

“THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH” IN *DEI VERBUM*:
A PAULINE PHRASE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CATHOLIC
INTELLECTUAL LIFE

Rev. Daniel B. Gallagher, M.A., Ph.L., S.T.L.

The American Maritain Association convenes this year to commemorate several anniversaries. December 8th marks the Fortieth Anniversary of the solemn liturgy, celebrated by Pope Paul VI in Saint Peter’s Basilica, which brought the Second Vatican Council to a close. The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* had been promulgated on the previous day. Twenty-three days later, Jacques Maritain would pen the preface to *The Peasant of the Garonne*. Each of these events is indeed worthy of commemoration. One would hope, however, that the *Divine Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, promulgated on November 18th of 1965, would receive no less attention on the Fortieth Anniversary of its publication. “Because of its inner importance,” Archbishop Ermenegildo Florit of Florence remarked, “as well as the many vicissitudes it has undergone, the history of the draft of the Constitution on Divine Revelation has fused with the history of this Council into a kind of unity.”¹

In what follows, I would like to revisit *Dei Verbum* with the intention of re-presenting its rich doctrine on Christian faith, a doctrine worthy of closer attention on the part of theologians and philosophers alike. The fathers at Vatican II offered the biblical notion of “obedience” as a privileged way of understanding the Christian response to divine revelation. Rather than entering into the many practical applications of “obedience” to the day-to-day work of professional philosophers and theologians, I will focus more narrowly on the reasons for which this Pauline term was adopted and then proceed to draw out some of its theological and philosophical implications.

My method will be the following. First, I compare the corresponding passages from Vatican I and Vatican II, which discuss the act of faith

¹ See the *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 155.

and consider briefly the evolution of the text in the latter. I then consider some of the more salient theological implications of the Pauline phrase. In the third section, I examine the work of scriptural exegetes on the phrase "obedience of faith" as we find it in Paul's Letter to the Romans. Finally, I turn to *Fides et Ratio* to illustrate the full import of the biblical phrase through Pope John Paul II's personalist analysis of the act of faith.

I

Vatican I: *Dei Filius*

Cum homo a Deo tamquam creatore et Domino suo totus dependeat et ratio creata in-creatae Veritati penitus subiecta est, plenum revelanti Deo intellectus et voluntatis obsequium fide praestare tenemur.

Vatican II: *Dei Verbum*

Deo revelanti praestanda est *oboeditio fidei*, qua homo se totum libere Deo committit "plenum revelanti Deo intellectus et voluntatis obsequium" praestando et voluntarie revelationi ab Eo data assentiendo.

Both *Dei Filius* and *Dei Verbum* orient the act of faith toward a specific object, the knowledge of which, albeit naturally accessible to man in an imperfect way, transcends all human faculties. In both cases, faith is directed toward the God who reveals (*Deo revelanti*). However, we immediately notice a difference between *Dei Filius* and *Dei Verbum* in that the latter highlights the importance of conceiving the act of faith as a total and unmitigated personal commitment to God rather than a commitment of individual human faculties or powers. To describe the act of faith, Vatican I adopted the phrase "*plenum revelanti Deo intellectus et voluntatis obsequium fide praestare*."² The word *fide*, in the ablative case,

² Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. Peter Hünermann, 3008. Heinrich Fries notes that even though the dative *revelanti Deo* is present, the *obsequium* objectifies the dative of the response of faith and de-personalizes it. Consequently, the teaching of Vatican I is *Instructionstheoretische*. "...hier werde ein unpersonaler 'Es' - und Daßglaube vorgestellt - der 'Du-Glaube', die Wahrheit als Begegnung, gehe dabei verloren." *Fundamentaltheologie*, 310. Nonetheless, because of its invaluable contribution to a greater

describes the means by which the *obsequium* is offered. The meaning of *fide*, as an ablative of instrument, remains faithful to the Tridentine doctrine affirming the divine infusion of the theological virtues. We could say that faith, as a virtue infused by God, leads to the *obsequium* which man himself offers as a response to the supernatural gift of faith.

In paragraph 5 of *Dei Verbum*, however, the description of what is offered to God who reveals himself is significantly modified (“*obsequium*” in *Dei Filius* → “*totum se*” in *Dei Verbum*)³, as well as the description of the way in which it is offered (“*fide*” in *Dei Filius* → “*oboeditio fidei ... quâ*” in *Dei Verbum*). The wording we find in *Dei Verbum* is a result of several petitions submitted by the bishops at the Council for a description of faith which might adhere more ostensibly to biblical formulations.⁴ At the same time, there is an anthropological

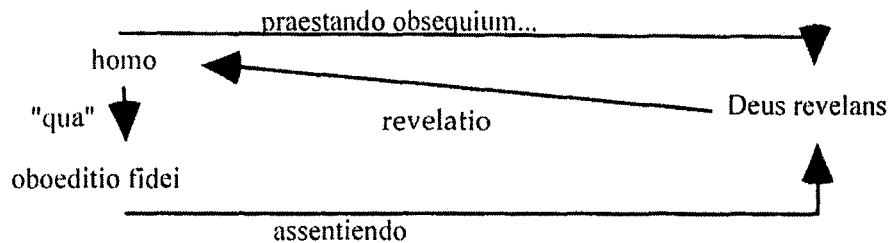
understanding of the intellectual element of faith, “Das I. Vatikanum ist besser als sein Ruf.” Ibid.

