

**The Challenge and Relevance of The Vow of Obedience Today:
Reflection on Spirituality Based on
Constitution of the osf Reute Sibolga Congregation**

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Abstract

Vows are promises that religious individuals make to remain faithful to God, including the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity, and poverty. These vows are fundamental to spiritual life and must be actively lived. The vow of obedience is meant to help individuals faithfully follow God's will freely and responsibly, expressed through mission work, communal living, and service to the Church. However, living out this vow today is challenging due to societal changes and the fast-paced, individualistic nature of modern life. Thus, the vow of obedience needs to be revisited to ensure it stays true to the principles in the OSF constitution and is not diminished by changing times. It also represents a commitment to social responsibility in the context of globalization and technological advancement. This article uses qualitative research through literature study to examine the challenges and deeper understanding of the vow of obedience in the OSF congregation. In conclusion, the vow of obedience remains relevant today and is a source of strength for religious individuals in fulfilling their calling. Religious individuals today are called to be humble and ready to be sent.

Keywords: Obedience, OSF Sibolga, Challenges, Relevance

Abstrak

Kaul adalah janji yang diikrarkan oleh orang-orang religius untuk tetap setia kepada Tuhan, termasuk nasihat-nasihat Injili tentang ketaatan, kemurnian, dan kemiskinan. Kaul-kaul ini merupakan dasar dari kehidupan rohani dan harus dijalani secara aktif. Kaul ketaatan dimaksudkan untuk membantu individu-individu setia mengikuti kehendak Allah secara bebas

dan bertanggung jawab, yang diekspresikan melalui karya misi, hidup berkomunitas, dan pelayanan kepada Gereja. Namun, menghidupi kaul ini pada masa kini merupakan sebuah tantangan karena perubahan-perubahan sosial dan sifat kehidupan modern yang serba cepat dan individualistis. Oleh karena itu, kaul ketaatan perlu ditinjau kembali untuk memastikan bahwa kaul ini tetap sesuai dengan prinsip-prinsip dalam konstitusi OSF dan tidak berkurang oleh perubahan zaman. Hal ini juga merupakan komitmen terhadap tanggung jawab sosial dalam konteks globalisasi dan kemajuan teknologi. Artikel ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif melalui studi literatur untuk melihat tantangan dan pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang kaul ketaatan dalam kongregasi OSF. Kesimpulannya, kaul ketaatan masih tetap relevan hingga saat ini dan menjadi sumber kekuatan bagi para religius dalam memenuhi panggilan mereka. Individu-individu religius saat ini dipanggil untuk menjadi rendah hati dan siap untuk diutus.

Kata Kunci: Ketaatan; OSF Sibolga; Tantangan; Relevansi.

1. Introduction

Religious life is a way of life rooted and grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Religious people live the counsels of the Gospel as a manifestation of the mystery of the Kingdom of God that is real in this world. This particular way of life shapes religious to have a free and willing attitude to leave everything and devote themselves to God and others.¹ Religious realize their devotion to God by living the three vows as an expression of the Son's love for the Father in union with the Holy Spirit. A vow is "a promise to God made with a free and firm determination of what is possible and preferable, to be fulfilled for the sake of religious virtue."² It is an act of surrender, by which the religious commits themselves to God or promises Him a good deed. Vows are also lived according to the exhortation of the Gospel and upheld by the Church.³ In the tradition of the Church, the totality of religious life is to consecrate and surrender one whole life to God by living the three vows, namely the vow of chastity, the vow of obedience, and the vow of poverty. These three vows are a form of life that follows in the footsteps of Jesus Christ himself.⁴

Today's world may be experiencing more challenging situations than ever before. Challenges can come from within and without. Challenges from within can be more severe when it is spiritually difficult to objectify. External challenges are generally due to the influence of globalization, and technological advances that can provide momentary satisfaction so that religious can experience a crisis in their vocation because they are unable to process it wisely.⁵

¹ Theo Riyanto, *The Religious Vocation of Lay Brothers and Sisters and Its Continuous Interpretation*. (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015).

² Herman Embuiru, ed., *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (Ende: Nusa Indah, 2015).

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2103., n.d.

⁴ Yohanes Wilson B Lena Meo, "Anggota Tarekat Hidup Bakti Dan Kegiatan Misioner: Perspektif Hukum Gereja (Members of the Congregation of Consecrated Life and Missionary Activities: A Church Law Perspective)," *Seri Filsafat Teologi* 32, no. 31 (2022): 127–36.

⁵ Paul Suparno, *The Challenges of Monasticism in Modern Times and How to Respond* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2016).

Pope Francis mentioned in *Evangelii Gaudium* that today's world is characterized by individualism and a lack of concern for one another.⁶ This individualism also has an impact on today's observance of the vow of obedience.

The current phenomenon in the OSF congregation⁷ is the difficulty of the leadership in placing the sisters in a community or a particular field of work. There are members of the congregation who claim that the success of their work is the achievement and are individual in their life together. The superior of the fraternity has difficulty when a sister is not willing to be reassigned because she is comfortable with the work at hand. Another situation that may occur is when a sister is not willing to be placed in an area that is considered remote or in an uncomfortable community situation. This situation can give rise to new communities within a community. The challenge of the vow of obedience is now a common reflection that requires a change and a better appreciation and can be done together as much as possible. The vow of obedience will be difficult to realize when members of the congregation are unable to recognize God's will in themselves and their congregation, through the tasks entrusted to them by the leadership.

