

# Highlights from *True Obedience in the Church*

## Amanda Evinger

I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER that stomach-twisting angst I felt when I finally faced the reality that I had no one to obey. As an 18-year-old Protestant, I sat with my New King James Bible open before me, in the chapel of the Calvinist college at which my grandfather had been a minister. Theological, moral and spiritual questions swirled around and around in my melancholic mind, and not only did I realize I did not have the answers to them, but I also realized that I didn't even know where to find them. Growing up under the ruthless force of John Calvin's "thumb," it had been drilled into my mind that the King James Bible had all the answers one would ever need to know about Christianity. And yet, here I sat, seriously wrestling with a bundle of serious questions: Was abortion in cases of rape really wrong? Didn't one have to practice good works to get into Heaven? Why had Luther called the Epistle of James in the New Testament an "epistle of straw" yet also claimed that the Holy Bible was the sole source of authority? Was Mary really supposed to be totally ignored when even the earliest Christians venerated her?

For the next few years, little by little, by God's grace, I realized that the Bible itself said that the Church "of the living God" actually had the answers, naming it the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3: 15). I knew I needed to find where this true Church of Christ could be found – and once I found it, I needed to obey it with all of my heart and soul. I soon realized that the "good ol' *sola scriptura*, me and my highlighted Bible" approach only brought me through a morbid maze of winding misery and confusion. I needed more than just "the Bible." I needed Sacred Tradition and a ruling Church which could tell me what was right and what was wrong. I needed a source of reliable authority who would map out the path to Heaven for me by means of infallible dogmas and teachings.

At age 22, I found this Church and I surrendered my life to Her. I accepted her precepts, her commandments and her rules. I savored them. Gratitude became me. I was now Roman Catholic and there was no desire to even look back. And yet, 21 years later, I admit, at times I wonder just what I surrendered to – and to whom. In a sense, I have had to search once again for the Absolute Truth of Christ and His Church, in a way somewhat similar to how I did it when I was a Protestant.

To obey... or not to obey, that is the question – or is it? Or perhaps the real question is *whom* to obey – the cult of man, or the voice of Almighty God? Most devout Catholics these days seem to be caught in between a rock and a hard place when it comes to these very questions, and that is where this compelling book,

*True Obedience in the Church: A Guide to Discernment in Challenging Times* (Sophia Press, 2021), comes in.

Author Dr. Peter Kwasniewski presents a short treatise on the topic of obedience in the Church, reflecting on how it is to be understood and lived out in the daily life of today's Catholics. Those who attended the Catholic Identity Conference in 2021 may remember the rousing speech he gave on the subject, which became the heart of this present book, although it has been expanded, particularly with detailed endnotes. In laying out his position, he refers to St. Thomas Aquinas's sane guidelines on the subject—what type of obedience is necessary for salvation, and which types are lawful and unlawful.

Among the many critical issues he considers are: if there can be situations where the normal structures of obedience impede the Church's primary mission to save souls; if there have been instances in Church history where faithful priests have exercised their ministry in violation of ordinary canonical norms; how should the clergy respond if the traditional Latin Mass is forbidden to them or declared "abrogated"; what is the proper role of conscience and how are liberal and conservative views of it defective; why is opposing the traditional liturgy equivalent to opposing the work of the Holy Ghost and harming the Church's common good; if Catholics are ever required to live in "blind obedience"; and finally, how the parameters of obedience are modified by situations of anarchy or breakdown, corruption or apostasy.

Throughout this brilliant tract, Dr. Kwasniewski sets the genuinely devout traditional Catholics' minds at ease by assuring them that it is only the Absolute Truth of Catholicism and leaders who themselves love it and obey it that they are required to obey before the eyes of Almighty God. At the end of their days, this is what they will be held accountable for. This should bring great serenity to their hearts. As he writes, "Any human being, no matter what his position in the Church or in the State, is to be obeyed only if and when what he commands is in harmony with the law of God, or at very least not evidently opposed to it."

Ultimately, *Sancta Mater Ecclesia*, our sole spiritual mother on earth, is meant to be the unfailingly loyal guardian and sanctifier of our immortal souls and that of our fellow men, and in situations of serious doubt as to what is being commanded or forbidden, we must follow the *sensus fidelium* based on the traditional doctrine and practice of the Church of the ages. For, as he reminds us, "It is for the salvation of souls that the entire structure of ecclesiastical law exists; it has no other purpose than ultimately to protect and advance the sharing of the life of Christ with mankind."

In order to nurture her children with the life-giving streams of Our Lord's Most Precious Body and Blood and bring the greatest possible glory to the Master of the Universe, She provides us with the Mass of All Time. *True Obedience in the Church* does a beautiful job of speaking in defense of this, our treasure of all treasures, showing us that we need not back down in the face of *Traditionis Custodes* or other similar threats. "To attack the traditional Latin Mass is to attack the Providence of God the Father; to reject the work of

Christ, the King and Lord of history; to blaspheme the fruitfulness of the Holy Ghost in the Church's life of prayer," Dr. Kwasniewski writes.

In a tactful, insightful way, Dr. Kwasniewski shows traditional Catholics on the arduous trek to Heaven what actually is morally binding upon our souls, and what is not. He explains, "An authority's power to morally bind resides in the common good, so if the authority deploys his office overtly against the common good, then that command inherently lacks moral binding power." He gives the average lay Catholic searching for God's will in the midst of the current crisis in the Church confidence in his or her discernment process, voicing that "Catholic theologians are unanimous in maintaining that [ecclesiastical] authority can actually act against the common good—and, even more importantly, that ordinary Catholics are capable of recognizing when it is happening."

Applying this lesson to the dangerous ecclesiastical battlefield in which we find ourselves fighting like smoke-oppressed soldiers, he writes:

The postconciliar liturgical reform, its subsequent ruthless implementation, and Pope Francis's renewed efforts to extinguish the preceding tradition are unreasonable, unjust, and unholy, and therefore cannot be accepted as legitimate or embraced as the will of God... Now that our enemies have made it clear that they intend our eventual liquidation, classic legal principles of self-defense, proportionate resistance, and the invalidity of unjustly-imposed penalties come fully into play.

Overall, *True Obedience* is an exceptionally handy tool to have around, not only for the present moment but to prepare for the next ambush on Sacred Tradition that may befall us. I would especially recommend it to clergy and seminarians, for whom a gracious benefactor has made free copies available that may be requested at [www.trueobedience.com](http://www.trueobedience.com). ■

“I needed Sacred Tradition and a ruling Church which could tell me what was right and what was wrong.”