³ Although “obedience” is not used in *Dei Filius* to describe the initial faith response to God who reveals, it is used in reference to the necessity of grace for the act of faith to occur. “Quare fides ipsa in se, etiamsi per caritatem non operetur (cf. Gal. 5.6), donum Dei est, et actus eius est opus ad salutem pertinens, quo homo liberam praestat ipsi Deo oboedientiam gratiae eius, cui resistere posset, consentiendo et cooperando.” Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. Peter Hünermann, p. 3010.

⁴ In the *Relatio* of the *Commissio Theologica* we read: “Plures postulant, ut praebeatur *descriptio fidei* magis biblica et personalistica, quae melius respondeat descriptioni datae de revelatione ipsa.” Francesco Gil Hellin, *Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis: Dei Verbum*, 697. I do not want to suggest that the term *obsequium* lacks biblical roots. Indeed, there are several examples of its use in the Vulgate. However, in the specific context of *Dei Filius*, *obsequium* was not explicitly chosen in view of its direct citation of scripture. In the Vulgate, *obsequium* is used to translate *latreia* from the Greek. Ratzinger and Rahner make direct reference to *obsequium* as *latreia* in Rom. 12.1 (see below). In the *Sentences*, Thomas Aquinas uses the term “obsequium” to refer to any general service of one person to another. Drawing from the Greek *latreia*, Thomas denotes the specific *obsequium* rendered to God as *latria*. Thomas interprets the use of *obsequium* in Rom. 12.1 as expressive of the offering of oneself through a life grounded in the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Joseph Henchey, “La formula ‘in obsequium’ nel linguaggio di S. Tommaso,” *Angelicum* 69 (1992): 454-56. *Obsequium* is also used in the New Testament to translate *leitourgia*, which, in Phil. 2.17, takes the genitive case *tēs pisteōs*.

shift underpinning the entire topic of revelation and faith in *Dei Verbum*. Man not only subjects himself to God through faith on the basis of his utter dependence on God, he also realizes what it means to be human precisely by committing himself to God through faith. In the final section, we shall turn to consider how this is fleshed out in Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.

The dynamic response of faith as described in paragraph 5 of *Dei Verbum* might roughly be diagrammed as follows:



II

Far from promulgating a definitive, self-contained formulation of "faith," *Dei Verbum* opens a realm of possibilities for further theological and philosophical reflection. Rather than setting boundaries, a phrase as pregnant as "obedience of faith" allows us to investigate more deeply the spiritual, intellectual, and ethical aspects of Christian faith.

Juan Alfaro commends the selection of Romans 1.5 as a way of underscoring the essential notion of self-giving in faith.⁵ Such an understanding attends to the continual re-commitment that takes place throughout one's life,⁶ thus leaving open the possibility that the

Finally, *obsequium* is even used to translate "obedience" (*hupakoē*) in 2 Cor. 10.5.

⁵ "Rinovando il concetto della rivelazione, il Vaticano II ha rinnovato logicamente anche quello della fede come risposta dell'uomo all'automanifestazione e autodonazione di Dio in Cristo." Juan Alfaro, *Rivelazione Cristiana, Fede e Teologia* (Brescia: Queriana, 1986), 116.

⁶ "La fede cristiana richiede la sua attuazione nelle circostanze della vita d'ogni giorno; è una decisione radicale, che esige sempre decisioni concrete nuove. La permanente tentazione di cullarsi nella decisione presa una volta è una

initial act of faith will wane if one fails to draw nourishment and strength from the sacraments, prayer, and upright moral living.⁷

Alfaro's distinctive theology of the supernatural virtues complements the doctrinal formulation of faith found in *Dei Verbum*. A theology that considers faith, hope, and love as constitutive of Christian existence rises above the debate of how *fides informis* relates to the "obedience of faith" because it proposes a harmonious unity of the theological virtues understood as three "aspects" of Christian existence. While neither disparaging the supernatural origin of the infused virtues nor ignoring the legitimate distinctions among them, Alfaro chooses to focus on the dynamism of the concrete, willing human person and his or her experience of believing, hoping, and loving that flow from the life of grace. Each of the theological virtues

minaccia imminente sulla stessa fede." Juan Alfaro, *Rivelazione Cristiana, Fede e Teologia* (Brescia: Queriana, 1986), 113. "Faith answering to the Gospel can thus also be called obedience by Paul since an affirming posture necessarily results in the gospel itself determining the believer's life and action from then on ... Paul shows here that the affirming acceptance of the gospel does not just represent a one-time act which takes place at the beginning of being a Christian; that faith which stands at the beginning needs rather to be sustained in the entire life of the Christian." Hans-Jürgen Hermisson & Edward Lohse, *Faith* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1981), 146.