Based on the situation above, the question arises: how do religious live out the vow of obedience today, especially in the OSF? This question arises from the understanding of the vow of obedience in the past and present. In the past, the understanding of the vow of obedience in religious life was lived in a highly structured and strict manner, emphasizing absolute obedience to both God and the leadership. Religious individuals who made the vow of obedience were required to fully obey the decisions made by their superiors. In this context, the vow of obedience was seen as a total self-sacrifice, where personal desires had to be suppressed and replaced with unconditional obedience to the existing authority.⁸ At that time, the leaders of the community were often regarded as God's representatives, granted the authority to make decisions considered to be God's will and guidance. Obedience was seen as the true form of holiness, where religious individuals left behind their personal desires in order to follow God's call through their leaders. This is evident in the strict community rules, such as specific times for prayer, work, and rest. Every rule was followed with full obedience to the norms in place within the community.

As time passed and the world changed, the understanding of the vow of obedience underwent a shift. The vow of obedience is now understood in a more open, reflective, and contextual manner. Obedience remains directed toward God and the community, but there is also an expectation of self-awareness and the freedom to think critically. Thus, obedience is no longer simply accepted without question; there is now space for dialogue and joint

⁶ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)* (Ecclesiastical Documentation Series No. 94), ed. F. X Adisusanto and Bernadeta Harini Tri Prasati (Jakarta: KWI Department of Documentation and Information, 2014).

⁷ "OSF Is Congregation of the Order of St. Francis Reute Sibolga. Next, It Will Be Summarized as: OSF," n.d.

⁸ Tom Jacob, *Religious Life: Its Meaning and Challenges* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1987).

consideration. In this new context, involvement between leaders and members of the congregation is necessary in every decision, grounded in love, wisdom, and mutual understanding.⁹

In the OSF Congregation, the vow of obedience is first, the vow of obedience is interpreted as a bond to God that can be found through the example of Jesus, who was obedient to His Father. Secondly, the vow of obedience directs OSF sisters to be obedient servants and to be free in their life of service. Third, the vow of obedience is lived out in obedience to the superior of the fraternity and in readiness to accept missionary assignments.¹⁰ This description of the vow of obedience is an important part of OSF sisters as a form of idealized vows. The vow of obedience is also a norm that can remind OSF sisters to be ready to carry out their duties faithfully and responsibly.

This paper aims to find and describe the meaning of the vow of obedience in the constitution of the OSF congregation and see new challenges and opportunities for living the vow today. This paper will also not describe the other two vows. The author limits this paper to focus more on the meaning and appreciation of the vow of obedience today.

2. Method

The method used in writing this article is qualitative research through literature study by collecting data from relevant sources into an idea that can be accounted for. This method is also done by reviewing and exploring various literatures, including the Constitution of the OSF Sibolga, the Holy Scriptures, and several Church Documents. The author endeavors to describe the vow of obedience according to the Constitution of the OSF and also describes the challenges and opportunities of the vow of obedience. The vow of obedience is a strength for religious to follow Christ in this increasingly advanced age.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Overview of OSF Congregation

The OSF congregation was founded in 1848. It was started by five simple girls from the town of Ehingen (South Germany) who initially served the sick and abandoned people. The five girls were Maria Anna Bloching (Sr. M. Margaretha), Maria Anna Braig (S.M. Antonia), Veronika Moll (Sr. M. Constansia), Magdalena Moll (Sr. M. Agnes), and Helena Schwer (Sr. M. Brigitta). They lived simply, worked without reward, and were grateful for every experience. Their ministry focused on the sick and suffering. They live in the spirituality of St.

⁹ Tom Jacob, "Religious Life," n.d.

¹⁰ Congregation of the Order of St. Francis (OSF) Reute Sibolga, *Constitutions of the Franciscan Sisters of Reute* (Germany, 1992).

Francis of Assisi by obeying the statutes of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi and the spirit of the congregation's patroness, Blessed Elisabeth the Good of Reute.

The OSF Sisters in Germany are growing rapidly both in number and ministry. The superior of the OSF congregation decided to open a new mission in the Diocese of Sibolga after communicating with the Administrator of the Apostolic Prefecture of Sibolga who was staying in Reute Germany, Bishop Gratian Grimm. On October 7, 1964, the first five missionary sisters were sent from Germany to Sibolga Prefecture. The first mother community in Sibolga Prefecture was located in Padang Sidempuan. The sisters sent from Germany to Indonesia were Sr. Notburga Furst, Sr. Bentivolgia, Sr. Franziska Forch, Sr. Erminolda Zoller, and Sr. Thoma Albrecht. They arrived in Padang Sidempuan in October 1964. They traveled a grueling one-and-a-half month journey by ship from Germany to Belawan, Medan. With all their struggles, the sisters proclaimed the Gospel among the Muslims through their testimony of faith.¹¹ The five sisters who were sent to Indonesia started the first community in Padangsidimpuan at the suggestion of Bishop Gratian Grimm, Apostolic Prefecture of Sibolga. The community was inaugurated on April 14, 1966, with the work of serving the polyclinic, kindergarten, and girls' dormitory, teaching in the elementary school, and helping the categorical groups in the parish.¹²

