

**Bishop Robert C. Morlino's address at the Stonehill College Symposium on
Apostolic Life: "Apostolic Religious Life since Vatican II...Reclaiming the
Treasure: Bishops, Theologians, and Religious in Conversation." - September 27,
2008**

I am honored to be with Cardinal Rodé, Cardinal O'Malley, brother bishops, so many good priests and so many sisters who seek after holiness. Every time I administer Confirmation, I remind the young women and men that consecrated life is all about witness to holiness with Mary, and like Mary, and that I need that witness. I need to be reminded that at the end it doesn't matter whether you are a pope, or a cardinal, or a bishop, or a priest. The only thing that matters at the end is holiness, with Mary, like Mary.

I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news for me is that all of the presentations were sent to me by Sister Jeanne in advance, in confidence, except for the presentation of His Eminence Cardinal Rodé. And my talk, that I had planned to give, mirrors his – rather closely. So that is tough for me. That's the bad news. The good news is that I'm on the same page as Cardinal Rodé. I feel great about that. So, in the last hour or so, I've been rethinking and revising a little bit, to see if there is some way that I could summarize the day, from my own point of view, but avoid repetition. And I thought I might put it this way.

As we watch television these days, in terms of the economic crisis in our country, we have one particular power group telling us that the plan proposed is a "bailout"; a bailout for the wealthy and the greedy – that doesn't sound very good. And we have another group telling us that it's a "rescue plan" for the tax payer – that sounds very good. Well, what is it? Is it a bailout or is it a rescue? Is it negative or is it positive? That's known as "spin." And what these representatives of these different power groups are trying to do, by repeating it over and over again, is teach us a language. Some want us to speak the language of "rescue" and some want us to speak the language of "bailout". They are trying to teach us a new language – people learn language by repetition. An awful lot of

money is being spent, so that certain political figures can repeat regularly, what they repeat, and teach us a new language. Repetition obviously works, when someone is trying to teach us a new language, and there is nothing new about that. St. Ignatius Loyola said, “repetitio est mater studiorum”, it’s the only way to learn.

As I look at the day, we’ve just been through, I couldn’t be more thrilled with Cardinal Rodé’s paper and the hope it’s given me, the inspiration to be even more emboldened than sometimes I am. I am very grateful to Cardinal Rodé for that. And I could not be more in agreement with what he said and especially with his concrete recommendations, regarding formation and continuing education. That’s where it’s at. People have been taught a language, since the Second Vatican Council. They’ve been taught a language and we have to teach our people, and people my age honestly, a new language. And in the case of people my age, it’s really profoundly difficult, because they have to unlearn a language, with which they’ve become very very familiar, since the Council.

I was impressed with Cardinal Rodé’s ability to speak Spanish so beautifully, along with Cardinal O’Malley. I can read Spanish. I cannot speak it, because I have to unlearn Italian, in order to do it. And it’s more important to me, right now, that I be able to speak Spanish, than it is to speak Italian. But Italian is, for me, more habitual. So, it’s very hard for me to speak Spanish, without defaulting to Italian, each time I pause to take a breath. It’s very hard to learn a new language, if we have to unlearn another language to do it. What you’ve been talking about all day, sentiments with which I strongly agree, is the language that was learned about the Church and about religious life, since Vatican II. But the language that many people have learned – it is clear from today that most of you resisted learning it – and I resisted learning it; but the language that many people have learned is the language of the discontinuity hermeneutic, the language of the rupture, between pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II. Many if not most of our people have learned the language of the discontinuity hermeneutic. And in order to learn the language that Pope John Paul the Great and Pope Benedict are trying to teach us, they have to unlearn the language that they learned. That’s very very difficult, and I try to remind myself every morning in prayer how difficult it is to unlearn a language, because I seemingly

cannot unlearn Italian, in order to speak Spanish. So, I really sympathize with those who are called to unlearn a language, in order to learn the one we need; in order to go with the Church in terms of the correct interpretation of the Second Vatican Council, for the sake of the future, for the sake of all of us, especially for the sake of younger people, younger sisters, younger priests, younger seminarians, especially for their sake, because they are not battle-hardened the way some of us are. And it would be better for their spiritual formation for them not to become battle-hardened. It would be better for their spiritual formation not to feel and experience being embattled, every morning when they wake up – that’s a hard way to wake up every morning. Like all good fathers and mothers, we want to leave our spiritual sons and daughters, our spiritual grandsons and granddaughters a better sense of life in Christ, and in the Church, than maybe we experienced.

With younger people, who are so open, the process is easier, because they don’t have to unlearn the language. But let’s just reflect on the language, that those of us who are older have been taught. I think, like a Jesuit, that in the religious life, everything comes down to obedience. Poverty is an instance of obedience, when you live the religious life. Poverty is obedience to a particular rule or constitution. Celibacy, celibate chastity, is an instance of obedience – obedience to the call of Jesus Christ, to sacrifice marriage for the sake of the Kingdom. Celibacy is an instance of obedience. The eschatological witness that we are called to live is an instance of obedience. Prayer, the daily structured prayer life, is an instance of obedience. Why is that so? It is because Jesus became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. The word used to concretize the love of Jesus Christ on the cross, is obedience. Jesus learned obedience from what He suffered – “not my will Father, but thy will be done” – obedience. Saint Paul, in this great Pauline year, says Jesus was never at one moment yes and another moment no to His Father, Jesus was never anything but yes. So, Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross – that act of love – as we unpack it, was an act of obedience, in fact, and an act of forgiveness. And we’ll get to that at the end.