⁷ "Può capitare che un uomo sia considerato o consideri se stesso non credente, mentre nell'atteggiamento profondo della sua libertà e nelle sue azioni ubbidisce a un valore assoluto (il cui vero nome, Dio, ignora senza colpa), e in questa scelta permanente e radicale riconosce il Dio della rivelazione, vivendo di conseguenza a livello esistenziale la decisione della fede, benchè non la esprime concettualmente nell'affermazione del messaggio cristiano." Alfaro, *Rivelazione Cristiana, Fede e Teologia*, 114. "In piena fedeltà al dato biblico, il concilio presenta la fede come risposta totale dell'uomo e mette in risalto la dimensione di dono fiducioso di se stesso alla grazia di Dio in Cristo, senza dimenticare l'aspetto di prassi della fede come "obediencia" e "testimonianza" che hanno compimento nell'azione del cristiano." Alfaro, *Rivelazione Cristiana, Fede, e Teologia*, 116-117. Alfaro also recognizes that unfortunately "la teologia cattolica e quella protestante continuano a parlare della prassi del credente come se fosse solo risultato ed espressione della fede e non una dimensione costitutiva della fede in se stessa." *Ibid.*, 127.

entails a radical response to orient oneself toward God who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ.

Heinrich Fries also draws attention to the fecundity of Paul's phrase in Romans understood as the totality of man's response.⁸ The self-abandonment of the person implicitly contained within it places in greater relief the divinity of its "object."⁹ Rino Fisichella urges readers

⁸ "The narrowing conceptions of faith as intellectual belief in dogmas or as fiducial faith are absorbed in the larger definition of faith as the total Yes of persons who, in the realization of their existence, give themselves over totally to God who is, in Jesus Christ, the way and truth of human beings." Fries, *Fundamental Theology*, 379. Dario Vitali also notes the importance of overturning a limited understanding of faith as *obsequium*: "Parlare dell'uomo che si abbandona tutto a Dio liberamente è ben altra cosa che parlare di pieno assequio dell'intelletto all verità rivelate, la formula conciliare recupera la totalità e la complessità dell'atto di fede, in correlazione all complessità del concetto di Rivelazione. Se, infatti, la Rivelazione non è unicamente un insieme di verità da credere, ma è anzitutto la libera e gratuita autocomunicazione di Dio all'uomo in Cristo — 'Piacque a Dio nella sua bontà e sapienza rivelare se stesso e far conoscere il mistero della sua volontà, mediante il quale gli uomini per mezzo di Cristo, Verbo fatto carne, nello Spirito Santo hanno accesso al Padre e sono resi partecipi della natura divina' — la fede non può essere unicamente un assenso intellettuale a delle verità, ma un atto che tocca e coinvolge l'uomo in tutto il suo essere. In altre parole, il recupero della Rivelazione in tutta la sua profondità e complessità di evento trascina anche il recupero di una realtà altrettanto articolata sul versante della fede. La fede appare allora come il 'si' integrale dell'uomo a Dio, che lo introduce nella partecipazione alla divina natura" (*emphasis mine*). *Esistenza Cristiana: fede, speranza, e carità* (in publication), 20. Vorgrimler contrasts the response of the total person in faith with previous intellectualistic misconceptions. Herbert Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 177.

⁹ "...it must be said that it is not without significance that the attempt to present the total character of faith primarily makes use of the idea of obedience and only secondarily takes up the idea of trust. This makes it clear that self-abandonment in faith is not without direction, but includes commitment to the word, and that this self-abandonment of faith means a readiness for the concrete manner of the encounter with God and his claim, as these are brought to me historically through the preaching of the Church. That this view is entirely in accordance with the Pauline *kerygma* has been shown impressively in the works of R. Bultmann." Vorgrimler, *Commentary*

of *Dei Verbum* not to miss the way the Pauline phrase alludes to an attentive listening to, and faithful proclamation of, the salvific Word of God.¹⁰

The primary motive for the insertion of the phrase “obedience of faith” into the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* was to broaden the conciliar teaching on faith by highlighting the personalist aspects of total self-giving and trust contained in the scriptural term.¹¹ The

on the Documents of Vatican II, 179. “La parola ‘obediencia’ perciò non deve sorprendere; essa deve essere intesa nel suo significato biblico. Da esso si ricava un contenuto molto ricco e intenso che fa della fede non un puro atto intellettuale, ma un atto vitale ed esistenziale, cioè la risposta che l’uomo dà a Dio con tutto il suo essere; meglio ancora, la fede è l’esperienza che l’umanità fa di Dio e della sua parola.” Giovanni Cardaropoli, *Introduzione alla fede cristiana* (Bologna: Piemme, 1991), 151.

¹⁰ “La fede si gioca sull’obbedienza e questa ne costituisce la sua forma più coerente; essa dipende dall’ascolto e viceversa, così come l’ascolto porta all’obbedienza. In una parola, per Paolo, la fede è centrata nella formulazione cristologica che sintetizza il mistero pasquale: passione-morte-risurrezione del Signore.” Rino Fisichella, *Quando la fede pensa* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1997), 128. Fisichella also stresses the generous and free act of self-giving: “(La fede) costituisce l’atto mediante il quale con tutto se stesso, ognuno si abbandona obbedienzialmente all’voluntà del Padre.” Fisichella, *Quando la fede pensa*, 235. Compare Alfaro: “La frase del Concilio Vaticano II ‘se totum Deo committit’ dice, con lo stesso verbo, che l’uomo, nella fede, si dà e si abbandona a Dio.” Alfaro, *Rivelazione Cristiana, Fede e Teologia*, 124.