In the beginning, the OSF sisters worked in the field of health by opening the Santa Elisabeth Medical Center. They served kindly, witnessed, and felt God's presence through the trust of the patients who experienced help and healing. Later the sisters also opened another ministry, a kindergarten, and also organized a skills course for women who were not getting an education. The sisters taught the girls to sew and opened an inn or hostel for those who came from the village.¹³ From time to time, the OSF Sibolga congregation grew with the addition of communities. The communities of OSF Sibolga sisters are located in four dioceses in Indonesia, namely the Diocese of Sibolga, the Archdiocese of Medan, the Archdiocese of Semarang, and the Archdiocese of Ende as well as a mission in Brazil, and a general in Germany. The mission in Brazil is in the Diocese of Arari.¹⁴

In general, the apostolate of the OSF Sibolga sisters is currently engaged in the field of education, namely kindergarten and elementary school. The health sector includes a health clinic and a maternity clinic. In addition, there is also the social field, namely a girls' dormitory, an orphanage, and a special mission for children who cannot afford education. In the pastoral field, OSF Sibolga sisters assist in parishes, dioceses, and retreat houses. There are 21 communities of OSF sisters in Indonesia and the center of the congregation is the San Damiano Community in Pandan.

¹¹ *The Compilation Team of the Book of Memories of 25 Years of OSF Sisters of Sibolga Region, Serving God in Little People and Suffering Memories of 25 Years of OSF Sisters of Reute-Sibolga Region 1976-2001* (Sibolga, 2014).

¹² Komsos Bureau, "*OSF Sibolga Communities*", in *Warta Diocese of Sibolga, Special Edition-June 2014* (Sibolga: Doses of Sibolga, 2013).

¹³ Komsos Bureau, "*OSF Sibolga Communities*," n.d.

¹⁴ Komsos Bureau, "*OSF Sibolga Communities*," n.d.

The OSF sisters try to live out the charism of the congregation, which is to serve God in the suffering person as an emanation of the love that the sisters have received and want to share with others. The original spirit of the founders centered on Jesus Christ guides and reflects the life of the sisters so that every day they are increasingly able to share love with others in need.¹⁵

3.2 The meaning of the Vow of Obedience in the OSF Constitution Articles 8.1-8.5

The vow of obedience is one way of keeping the counsel of the Gospel. The definition of the vow of obedience in the OSF Constitutions Articles 8.1-8.5 is defined as follows:

3.2.1 Bond with God

Obedience comes from the Latin *Oboedire*, which in Greek is *Hypakuo*, and in Hebrew is *Shama* which means listening intently, opening one's ears, and carrying out practical action. In a religious sense, obedience means an attitude of listening intently to the word of God and focusing on the will of God.¹⁶ The vow of obedience as stated in the OSF constitution is a guideline for every member because "by profession, we bind ourselves to obey the will of God, as revealed to us in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁷ The bond with God is deeply understood as complete surrender.¹⁸ Binding oneself in the Articles of Association of the Third Order of St. Francis Regular in the three vows is an affirming and liberating form of life. OSF sisters also realize their vows by following Christ and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, dedicating themselves to God fully through ministry and being a sign of God's presence in the world.¹⁹

The vow of obedience is also a means of seeing God's goodwill, listening to God's word, and living according to His will. This is manifested in a life of prayer and service to others, in the community, and in participating in the Church's mission of salvation.²⁰ OSF Sisters learn from the person of Jesus, who always put the will of His Father first. Jesus did not act from Himself but always saw and fulfilled the will of God. Obedience is also meant to be obedience for the sake of liberating love.²¹ The vow of obedience means dedicating oneself by prioritizing God's will so that personal will becomes unimportant. The obedience to God is manifested in one's obedience to the congregation. The congregation's leader is also a representation of God for the benefit of all members.²²

3.2.2 Living in Brotherhood

¹⁵ Komsos Bureau, "*OSF Sibolga Communities*," n.d.

¹⁶ Jose Christo Rey Gracia Paredes, *Obedience for the Kingdom of God Theology of Religious Life* (Ende: Ledalero, 2016).

¹⁷ *Congregation of the Order of St. Francis (OSF) Reute Sibolga, 8.1.*, n.d.

¹⁸ *Congregation of the Order of St. Francis (OSF) Reute Sibolga.*, n.d.

¹⁹ Maria Imakulata Tere and Ignasius Ledot, "Commitment to Religious Life from the Perspective of Organizational Commitment," *Jurnal Konseling Dan Pendidikan* 9, no. 3 (2021): 226–33.

²⁰ Raidin Sinaga, "Celebrating the Perfectae Caritatis Decree on the Renewal and Adjustment of Religious Life," *Logos* 12, no. 2 (2015): 63–89.

²¹ Surip Stanislaus and Doni Xaverius, "Joseph's Obedience in Response to God's Command: An Exegetical Description and Theological Reflection on Matthew 1:18-25.," *LOGOS*, 2024, 243–58.

²² Paul Suparno, *Monastic Life in Modern Times* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2016).

