destiny*. Preparation is only possible now. Don’t be fooled by your sunny skies. When the rains descend and the floods come and the winds blow and beat upon your house, your private dwelling, your own family, your own fair hopes, your own strong muscles, your own body, your own soul itself, then it is well-nigh too late to build a house. You can only go inside what house you have and pray that it is founded upon the Rock. Be not deceived by distance in time or space, or the false security of a bank account and an automobile and good health and willing hands to work. Thousands, perhaps millions as good as you have had all these things and are perishing in body and, worse still, in soul today.”

An awful solemnity is upon the earth, for the *last vestige* of earthly security is gone. *It has always been gone*, and

by this well-nigh passive route, wherein God alone seems to be the actor and we seem to be wholly acted upon. And our wills are melted and dissolved and made pliant, being firmly fixed in Him, and He wills in us.

But in contrast to this passive route to complete obedience most people must follow what Jean-Nicholas Grou calls the active way, wherein we must struggle and, like Jacob of old, wrestle with the angel until the morning dawns, the active way wherein the will must be subjected bit by bit, piecemeal and progressively, to the divine Will.

But the first step to the obedience of the second half is the flaming vision of the wonder of such a life, a vision which comes occasionally to us all, through biographies of the saints, through the journals of Fox and early Friends, through a life lived before our eyes, through a haunting verse of the Psalms—“Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee” (Ps. 73: 25)—through meditation upon the amazing life and death of Jesus, through a flash of illumination or, in Fox’s language, a great opening.

But whatever the earthly history of this moment of charm, this vision of an absolutely holy life is, I am convinced, the invading, urging, inviting, persuading work of the Eternal One. It is curious that modern psychology cannot account wholly for flashes of insight of any kind, sacred or secular. It is as if a fountain of creative Mind were welling up, bubbling to expression within prepared spirits. There is an infinite fountain of lifting power, pressing within us, luring us by dazzling visions, and we can only say, The creative God comes into our souls. An increment of infinity is about us. Holy is imagination, the gateway of Reality into our hearts. The Hound of Heaven is on our track, the God of Love is wooing us to His Holy Life.

Once having the vision, the second step to holy obedience is this: Begin where you are. Obey now. Use what

little obedience you are capable of, even if it be like a grain of mustard seed. Begin where you are. Live this present moment, this present hour as you now sit in your seats, in utter, utter submission and openness toward Him. Listen outwardly to these words, but within, behind the scenes, in the deeper levels of your lives where you are all alone with God the Loving Eternal One, keep up a silent prayer, "Open Thou my life. Guide my thoughts where I dare not let them go. But Thou dares. Thy will be done." Walk on the streets and chat with your friends. But every moment behind the scenes be in prayer, offering yourselves in continuous obedience.

I find this internal continuous prayer life absolutely essential. It can be carried on day and night, in the thick of business, in home and school. Such prayer of submission can be so simple. It is well to use a single sentence, repeated over and over and over again, such as this: "Be Thou my will. Be Thou my will," or "I open all before Thee. I open all before Thee," or "See earth through heaven, See earth through heaven." This hidden prayer life can pass, in time, beyond words and phrases into mere ejaculations, "My God, my God, my Holy One, my Love," or into the adoration of the Upanishad, "O Wonderful, O Wonderful, O Wonderful." Words may cease and one stands and walks and sits and lies in wordless attitudes of adoration and submission and rejoicing and exultation and glory.

And the third step in holy obedience, or a counsel, is this: If you slip and stumble and forget God for an hour, and assert your old proud self, and rely upon your own clever wisdom, don't spend too much time in anguished regrets and self-accusations but begin again, just where you are.

Yet a fourth consideration in holy obedience is this: Don't grit your teeth and clench your fists and say, "I will! I

a separated life, a renounced life, cut off from worldly compromises, distinct, heaven-dedicated in the midst of men, stainless as the snows upon the mountain tops.

He who walks in obedience, following God the second half, living the life of inner prayer of submission and exultation, on him God's holiness takes hold as a mastering passion of life. Yet ever he cries out in abysmal sincerity, "I am the blackest of all the sinners of the earth. I am a man of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of Hosts." For humility and holiness are twins in the astonishing birth of obedience in the heart of men. So God draws unworthy us, in loving tenderness, up into fellowship with His glorious self.

IV. ENTRANCE INTO SUFFERING

Another fruit of holy obedience is entrance into suffering. I would not magnify joy and rapture, although they are unspeakably great in the committed life. For joy and rapture need no advocates. But we shrink from suffering and can easily call all suffering an evil thing. Yet we live in an epoch of tragic sorrows, when man is adding to the crueler forces of nature such blasphemous horrors as drag soul as well as body into hell. And holy obedience must walk in this world, not aloof and preoccupied, but stained with sorrow's travail.

Nor is the God-blinded soul given blissful oblivion but, rather, excruciatingly sensitive eyesight toward the world of men. The sources of suffering for the tendered soul are infinitely multiplied, well-nigh beyond all endurance. Ponder this paradox in religious experience: "Nothing matters; everything matters." I recently had an unforgettable hour with a Hindu monk. He knew the secret of this paradox which we discussed together: "Nothing matters; everything

God in Christ, how captivating, how alluring, how compelling it is! The pure in heart shall see God? More, they who see God shall cry out to become pure in heart, even as He is pure, with all the energy of their souls.