¹¹ The documents leading up to the final draft of the *Constitution on Divine Revelation* reveal that the phrase “obedience of faith” found its way into the later *Schemata* by way of the document *De deposito fidei pure custodiendo* which was completed in July of 1961 and discussed by the *Commissio Theologica* in September of the same year. Brendon J. Cahill, *The Renewal of Revelation Theology (1960-1962): the development and responses to the fourth chapter of the Preparatory Schema “De deposito Fidei”* (Rome: Gregoriana, 1999), 71-107. At the beginning of chapter 4, we find the paragraph in which the “*notio catholica*” of revelation and faith is described. Dhanis’ *De revelatione et fide*, which had been proposed prior to the drafting of *De deposito fidei pure custodiendo*, adopts the word *obsequium* found in *Dei Filius*, but does not contain the expression *oboedientia fidei* (“...sapiientissimus Deus voluit ut obsequium illius fidei rationi constantaneum est”). *Ibid.*, 309. Despite the absence of the term in Dhanis’ text, he made a valuable contribution toward an understanding of the act of faith

conciliar fathers believed that the Pauline expression “obedience of faith” most fully captures this sense.¹² A study of the conciliar interventions shows that the bishops believed the phrase embraced both the initial response to God who reveals Himself and the continual, day-by-day living out of that response. Obedience is neither merely the addition of *obsequium* and *assensus* nor is it simply the “handing-over” of one’s intellectual and voluntary faculties. It is a commitment of the entire self *quadam proportione* to God’s own self-giving as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. Consequently, the obedience of faith is intimately tied to the more personalist view of revelation that emerges from paragraphs 2 through 4 of *Dei Verbum*.

Let us now turn to consider briefly the original context of the phrase within Paul’s letter to the Romans to appreciate further the remarkable affinity between the conclusions drawn by scriptural exegetes and the motives that drove the conciliar Fathers to adopt the phrase.

III

The body of Paul’s letter to the Romans is sandwiched between two occurrences of the expression “obedience of faith” (*hupakoē pisteōs*) in verses 1.5 and 16.26, a term he uses to summarize the scope of his mission to the Gentiles, among whom are included the Romans. At the

in more personalized terms by suggesting a citation of “*fides ex auditu*” from Rom. 10.17 to render a more specifically Pauline understanding of faith. These two contributions paved the way to an understanding of faith as “obedience” even before explicit citations of Rom 1.5 and 16.26 were inserted into *Dei Verbum*.

¹² The following key intervention by Julius Cardinal Dörpfner best summarizes the reasons for adopting the wording found in *Dei Verbum*: “Haec paragraphus agit ‘de fide revelationi praebenda,’ i.e. de responso ab homine Deo sese revelanti dando. Quo in connexu pro necessitatibus praedicationis hodiernae et pro fine pastoralis huius Concilii non sufficit tantummodo repetere conceptum fidei a Concilio Vaticano I traditum, licet verissimum, sed fere non nisi apologeticum; potius necesse est iam inde ab initio prae oculis habere notionem biblicam fidei et efferre indolem eius personalem necnon influxum gratiae divinae.” Francesco Gil Hellin, *Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis: Dei Verbum* (Rome: Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 533.

beginning of the letter, Paul directly links his commission to bring about the obedience of faith in his hearers to his own office of apostleship.¹³ The same designation is repeated at the end of the epistle, this time in connection with the gospel of Jesus Christ, which "has been disclosed through the prophetic scriptures for the purpose of bringing about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles" (Rom. 16.26).

Although it is highly significant that Paul designates the obedience of faith as the aim of his missionary activity at both the beginning and the end of the letter,¹⁴ the precise import of the phrase is somewhat vague in respect to the teaching developed within the body of the letter. The much-debated point about the purpose of the epistle complicates the search for a precise meaning of "obedience," especially in reference to the Christian community in Rome.¹⁵ Paul seems to imply that the Gentiles' ability to accept his preaching presupposes a type of obedience roughly understood as a willingness to listen. Elsewhere in the letter, however, as in 16.19, Paul suggests that the obedience of the believers in Rome is already exemplary at the time of the composition of the letter. Although this ambiguity may in part stem from the activity of subsequent redactors, we must also respect the coherence of the letter as a whole in the attempt to elucidate the meaning of "obedience."

¹³ "Just as the Israel of old was virtually defined as the 'obedient nation,' practicing an obedience of fidelity to the law, so now Paul has been charged to gather from all nations a final people of God, defined solely on the basis of that obedience which stems from faith." Brendan Byrne, *Reckoning with Romans* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier Press, 1986), 37.

¹⁴ "Wir haben es mit einer zusammenfassenden, missionarischen Wendung zu tun, die dem Begriffe des Glaubensgehorsams entsprechen muß." Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 76.

¹⁵ Byrne argues that, since Paul is sensitive to the fact that the community at Rome has already accepted the good news, his purpose in writing the epistle is that "it will bring about in Rome, prior to his visit and further expedition to the West, a deeper sympathy for the conformity to the specifically Pauline contours of the gospel: most notably the inclusion of the Gentiles as equal citizens in the eschatological people of God." B. Byrne, *Reckoning with Romans* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1986), 19.

Pauline scholars continue to debate the central message of Romans. Stendahl summarizes recent developments as a shift in emphasis from individual justification—ostensibly present in the exegesis of the Reformers¹⁶—to salvation history and the fulfillment of God’s promises to the Jewish people in the Old Testament.¹⁷ Obedience is thus required from Jew and Gentile alike in light of what Jesus Christ has accomplished for the many rather than the few.¹⁸ A polarity between that which is called for in faith on the part of the Jews and that which is

¹⁶ “Instead of reading Paul in the context of the first century situation, where concern for the inclusion of the Gentiles in the messianic community was paramount, the Reformers had interpreted Paul’s statements as answers to the quest for the assurance about man’s salvation out of a common human predicament.” Glen N. Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study in Romans 1-4* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 11.