The vow of obedience must be realized as a choice accompanied by free will. Free choice leads the religious to a congregation. The congregation chosen by the OSF sisters became the means for the realization of the vow of obedience. Brotherhood is lived out freely and happily to seek God's will together.²³ Brotherhood becomes a way to share freely and not under pressure. The vow of obedience will be realized with the awareness of all the rules and consequences that exist in the congregation. Each sister is a blessing, and with the acceptance of each other, each sister tries to bring the Kingdom of God in her way.²⁴

Community is a supportive place to achieve personal maturity, common sense, openness to cooperation, and willingness to be corrected for the sake of personal development and spirituality. Obedience in the community is not a matter of whether one wants to or not, but each person can realize goodwill and an honest willingness to obey even if there are differences of opinion in making decisions. This situation invites OSF sisters to realize their total devotion to a community that is unique to each sister.

3.2.3 Willing to Do Mission

The basis of living the obedience vows is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who was obedient to the will of the Father. Jesus came into the world as a clear sign that "He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:7-8). Legitimately, OSF Sisters also follow and imitate Jesus the Master totally in their service in the fraternity as obedient and faithful servants of God.²⁵

A religious must be ready to accept the mission and live the mission with love, especially for the little and weak people as a top priority. This service has its source in Jesus, who made the poor and the weak the ones who need attention and help.²⁶ The task that each sister undertakes is a consequence of the vow of obedience without choosing based on human comfort. Obedience also helps the sisters to always trust and depend on God in all life experiences. OSF sisters also strive to maintain harmony and harmony with God in prayerful relationships and ministry.²⁷

The readiness to accept a mission is an obedience to the leadership as God's representative and can be carried out properly.²⁸ The mission received by a sister should be a sign of joy and a part of service to God and His Church. The willingness to be sent is a consequence of the vow of obedience that enables OSF sisters not to complain and not to easily experience

²³ Bernat Sitorus, "MONKS/NUNS: IN THE VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY," *Majalah Ilmiah METHODODA* 12, no. 3 (2022): 300–307.

²⁴ Paul Suparno, *Monastic Life in Modern Times*, n.d.

²⁵ "Congregation of the Order of St. Francis (OSF) Reute Sibolga," n.d., 8.4.

²⁶ Stefan Eunaldus Sianturi and Surip Stanislaus, "'Service of Love in Consecrated Life According to the Vita Consecrata,'" *RAJAWALI*, 2023, 78–84.

²⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata (Consecrated Life) (Ecclesiastical Documentation Series No. 51)*, ed. R. Hardawirjana (Jakarta: KWI Department of Documentation and Information, 1996).

²⁸ Paul Suparno, *Living a Monastic Life.*, n.d.

difficulties in the life of obedience. In addition, openness to the leadership of the congregation is necessary to determine the field of service that suits the talents and abilities of the members in line with the needs of the congregation

3.3 Obey the Ordinary of Diocese

The congregation of OSF is a diocesan congregation.²⁹ The congregation always has a connection with the local Church, namely the local bishop as the regional ordinary.³⁰ This obedience is shown by the willingness of the OSF sisters to be sent out and to cooperate with the local ordinaries. OSF Sisters also participate in the ministry of the local Church so that the presence of OSF Sisters is part of the face of God. Thus, the presence and self-giving through the work of the congregation and involvement in the parish or station is part of the living out of the vow of obedience.

Obedience is also lived out in reverence for the Church, especially in the hierarchy of the Church as the embodiment of God's real presence in the world.³¹ St. Francis saw God in the hierarchy of the Church who can lead every human being to the salvation of the soul. Obedience to the ordinary diocese or hierarchy becomes the strength for religious to be obedient to the work of the congregation as part of their participation in building the Church in the local diocesan area.

3.4 Self-giving in Brotherhood

The vow of obedience is also interpreted as a form of service in the brotherhood specifically as stated in the constitution:

"The sisters, entrusted with the task of leadership in the fraternity, openly and kindly listen to each sister and try to make decisions that are appropriate to her personality, problems, and situation. In her service as a sister, the superior guides the fraternity in by the Rule of Life and the authority established by the General Chapter."³²

Leadership is exercised by the fraternity minister by acting and ordering according to the rules in the constitution of the congregation.³³ The fraternity minister carries out her duties according to the movement of the Holy Spirit to be able to consider and lead each member of the congregation with love and sincerity. The superior also strives for the obedience of the members of the congregation by respecting each person, listening, serving, and helping the members of the congregation to advance and take part in the development of the Church. The

²⁹ "The Diocesan Level Means a Congregation That Is in the Diocesan Order and the Papal Level Means a Congregation That Is in the Papal Order", *Book of Canon Law (Codex Iuris Canonici)*, Revision 2 (Jakarta: Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, 2016).

³⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, "Ordinaries of the Territory Refer to Bishops Who Are given the Specific Task of Governing the Church, Namely Dioceses or Dioceses", n.d.

³¹ *Church Hierarchy Comes from the Word "Hierarchy" Which Means the Levels of Office in the Pastoral Ministry of the Church. The Hierarchical Structure of the Church Consists of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.*, n.d.

³² *Congregation of the Order of St. Francis (OSF) Reute Sibolga*, 8.3., n.d.

³³ Silvester Susianto Budi, *Religious People A Juridical Review* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2017).

open heart of the congregation leader and the spirit of serving like Jesus will bring joy to those served.