This has been an astonishing and unexpected element for me. In this day of concern for social righteousness it sounds like a throwback to medieval ideals of saintliness and soul-combing. Our religious heroes of these social gospel days sit before a battery of telephones, with full office equipment, with telegraph lines to Washington and London and Tokyo and Berlin. And this is needed, desperately needed. Yet there is in the experience of God this insistent, imperative, glorious yearning—the craving for complete spotlessness of the inner self before Him.

No average goodness will do, no measuring of our lives by our fellows, but only a relentless, inexorable divine standard. No relatives suffice; only absolutes satisfy the soul committed to holy obedience. Absolute honesty, absolute gentleness, absolute self-control, unwearied patience and thoughtfulness in the midst of the raveling friction of home and office and school and shop. It is said that the ermine can be trapped by surrounding it with a circle of filth. It will die before it will sully its snowy coat.

Have we been led astray by our fears, by the fear of saccharine sweetness and light? By the dangers of fanatical scrupulousness and self-inspection and halo-hunting? By the ideal of a back-slapping recommendation of religion by showing we were good fellows after all? By the fear of quietism and of that monastic retreat from the world of men's needs which we associate with medieval passion for holiness of life? Nay, tread not so far from the chasm that you fall into the ditch on the other side. Boldly must we risk the dangers which lie along the margins of excess, if we would live the life of the second half. For the life of obedience is a holy life,

will!" Relax. Take hands off. Submit yourself to God. Learn to live in the passive voice—a hard saying for Americans—and let life be willed through you. For "I will" spells not obedience.

III. HUMILITY AND HOLINESS

The fruits of holy obedience are many. But two are so closely linked together that they can scarcely be treated separately. They are the passion for personal holiness and the sense of utter humility. God inflames the soul with a craving for absolute purity. But He, in His glorious otherness, empties us of ourselves in order that He may become all.

Humility does not rest, in final count, upon bafflement and discouragement and self-disgust at our shabby lives, a brow-beaten, dog-slinking attitude. It rests upon the disclosure of the consummate wonder of God, upon finding that only God counts, that all our own self-originated intentions are works of straw. And so in lowly humility we must stick close to the Root and count our own powers as nothing except as they are enslaved in His power.

But O how slick and weasel-like is self-pride! Our learnedness creeps into our sermons with a clever quotation which adds nothing to God's glory, but a bit to our own. Our cleverness in business competition earns as much self-flattery as does the possession of the money itself. Our desire to be known and approved by others, to have heads nod approvingly about us behind our backs, and flattering murmurs which we can occasionally overhear, confirm the discernment in Alfred Adler's elevation of the superiority motive. Our status as "weighty Friends" gives us secret pleasures which we scarcely own to ourselves, yet thrive upon. Yes, even pride in our own humility is one of the devil's own tricks.

But humility rests upon a holy blindedness, like the blindedness of him who looks steadily into the sun. For wherever he turns his eyes on earth, there he sees only the sun. The God-blinded soul sees naught of self, naught of personal degradation or of personal eminence, but only the Holy Will working impersonally through him, through others, as one objective Life and Power. But what trinkets we have sought after in life, the pursuit of what petty trifles has wasted our years as we have ministered to the enhancement of our own little selves! And what needless anguishes we have suffered because *our* little selves were defeated, were not flattered, were not cozened and petted!

But the blinding God blots out this self and gives humility and true self-hood as wholly full of Him. For as He gives obedience so He graciously gives to us what measure of humility we will accept. Even that is not our own, but His who also gives us obedience. But the humility of the God-blinded soul endures only so long as we look steadily at the Sun. Growth in humility is a measure of our growth in the habit of the Godward-directed mind. And he only is near to God who is exceedingly humble. The last depths of holy and voluntary poverty are not in financial poverty, important as that is; they are in poverty of spirit, in meekness and lowliness of soul.

Explore the depths of humility, not with your intellects but with your lives, lived in prayer of humble obedience. And there you will find that humility is not merely a human virtue. For there is a humility that is in God Himself. Be ye humble as God is humble. For love and humility walk hand in hand, in God as well as in man.

But there is something about deepest humility which makes men bold. For utter obedience is self-forgetful obedience. No longer do we hesitate and shuffle and apologize because, say we, we are weak, lowly creatures and the world

is a pack of snarling wolves among whom we are sent as sheep by the Shepherd (Matt. 10:16). I must confess that, on human judgment, the world tasks we face are appalling—well-nigh hopeless. Only the inner vision of God, only the God-blindedness of unreservedly dedicated souls, only the utterly humble ones can bow and break the raging pride of a power-mad world.

But self-renunciation means God-possession, the being possessed by God. Out of utter humility and self-forgetfulness comes the thunder of the prophets, “Thus saith the Lord.” High station and low are leveled before Him. Be not fooled by the world’s power. Imposing institutions of war and imperialism and greed are wholly vulnerable for they, and we, are forever in the hands of a conquering God. These are not cheap and hasty words. The high and noble adventures of faith can in our truest moments be seen as no adventures at all, but certainties. And if we live in complete humility in God we can smile in patient assurance as we work. Will you be wise enough and humble enough to be little fools of God? For who can finally stay His power? Who can resist His persuading love? Truly says Saint Augustine, “There is something in humility which raiseth the heart upward.” And John Woolman says, “Now I find that in the pure obedience the mind learns contentment, in appearing weak and foolish to the wisdom which is of the World; and in these lowly labors, they who stand in a low place, rightly exercised under the Cross, will find nourishment.”

But God inflames the soul with a burning craving for absolute purity. One burns for complete innocence and holiness of personal life. No man can look on God and live, live in his own faults, live in the shadow of the least self-deceit, live in harm toward His least creatures, whether man or bird or beast or creeping thing. The blinding purity of