¹⁷ Cf. Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). Stendahl states that: “The doctrine of justification by faith was hammered out by Paul for the very specific and limited purpose of defending the rights of Gentile converts to be full and genuine heirs to the promise of God to Israel.” *Ibid.*, 2. “Paul’s argument is that one does not have to go through Judaism into Christianity, but that there is a straight and direct way for the Gentiles apart from the law.” *Ibid.*, 18. “Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith has its theological context in his reflection on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, and not within the problem of how *man* is to be saved.” *Ibid.*, 26. Others have contributed to the recontextualizing of *dikaioσuvnh* Qeou within other themes in *Romans*. Garlington notes that “the subject matter of Romans announced by these verses (1:3-6) is not justification by faith as such but the revelation of the righteousness of God to everyone who believes.” Don Garlington, *The Obedience of Faith: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), 250. For a review of the issue, see R. Y. K. Fung, “The Status of Justification by Faith in Paul’s Thought: A Brief Survey of the Modern Debate,” *Themelios* 6 (1981): 4-11.

¹⁸ Garlington’s study of the Jewish understanding of obedience reveals that *hupakoē* must be understood primarily within the scriptural tradition of the Old Testament. What is remarkable in *Romans*, however, is that this same obedience is rendered possible for “all nations” through the obedience of Jesus Christ. “Because of this denotation of the ‘obedience of faith’ in Jewish theology, Paul’s phrase assumes the character of a ‘manifesto’ that ‘the nations’ can participate in God’s (new) covenant apart from becoming and remaining Jewish.” Garlington, 5.

required of the Gentiles would obfuscate both the purpose of Paul's office of preaching and his motive for writing the letter to the Romans.¹⁹ The Gospel message implicitly contained in Rom. 1.5 and expounded in the body of the letter is that the same promises which had given hope and identity to the Jews through the centuries, by being fulfilled in Jesus Christ, are now open to the Gentiles as well.²⁰ Their obedience to the Gospel demonstrates that they were responding to God's plan in the way that Israel's forefathers also had responded in faith.²¹

The genitive case of *pisteōs* has given birth to a plethora of possible translations of Romans 1.5, but also a variety of interpretations of the theology of faith developed subsequently in the letter. While the entire doctrine of faith in Romans may be determined by a translator's rendering of the genitive in *hupakoē pisteōs*, more often one's understanding of the doctrine contained in the body of the letter determines the translation of the genitive case.

The majority of commentators since 1960 take the genitive case of "faith" in the expression *hupakoē pisteōs* as a genitive of apposition. Such an interpretation resists the tendency to give priority to one word over the other, or the specific placement of one word within the *genus* of the other. Examples of non-appositive interpretations include

¹⁹ The fact that the Gentiles in the Roman community would be designated as *hagioi* underscores the singularity of obedience as the defining characteristic of believers who are genuinely living the faith. Dunn states that "the fact that Gentiles should count themselves *hagioi* when they offered no sacrifices, call no man 'priest', practiced no rite of circumcision, must have been puzzling to most pagans and offensive to most Jews." James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 20. It is their obedience, then, which proves that they are indeed called to share in the promises made to Jews and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

²⁰ Minear, placing this text under the light of Gal. 3:28, states that "the only distinction which survived the resurrection of Jesus was the distinction of faith and unbelief." Paul S. Minear, *The Obedience of Faith: the Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans* (London: SCM, 1971), 48.

²¹ "On this basis he is able to address the Romans as though they were the ancient people of God, because they have responded—and still do respond—to God's gospel with believing obedience." Garlington, *Obedience of Faith*, 242.

translations such as "obedience required by faith" or those which take the genitive "of faith" to mean simply "believing."²²

A cursory reading of the different translations found in various versions of the Bible opens our eyes to the several hermeneutical difficulties presented by the passage. The major bibles in English, including the *New Jerusalem Bible*, the *New American Bible*, and the *New Revised Standard Version*, all opt for a literal translation of the phrase, i.e., "the obedience of faith." In a footnote to the verse in the *New Jerusalem Bible*, we read that obedience "is a virtue of faith rather than the obedience owed to the gospel message."²³ Other translators, however, interject a theological interpretation into the translation itself. The expression is thus rendered "the obedience which consists in faith," or "the obedience which springs from faith."²⁴ There are others who turn the entire meaning around and thus translate the phrase as "the faith which consists in obedience."²⁵ Some prefer to emphasize the attitude of obedience by translating the phrase as "believing obedience." J. J. Vincent offers a translation that expresses both the obedience by which one comes to faith, and the obedience which typifies faith.²⁶ Ernest Best is of the opinion that neither term should be given excessive priority.²⁷ The *Interpreters' Bible* of 1954 reads "the obedience (to Christ) which comes from faith." John Knox prefers "obedience to the faith," but as Patrick Boylan remarks, the lack of an

²² The former translation places a certain species of "obedience" into the genus "faith," while the latter translation places the species "faith" into the genus "obedience."