One of the figures who popularized the art of service of a leader is Robert K. Greenleaf. In his writings, Robert states that a leader must have a natural drive as a servant who is willing to serve and serve. A servant leader will prioritize the needs and welfare of the people he leads. A servant prioritizes the common good (*bonum commune*) over self-interest.³⁴ OSF sisters entrusted with the service of the fraternity realize it as a servant and encouragers of the fraternity. This requires an evangelical spirit and fidelity centered on Jesus who was obedient and faithful in his mission. Leaders in the fraternity must be neutral in the fraternity and able to involve their peers in the decision-making process. Leaders should respect each other's decisions and not act outside of them.³⁵

The vow of obedience becomes the strength for the leader of the congregation to be able to serve lovingly. Service to the brotherhood will make it easier for members of the congregation to experience and accept trust through decisions made by the leadership. The leader of the congregation should use his authority as well as possible so as not to cause undesirable conditions for the members of the congregation. The power to lead is a blessing for the brotherhood to help the members of the congregation in self-development and the development of the work of the congregation. The leader also always tries to offer and devote himself to the service of the congregation so that members can feel the exemplary leadership of the congregation.³⁶

3.5 Challenges in Living the Vow of Obedience Today

Living the vow of obedience is an important part of religious life. Obedience has an important role in its realization for the members of the congregation, the community, the apostolate, and the universal Church. However, living the vow of obedience is not always well realized. Some of the challenges that can weaken the living of the vow of obedience will be described below, both challenges from within the religious and from outside the religious.

3.5.1. Instantism

The development of increasingly modern times brings various changes to the world and also to the development of monastic life. Modern times offer many interesting options such as information, freedom of expression through cyberspace, and various infrastructure facilities that can make it easier for humans to do or get something they want. These developments and changes have a positive side that makes human life easier, more comfortable, and better quality. However, there is also a negative side when human life is increasingly alienated and becomes a slave to the development of the era. The higher worldly offers can affect the appreciation of

³⁴ F.X. Didik Bagiyowinadi, ed., (*Kasih Tanpa Pamrih Tulus Tiada Modus Menggali Makna Pelayanan Dalam Perspektif Alkitab (Selfless Love Sincerely Exploring the Meaning of Service in Biblical Perspective)*) (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015).

³⁵ *Congregation of the Order of St. Francis (OSF) Reute Sibolga*, 8.3.

³⁶ Yosef Masan Toron, "Shepherd Leadership: Realizing Jesus' Leadership Spirit in Religious Communities," *Jurnal Alternatif-Wacana Ilmiah Interkulutral* 10, no. 1 (2020): 27–42.

the vow of obedience today. Today's instant culture has also entered the lives of religious. Everything can be obtained easily which results in religious being less able to limit themselves. Every sister needs facilities and infrastructure for the smooth running of the mission. The facilities provided are intended so that the religious can use them to expedite the task not for mere pleasure.³⁷

Instant lifestyles can weaken the appreciation of religious life because they do not want to bother and do not want to struggle. Technology and information facilities such as gadgets, the internet, *Facebook*, and *Twitter* can weaken the appreciation of the vow of obedience when misused. Instant lifestyles make religious life comfortable and convenient but can obscure the spiritual power of the vow of obedience. In this context, it is very important to realize the purpose of religious life, which is to follow and surrender life completely according to God's will through the vows. Religious who are unable to think critically and realize their vocation can fade the fighting power and spirit of their vocation.

This instant lifestyle can also have an impact on the religious personality as described in the previous paragraph but it also has an impact on community life. Religious who have fallen into an instant lifestyle will feel challenged and even unable to live and stay in small communities and remote areas. Religious will experience difficulties because they cannot get good facilities and the mission is felt as a burden that must be borne.

An instant lifestyle can indeed make things easier and take less time, but it is important to realize that not everything should be done instantly. An instant lifestyle that cannot be controlled can cause new problems where religious are unable to internalize a life problem and cause a person who is not strong. This can be seen when religious experience difficulties in the work of the congregation in various situations. An instant lifestyle can cause religious to be trapped in superficiality because they do not want to bother solving problems at their roots. An instant lifestyle can also cause religious to lack a deepening spiritual life and a sense of brotherhood in the community because they think everything can be obtained easily and provide quick satisfaction through modern facilities.

3.5.2. Individualism

The development of the times had a considerable influence on humans, especially freedom. Today's technological advancements allow individuals to more easily gain access to information and provide more freedom to make life choices, lifestyles, and personal relationships. However, with this freedom comes a cultural shift from collectivity to individualism.³⁸ Freedom can also lead to a lack of consideration of human values and moral values in human behavior. Many people feel comfortable with themselves and have little respect or appreciation for others. An individualist attitude will lead humans to be trapped in an attitude of not wanting to be restrained or controlled by existing systems both in the family

³⁷ Romelus Blegur, "Theological Perspectives on the Meaning of 'Presence' in Digital Culture," *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 22, no. 2 (2022): 246–61.

³⁸ Paul Suparno, *Living a Monastic Life.*, n.d.

and the wider community environment. Humans feel more independent by not depending on others but are free to express themselves without restrictions from others.³⁹

The freedom that humans have today needs to be addressed wisely so as not to deviate from the norms of life in general. Uncontrolled freedom will lead to an individualistic attitude that affects the lives of many people, including in religious life. This attitude certainly affects the appreciation of the vow of obedience. The living of the vow of obedience is realized in the awareness of togetherness with one another. Healthy relationships with fellow sisters or partners will help each religious to listen to each other and cooperate well. Working well together can help religious to be open and not close themselves off to the situation and the outside world.

This individualistic attitude is a challenge in religious life, especially in community, mission, or relationships with others. Every religious seeks unity in the community, but sometimes there are uncomfortable situations among community members that can lead to misunderstandings or disputes caused by anger, hurt, and disappointment. This situation will lead each person to close themselves off and not care about others. Individualistic attitudes hurt religious who are caught up in "hostility" which makes them closed, isolated, and even feel superior among others so that they can become a stumbling block for others.

Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* also emphasizes being open to others because, through encounter and effective communication, one can recognize oneself well and will become a person who has a face to be loved. Living in togetherness, fellowship, and fraternity will produce good relationships avoid selfishness, and find new meaning that each person is not only focused on himself but lives for others.⁴⁰ Individualism cannot make religious freer, more equal, and more fraternal. It is an attitude of individual ambition and security that has no positive impact on others.⁴¹

3.5.3. Multiculturalism

The community is a fellowship of members who share the common goal of following God specifically and serving others. Religious life is a life based on love and brotherhood (cf. Acts 4:32), based on Jesus and the apostles (cf. John 13:34-35). Behind this idealized image of brotherhood, it is necessary to look at its advantages and disadvantages. When a comfortable situation is created in the community, religious members can be helped to live their vocation well. However, human weaknesses can be a challenge both for oneself and for life together.

The different backgrounds and mindsets of each religious person will give the community a distinctive color. Each person is unique and comes from a diverse family, culture, and social status. Community life is also not always easy to build because each religious has its character or traits. Differences often become a problem if they do not realize the same goal of serving

³⁹ Paul Suparno, *Living a Monastic Life*.

⁴⁰ Pope Francis, *Brothers and Sisters. Fratelli Tutti: Pope Francis' Encyclical on Social Fraternity and Friendship*. (Ecclesiastical Document Series No. 124), ed. Martin Aaron (Jakarta: KWI Department of Documentation and Information, 2020).

⁴¹ *Fratelli Tutti*, 105., n.d.

God in brotherhood. Differences that cannot be accepted and understood will result in a gap between religious who consider themselves more important and greater when compared to others.

The challenge in accepting differences is when community members do not always meet with community members who have similarities. The vow of obedience will be difficult to realize when each member of the community cannot accept the strengths and weaknesses of each member. Unacceptable differences can create the impression of competition in religious life. Jealousy and wanting to be greater than others will humble others and be less able to listen to each other.

3.5.4. Exclusivism

A community is a coming together of religious members to accept and understand one another. The community becomes a place to share gifts and grow together so that through community religious learn about the mission of sanctification.⁴² The reality of religious life does not always display true harmony. Building a community within the community is a challenge in living the vow of obedience. This challenge can lead to gaps or separate groupings in the community when there are problems in the community that cannot be resolved properly. Problems in the community can arise because of misunderstandings, and feeling superior so that they are unable to listen and provide space for others to express their opinions. Different backgrounds such as family, ethnicity, character, and idealism also greatly affect community harmony.

Differences of opinion and practical matters that occur in the community that are not resolved together can give rise to "new communities" within the community by creating groupings based on the same ideas, the same hobbies, or siding with the stronger and can also be due to reciprocity. Indeed, the vow of obedience is deeply felt in the life of communion (*communio*) and brings the common good (*bonum commune*). The reality of community life that is not always harmonious can also have an impact on people around such as coworkers or people served. This challenge will continue if community members do not seek reconciliation with one another. Building community within the community can make some community members feel isolated and can lead to a sense of not caring for one another.

3.6. Relevance of the Vow of Obedience Today

OSF sisters live in today's modern world with all its advantages and challenges. The internalization of the vow of obedience is also affected by the changing and developing situation of the times. For this reason, the author tries to articulate the relevance of the vow of obedience today.

3.6.1. Being a Humble Religious

⁴² Clara Nugroho, ed., *Congregation for the Order of Consecrated Life and the Society of Apostolic Life, New Wine in New Wineskins (Ecclesiastical Documentation Series No. 104)* (Jakarta: KWI Department of Documentation and Information, 2017).

Vocation is a special grace received by the one who is called. Every life experience is interpreted as an experience of God's love and generosity. The surrender of life should also be unconditional and put all hope in God.⁴³ Religious strive to be more like Christ by being able to bear every mission of Christ by struggling and suffering with Him to realize an attitude of devotion to God. The development of this era requires religious to renew themselves through repentance and self-denial by enjoying various processes in community life and in the task of service.⁴⁴

Living the vow of obedience as a religious free choice is a way of carrying out God's will. The vow of obedience is not used to gratify lust but becomes a way to sanctify oneself day by day.⁴⁵ Religious who always realize God's will in themselves will radiate joy. Joy is realized through the willingness to bear the mission and live in a community with various situations that are not always by personal wishes. Religious enjoy every dynamic of their lives with a spirit of humility and liberating obedience so that every mission is not seen as a burden but as a sign of loyalty to God. God has given freely through the congregation, so the members also give themselves freely through mission and service.