²³ Cf. 1985 edition of *The New Jerusalem Bible*, 1867. In the 1966 version of this bible, the editors call this genitive a "subjective genitive" which they claim is an obedience "implicit in the virtue of faith."

²⁴ Archibald M. Hunter, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: SCM, 1955), 29.

²⁵ Charles E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 50.

²⁶ "The obedience which characterizes and proceeds from faith." John J. Vincent, *Letter to the Romans* (London: Epworth, 1963), 39.

²⁷ "Faith and obedience go inextricably together. Only in obedience is there faith, for faith is not an emotional feeling or an intellectual acceptance, but an active response to a person: God. It is trust." Ernest Best, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), 41.

article preceding "faith" in the Greek, as well as the unlikelihood that faith was understood as a body of teaching at the time of the original composition of Romans, weakens the latter interpretation.²⁸

Joseph Fitzmyer makes a provocative suggestion that "obedience" may not be the most auspicious translation of *hupakoē*. The Knox Bible suggests "homage," while the *New Biblical Commentary* suggests "trusting submission." Due to pejorative overtones of "obedience," Fitzmyer suggests that it may be more desirable to use a word such as "commitment."²⁹ Despite the risk of losing sight of the allusion to the importance of covenantal obedience in the Old Testament, "commitment" is advantageous in distinguishing the type of obedience found in the Old Testament from the complete submission to God in the person of Jesus Christ announced in the New Testament. If, however, we want to join Garlington and Davies in emphasizing the continuity of *hupakoē* with the tradition of the Old Testament,³⁰ "commitment" fails to communicate the link between obedience to the Old Covenant and that to the New. "Commitment" also seems to undermine the aspect of authority that "obedience" includes, as well as the etymological similarities between *hupakoē* and *oboedire*. Finally, it may blur the distinction between the Greek word *hupakoē* and other words in Greek such as *prothesis* ("devotion" in Acts 11.23) and even *hupomonē* ("steadfastness" in 1 Tm. 6.11 and Js. 5.11). In any event, Fitzmyer's suggestion is helpful in pointing out the flexibility of the term *hupakoē* in the letter to the Romans, as well as highlighting its descriptive function when found in conjunction with the genitive *pisteōs*.³¹

²⁸ Patrick C. Boylan, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Translation and Commentary* (Dublin: MH Gill, 1934), 5.

²⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 327.

³⁰ "Obedience as evidence of and expressive of faith for Christians is not qualitatively different from that which is characteristic of believers before Christ, though the content of that obedience as it relates to the law may require some qualifications." Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans*, 19.

³¹ Although it must be noted that "pistis" itself often carries a meaning of "commitment" as faithfulness or steadfastness in the New Testament (see 1 Tim. 6.11).

Fitzmyer's translation also strongly evokes the expression "*totum se Deo committit*" in *Dei Verbum* analyzed in the preceding section.

In short, "obedience" seems to be the most favorable translation of *hupakoē*. Most likely, Paul did not intend to restrict his use of the term to a single and exclusive meaning. In both his letter to the Romans and in other instances where he uses "obedience,"³² the term refers to a total commitment to Christ, as well as the necessary dispositions of listening, submission, self-abasement, and fidelity that would have been just as clear to Paul's original audience as they are to us today. For these reasons, the fathers at Vatican II believed the inclusion of the Pauline expression and the rewording of the description of faith in *Dei Verbum* to be both a complement to and an improvement upon *Dei Filius*.

IV

In Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, possibilities are opened for both the philosopher and the theologian to discern more keenly the role of the human will in the act of faith understood as obedience. John Paul presumes that there must be some analogical understanding of freedom in order both to preserve the reasonableness of the *obsequium* involved in the act of faith, and to hold obedience as the fulfillment of man's spiritual nature: a nature which antecedes the act of faith.

The discussion in *Fides et Ratio* concerning the act of faith contextualizes the faith/reason question within the history of Vatican I and Vatican II considered above. As stated previously, there is no abrogation of the will in the act of faith as described in *Dei Verbum*. Nonetheless, a difficulty remains: not only is the will offered to God through the obedience of faith, the will itself moves the subject to make this offering. For this reason the act of faith is impossible without the gift of supernatural grace. In order to commit his will, man must in fact employ his will, enabling him to offer himself *libere* and assenting to revelation *voluntarie*. This might seem paradoxical at first, but not quite

³² 2 Cor. 10.5-6. *Hupakoē* also appears in Rom. 15.18, 5.19, 6.16, and 10.16.

in the way described by Rudolf Bultmann.³³ For there to be a fulfillment of that which man is by nature, there must be an analogous use of "freedom" as understood before and after the act of faith. This analogy allows man to realize his full freedom not only "after" the act of faith, but precisely "in" the act itself. It is in the act of faith that the full spiritual nature of man is realized.