Recognizing the will of God in her life will encourage the religious to serve other sisters as Christ served His brothers and gave His life as a ransom for His people.⁴⁶ Religious who are close to God will be open to service, both in the work of the congregation and in the service of the universal Church to reach the level of fullness in Christ. Members of the congregation should, in a spirit of faith and humility, obey the superior of the fraternity and, through their competence, accept and fulfill the responsibilities given to them.

Religious take part in the mission of Christ by learning to enjoy every process of life and by daring to deny themselves as obedient servants of God. Religious obedience is realized in the form of self-denial and humility to be able to do service full of love and freedom. The vow of obedience is a commitment to attain a state of grace by limiting oneself to the temporal life of the world to have more treasure and time to share with others.

Religious who are faithful to God must dare to be firm and have a complete love for God as well as for the good of the world. Religious obedience is the embodiment of children who are loved by God. Religious dare to let go of worldly desires and are even willing to accept the cross and continue to love God to the end, just like Jesus who was obedient to death, even dying on the cross. Religious self-denial is an important part of becoming a servant of God who is not bound by worldly desires but is in the process of becoming a more humble person.

3.6.2. Collaboration among Community Members

⁴³ *Vita Concecrata*, 17., n.d.

⁴⁴ Sihol Situmorang, "The Confession of Faith in the Holy Trinity as the Basis of the Brotherhood of Consecrated Life A Theological Reflection on the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Concecrata*," *LOGOS: Journal of Publications* 20,1 (2023): 33.

⁴⁵ Surip Stanislaus and Doni Xaverius, "Joseph's Obedience in Response to God's Command," n.d., 256.

⁴⁶ R. Hardawiryana, ed., *Second Vatican Council, "Decree on the Renewal and Renewal of Religious Life" (Perfectae Caritatis)*, in *Documents of the Second Vatican Council* (Jakarta: KWI Department of Documentation and Information, 1992).

Individualism can lead religious to selfishness. This attitude is contrary to Christ's example of obedience to God the Father. The obedient religious will be seen in the total gift of self in the mission and fraternity by letting go of any personal desires or ambitions.⁴⁷ Obedience also enables the religious not to be attached to the self and not to be distracted by the things of the world. Freedom enables the religious to feel and give themselves to anyone in need.

Love in a religious fraternity is a symbol of ecclesial fellowship that leads the religious in complete surrender to God and is ready to serve the fraternity generously. This illustrates that religious cannot live for themselves but are immersed in one another and build close relationships with one another. The obedience shown in the fraternity as well as in the mission will help the religious to avoid self-interest and rather strive to create the common good.

The cooperation carried out by religious is part of the Church's mission of service by sharing and being of one heart and soul in both ministry and spiritual experience. The obedience done joyfully by each religious will strengthen the brotherhood according to the example of the Early Church who shared and lived for others. Religious are no longer bound to an individual attitude but to a service of love and an attitude of sharing with each person served.

In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, it is said that:

"In all ages and all nations, God is pleased with those who honor Him and practice the truth. Yet God intends to sanctify and save people not one by one, without any connection to one another. But He wants to form them into a people, who acknowledge Him in truth and serve Him in holiness."⁴⁸

This statement wants to emphasize that religious are part of the Church by being united in Christ. Religious participate in the task of the universal Church through community service, the work of the congregation, and the service of the Church and society. Religious participate in the mission by presenting the loving face of God. The work of the congregation aims to help people who are small, suffering, and marginalized as part of serving Jesus tangibly.

The existing works in the congregation are always pursued and adapted to the needs of the times for the advancement of the Church and society. Religious can serve in various fields of work such as education, pastoral, health, and social as a form of appreciation of the vow of obedience. The missionary spirit becomes the strength to work according to the spirit of the congregation. Every work of the congregation is a sign of God's presence which is done wholeheartedly and joyfully.⁴⁹

3.6.3. Unity in Community

Community is the hallmark of monastic life as Jesus also lived in community with His disciples. The community becomes a place of self-devotion to serve, proclaim the word,

⁴⁷ Sihol Situmorang, *Confession of Faith in the Holy Trinity*, n.d.

⁴⁸ R. Hardawiyana, ed., *Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" (Lumen Gentium)*, in *Documents of the Second Vatican Council* (Jakarta: KWI Department of Documentation and Information, 1993).

⁴⁹ Benny Phang Khong Wing, "Conscience: The Harmonious Union of Synderesis, Conscientia and the Virtue of Wisdom," *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 21, no. 2 (2021): 195–217.

proclaim, and as a place to be able to make decisions together based on the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰ Togetherness in the community becomes the starting point to bring true brotherhood. Unity in living together has a high value that is realized in each other so that harmony is created.⁵¹ Harmony is maintained in love, solidarity, mutual support, and forgiveness. The vow of obedience is best lived when each sister can present herself openly and freely in love with one another. Each sister seeks unity and appreciates and respects each other's strengths and weaknesses with undivided love.⁵²

Religious are expected to have a deep understanding of brotherhood and develop a sense of shared identity to sustain one another. Religious are called into a community united by the Holy Spirit as members of the community. The community is expected to always grow towards unity in vocation and mission. The community is occupied by religious from different backgrounds, but God brings them together thanks to the grace of the vocation received. This emphasizes the importance of mutual respect for each member of the community and of loving each other as oneself. Religious will grow and develop in their spirituality when they feel full trust in one another.⁵³

Religious need to have an attitude of respect and acceptance of every difference without trying to dominate and live the mission by living interculturality as a testimony to serving God. Obedience will be realized when religious presents community as a sign of hope, love, and unity. The uniqueness of each religious cannot be ignored or homogenized but each person strives to cross the boundaries of their uniqueness and respect others. Diversity becomes a strength and blessing to strengthen the communion. Unity in community will be achieved by continuing to cultivate the spirit of prayer which is the strength of brotherhood.⁵⁴

St. Francis saw community as a form of mercy as the Lord said "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you". Religious make themselves available to give their lives to others as fellow travelers on pilgrimage in the world.⁵⁵ St. Francis realized that love would lead the religious to be able to interpret the deepest meaning of community life without measuring how much of an act of love he did because he was only carrying out what God wanted in him.

Harmonious community life will be able to build and provide opportunities for dialogue together amidst the diversity of members. Each religious must dare to go outside of itself as Pope Francis stated "After all, the man himself must occasionally dare to jump outside of himself" to recognize the richness of religious experience to find harmony in community life.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Nikolaus Tabe Radja and Yohanes Endi, "The Spirit of Brotherhood in the Order of Consecrated Life in Union with Jesus," *Sapa: Jurnal Kateketik Dan Pastoral* 7, no. 1 (2022): 63.

⁵¹ A. Heuken, *Encyclopedia of the Church Volume III H-J* (Jakarta: Yayasan Cipta Loka Caraka, 2004).

⁵² Leo Laba Ladjar, "Consecrated Life as Witness," *Liturgy* 26,4 (2015): 4.

⁵³ Marieta Ose Melburan, "The Trinitarian Communio According to Leonardo Boff and Its Relevance for the Community Life of Religious.," *KENOSIS: Jurnal Kajian Teologi* 8, no. 1 (2022): 99–114.

⁵⁴ Marieta Ose Melburan, "The Trinitarian Communio According to Leonardo Boff," n.d., 109.

⁵⁵ Desna Suryanita Malau and Hadrianus Tedjoworo, "Educational Process in the Correlation of Paulo Freire's Thought and the Spirituality of Francis Assisi," *Melintas* 39, no. 1 (2023): 64–97.

⁵⁶ *Fratelli Tutti*, 88., n.d.

Pope Francis also invites religious to share fraternal love and solidarity and to care for, support, and accompany each other.⁵⁷ Differences and conflicts in communal life are bound to occur but through these experiences, each member can strengthen each other and interpret them as experiences of love.

3.6.4. Hospitality in Community

Religious are called by God to be a source of joy in a world experiencing a crisis of affection. Religious need to strive for a welcoming and open community so that every member of the community and anyone who comes experiences joy and a good reception. The community is also part of obedience with mutual respect and appreciation for each person with all forms of service duties and also community members who have the trust to be servants. The community tries to live in diversity and be obedient to the community servant as a unifier, director, and an oasis for each member of the community to share, accept each other, trust each other, and forgive and embrace each other. Stewards in the community have a role in bringing community members to unite and be open in brotherhood to create a harmonious and peaceful community.⁵⁸

Dialogue within the community is an important part of creating a more open community. Dialogue is not only about exchanging thoughts or ideas but it becomes a living dialogue involving the heart and feelings that can help religious find truths that can be communicated together. An open community will have two directions that will strengthen brotherhood: inward movement to strengthen fellowship and outward movement to direct others to be in fellowship.

Religious communities are part of the partners of the Triune God who seek to bring others into God's plan of salvation. Unity in community is a great strength in love for mission in this age. Religious need to be open to the needs of today's world according to the charism of the congregation and take part in the task of the universal Church.⁵⁹ The spirit of brotherhood is expected to be a sign of God's presence that is real and felt by every member of the community and those who are served.

4. Conclusion

The vow of obedience in religious life is a commitment to both God and the community, expressed through detachment, love, and service. It is modeled on Jesus' obedience to the Father, even unto death. While modern challenges such as technology and individualism can threaten this commitment, religious individuals must strive for spiritual renewal to continue living their mission with joy and dedication. Obedience fosters true brotherhood and cooperation and strengthens spiritual bonds, helping religious members become a source of joy and actively contribute to the Church's universal mission.

⁵⁷ Sihol Situmorang, "The Beauty of God's Call: Reflections on Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter in the Year of Consecrated Life"; Also Anggur Baru, p. 24., "Logos 12, no. 2 (2015): 11.

⁵⁸ Marieta Ose Melburan, "The Trinitarian Communio According to Leonardo Boff."

⁵⁹ Nikolaus Tabe Radja, "The Spirit of Brotherhood in the Order of Consecrated Life in Union with Jesus'." n.d., 68.

Ultimately, the vow of obedience is a concrete way to live out the Gospel, providing spiritual nourishment that sustains the foundation of religious life. Through this vow, religious individuals deepen their love for God, build meaningful community relationships, and remain committed to serving others. It serves as a source of strength and guidance, ensuring that religious life remains rooted in faith and service.

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