Pope John Paul II's analysis in *Fides et Ratio* reveals the influence of the obediential model apparent in *Dei Verbum* 5 as well as in its underlying anthropology.³⁴ The biblical notion of obedience opens up a

³³ Bultmann places the question of freedom into the forefront of the discussion concerning obedience and faith. The will, rather than simply opening itself up to the workings of grace, must actually reverse itself in order to expunge all that it desires for its own sake. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1959), 314. Bultmann understands faith as obedience in the following way: "Faith is obedience, because in it man's pride is broken. What is actually a foregone conclusion becomes for man in his pride what is most difficult. He thinks he will be lost if he surrenders himself -if he surrenders himself as the man he has made of himself for the first time. Obedience is faith because it is the abandonment of pride, and man's tearing himself free from himself." *Glauben und Verstehen*, 2, 154 (translation mine). The reversal of the will is integral for the full realization of faith through obedience. Because faith is a reversal of the will, it can never constitute a foundation upon which the rest of Christian life can be built. This reversal, insofar as it is a "deed," is in constant need of renewal. "Faith is never a foundation upon which we set ourselves up, but rather an ever new deed, new obedience, always uncertain, as soon as we reflect upon it, as soon as we speak of it, it is certain only as deed." Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, I, 37; cf. *Kerygma und Mythos*, II, 202. It is this reversal, which assures the authenticity of faith so that it may be distinguished from a "work." *Ibid.*, 315. Bultmann is of the opinion that perfect obedience was impossible for the ancient Jew since the very notion of obedience was a "formal" principle rather than a principle which involved the radical allegiance of the whole man. *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting*, 68.

³⁴ "This statement (*Dei Verbum*, 5) reflects an awareness of the different emphases in Protestant and Catholic theology and an intention to include the sound elements of each. The dimensions of trust, obedience, and intellectual assent are here harmoniously integrated into an expression of full personal adhesion." Avery Dulles, *Assurance of Things Hoped For* (Oxford:

new horizon for understanding the relational aspect of the act of faith. Man exercises obedience through the act of faith, but, rather than offering an *obsequium*, he offers his very self to the other.³⁵ An offering of merely an *obsequium* would undermine man's potential to realize his freedom in the act of faith, for his very self would remain somehow "outside" the faith relationship. Indeed, man remains an "I" after the act of faith, but he is an "I" who has given himself completely and freely to a "Thou" who, in turn, actualizes the subject's fullest anthropological potential. Only when the "I" maintains its status as an active subject will personal freedom have a role to play in the dynamic faith-response.

Besides the personal dynamics of faith considered in paragraph 13 of *Fides et Ratio*, there are three points to be made regarding John Paul II's treatment of *oboeditio fidei*. First, the foundation of credibility is reaffirmed to be God who reveals Himself. God is the "pledge" of those things he reveals.³⁶ There is no external source apart from revelation which would determine the act of faith in such a way that would prevent the act from being an act of absolute obedience. The *preambula fidei* in no way precondition the subject such that he can exhaustively ascertain the credibility of revelation in Jesus Christ prior to coming

Oxford University, 1994), 185-86. For a review of the personalist philosophy of human action underlying John Paul's teaching on faith, see Rocco Buttiglione, *Il Pensiero dell'Uomo che divenne Giovanni Paolo II* (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), 147-210.

³⁵ Cf. *Veritatis Splendor*, 88: "It is urgent to rediscover and to set forth once more the authentic reality of the Christian faith, which is not simply a set of propositions to be accepted with intellectual assent. Rather, faith is a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of his commandments, and a *truth to be lived out*. A word, in any event, is not truly received until it passes into action, until it is put into practice. Faith is a decision involving one's whole existence. It is an encounter, a dialogue, a communion of love and of life between the believer and Jesus Christ, the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (cf. Jn. 14:6). It entails an act of trusting abandonment to Christ, which enables us to live as he lived (cf. Gal. 2:20), in profound love of God and of our brothers and sisters."

³⁶ "Hoc significat eum (hominem) plene integreque agnoscere rerum revelatarum veritatem, quoniam ipse se pignus illarum exhibet Deus." *Fides et Ratio*, 13.

into contact with that revelation through the Word of God. Such a position would in fact mitigate the role of freedom in the act of faith, for it would imply that there were externally grounded motives coercing the will rather than prompting it. Rather, the full realization of the spiritual freedom of the human person, perfected through faith, is in some perfect measure proportionate to the origin of credibility who is God himself.³⁷ Faith, as an obedient response, first recognizes the divinity and transcendence of God.³⁸ The *datum* of revelation in Jesus Christ is the "material" of credibility to which the predicate "credible" primarily refers, while the origin of that credibility is God himself.³⁹

Second, the full surrender to God through the act of faith is ultimately grounded in truth, a transcendental which played an integral role in the thought of John Paul II's anthropology.⁴⁰ Absolute truth, including the truth about man, becomes the force that draws man toward divine revelation. This truth, like the credibility of revelation, is guaranteed by God Himself. Not only is truth a key transcendental in the analysis of the credibility of revelation and man's assent, it is also that which leads to the ultimate freedom attained through faith.⁴¹ Man, who naturally tends toward freedom, is defined by John Paul II as *ille qui veritatem quaerit*.⁴² The ultimate truth sets man

³⁷ "Usque ad extremum intellectus ac voluntas exercent spiritualem suam naturam ut subiecto humano permittatur actum perficere qui uniuscuiusque libertas pleno modo vivatur. In fide proinde non adest dumtaxat praesens libertas: etiam postulatur." *Fides et Ratio*, 13.

³⁸ "Id (responsio oboeditionis fidei) poscit ut Ille sua agnoscatur in divinitate, sua in transcendentia supremaque libertate." *Fides et Ratio*, 13.

³⁹ "Deus qui facit ut ipse cognoscatur ob suae absolutae transcendentiae auctoritatem, secum etiam adfert credibilitatem eorum quae revelat." *Fides et Ratio*, 13.

⁴⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 19; *Veritatis Splendor*, 64.

⁴¹ Freedom, according to John Paul II, cannot be perfectly realized outside of faith. "Quomodo enim verus libertatis usus iudicari posset nulla sese aperiendi voluntas ad id quod sinit homines se totos explicare? Credendo namque persona humana actum suae vitae significantissimum complet." *Fides et Ratio*, 13.

⁴² John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 28.

free insofar as he is spared of enslavement to a series of merely apparent truths, the pursuit of which would drive him to frustration and despair.⁴³

Third, the revelation of truth which calls for the obedience of faith is to be accepted as total gift. In this way the *oboeditio fidei* becomes the rendering of a gift in return for an even greater gift completely unmerited by man. If an attitude of obedience were lacking, man would presume ownership of the gift of salvation, rendering the full commitment of one's entire self impossible in the act of faith. Revealed truth, insofar as it is gratuitous, paves the way for an interpersonal communication that essentially consists in a relationship between the Giver of the gift in his giving and the receiver of the gift in his acknowledgment that God is indeed the giver. The underlying anthropology of the act of faith in *Fides et Ratio* renders this interpersonal communication possible, for it is the man Jesus Christ who communicates with man, revealing to him the fullness of truth about himself.⁴⁴ The encounter with Jesus Christ is always an encounter with the gift of truth which includes both the truth of God and the truth about man.

A reading of *Fides et Ratio* 13 reveals that the language of obedience is most appropriate to the act of faith. In order to apply it properly to the supernatural act by which one commits himself to God, it must be distinguished from all other natural instances of "obedience" by analogy. Only in this way can the paradox between freedom and obedience be resolved. An understanding of the nature of obedience in common experience, however, allows the subject to penetrate more deeply the meaning of one's relationship with God. As noted previously, it is quite possible that Paul adopted the expression to enable his listeners to concretize an understanding of the faith they had already received.

Although there are some essential differences between the ways obedience, faith, and justification interact in Protestant and Catholic thought, the common insistence upon a humble openness to the revelation of God opens the door to a fuller understanding of how the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

entire self is offered in faith. It is not simply one apprehension among many, nor is it one decision to be made among many.⁴⁵ Rather, it is that unique act by which man most fully realizes his freedom.⁴⁶ The obedience/freedom paradox is only resolved when we take stock of the object of obedience, the one to whom the act of faith is directed: a God who totally transcends this world but nonetheless reveals Himself by becoming Man in the world.⁴⁷

V

Before being elevated to the College of Cardinals, Avery Dulles noted that different theological currents have attempted to shed light on the polyvalence of faith by focusing on one particular way of viewing the supernatural act. He writes that "the biblical usage of terms such as the

⁴⁵ Cf. John Paul II *Veritatis Splendor*, 66: "There is no doubt that Christian moral teaching, even in its Biblical roots, acknowledges the specific importance of a fundamental choice which qualifies the moral life and engages freedom on a radical level before God. It is a question of the decision of faith, of the *obedience of faith* (cf. Rom. 16:26) 'by which man makes a total and free self-commitment to God, offering "the full submission of intellect and will to God as he reveals."' This faith, which works through love (cf. Gal. 5:6), comes from the core of man, from his 'heart' (cf. Rom. 10:10), whence it is called to bear fruit in works (cf. Matthew 12:33-35; Lk. 6:43-45; Rom. 8:5-10; Gal. 5:22)."

⁴⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 188-95. John Paul holds up Mary as the primary model of one who exercises and perfects her human freedom in the obedience of faith: "The Holy Spirit, who with his power overshadowed the virginal body of Mary, bringing about in her the beginning of her divine Motherhood, at the same time made her heart perfectly obedient to that self-communication of God which surpassed every human idea and faculty.... Mary entered the history of the salvation of the world through the obedience of faith. And faith, in its deepest essence, is the openness of the human heart to the gift: to God's self-communication in the Holy Spirit. St. Paul writes: 'The Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.' When the Triune God opens himself to man in the Holy Spirit, this opening of God reveals and also gives to the human creature the fullness of freedom. This fullness was manifested in a sublime way precisely through the faith of Mary, through the 'obedience of faith'." *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 51.

⁴⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

Charles Journet in the late 1940s. Notwithstanding Maritain's hesitations, however, Ralph McInerny suggests that "one can predict what his response to Paul VI's encyclical would have been: total acceptance....no reader of *The Peasant of the Garrone* could image Jacques Maritain questioning, either privately or publicly, such a document as *Humanae Vitae*."⁵⁰

I close with a cogent description of the informed, reasonable, and free obedience which is the hallmark of Christian faith made by a young conciliar *peritus* by the name of Father Joseph Ratzinger as he commented upon *Dei Verbum* 5 a year after its promulgation: "It is not without significance that the attempt to present the total character of faith primarily makes use of the idea of obedience and only secondarily takes up the idea of trust. This makes it clear that self-abandonment in faith is not without direction, but includes the commitment to the word, and that this self-abandonment of faith means a readiness for the concrete manner of the encounter with God and his claim, as these are brought to me historically through the preaching of the Church."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ralph McInerny, *The Very Rich Hours of Jacques Maritain* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2003), 183-84.

⁵¹ *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 179.