But if I wanted to sum up what I want to say right now, briefly, it would be in the form of a simple equation: Obedience + Forgiveness = Love = Charity. But what happened? Obedience is everything. Obedience was reduced, it was redefined and it was spun as autonomy, autonomy justified by following my conscience. We've heard the word "deconstruct" several times today. In 1968, at the time of *Humanae Vitae* – the 40th anniversary is this year – the word "conscience" was deconstructed. Conscience was separated from its focus on discovering the objective truth. Conscience is a creature, conscience is not the creator of truth. Conscience is subject to the truth – the truth we get from scripture, from tradition, as interpreted by the Magisterium. Unworthy though we are, the Holy Father and the bishops have something to do with people maintaining a right conscience, rather than an erroneous conscience. But if people have an erroneous conscience, they still have to follow it. But that can't be the end of the story. And if people who have an erroneous conscience do not see the Holy Father and the bishops as speaking to that erroneous conscience then they're not in the Catholic Church. Then conscience becomes the creator of the moral law, rather than the creature, a human faculty, that is meant to latch on and discover the moral law. *Humanae Vitae* "took the lid off", in terms of the deconstruction of the word "conscience". Conscience became supreme. And it's not that artificial contraception is at the root of every other problem – it's that artificial contraception caused the deconstruction of the word "conscience" on a wide-spread level among Catholics. Catholics felt perfectly free to dissent and to "follow their conscience" and they were consistent enough to know that if they could follow their conscience, with regard to *Humanae Vitae*, they could follow their conscience with regard to anything else. And that was the beginning of all of the issues that you have been discussing today, because conscience is no longer a creature, but creator of the truth and free to reduce, to redefine, to deconstruct. Conscience redefined, deconstructed obedience to be some kind of consensus activity, lead by a facilitator, but not imitating Jesus Christ, by sacrificing the intellect and will completely, in obedience to superiors, to lawful authority in the Church. Obedience got deconstructed because conscience saw obedience differently than the tradition of the Church. And not only am I free to follow my conscience, but I must. That's how it went.

Then conscience took on poverty. Poverty was reduced to getting permission. It didn't mean another thing, in the late sixties and the seventies. It meant getting permission. So, poverty really went out of existence, not in every case, but institutionally/structurally, because poverty was reduced to obedience. If I got permission, then I kept my vow of poverty. And all you had to do to get permission, in those days (and I know there are some wonderful brother Jesuits here today – and they really are my brothers in a real way, and they know that I love them. I'm not talking about them today, I'm talking about the late sixties and the seventies.) if you went into a superior for permission, all you had to do was use the word "discern." If you said to the superior, "I discerned this", you got permission. And if you got permission, you kept the vow of poverty. That's a kind of profound reductionism. I used to joke with my friends, they seemed to conjugate that verb: I discern, you discern, I decide, when we should be conjugating it: I discern, you discern, He decides. Poverty was reduced to obedience.

Celibacy chastity was reduced to the abstention from the physical expression of sex. Celibacy, which is God's special gift to the religious, and to priests, is the sacrifice of marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of God – the sacrifice of marriage: one husband, one wife, one lifetime, openness to children, wanting to be a great dad, wanting to be a great husband. Jesus gives me the grace to sacrifice all of that. Celibacy is not just a matter of abstaining from the physical expression of sex; abstaining from sexual behavior. Celibacy has to do with what I think and how I feel, when I'm abstaining. There is no mind-body split. Celibacy has to do with what I think and what I feel when I'm abstaining. So, we're in a culture that wants to redefine marriage. If you're going to redefine marriage, you need to redefine celibacy. That's what I mean by spin and playing with words. Redefinition of marriage is particularly perilous for the Church. I can't make all the connections at this moment, but so much of what we believe depends on the definition of marriage that we have, from Christ, through the scriptures, in the Church. And if marriage is allowed to be redefined, the ripple effect of that problem will be something worse than the ripple effect of our current economic situation, which remains unknown. But in order to be the Church of Jesus Christ and to love Him, we need to know what marriage is. And if marriage can be redefined, in the minds of our people,

celibacy will have to be redefined. What am I sacrificing? But of course, marriage can't be redefined. But especially as consecrated religious, you have a great stake in that, as do I as a bishop. We can't sit back and watch the redefinition of marriage happen.

So, obedience got deconstructed, poverty got deconstructed, celibate chastity got deconstructed, the eschatological witness of religious life was kind of set aside (in favor of liberation theology – we're going to be messianic and perfect this world, when rather we need, constantly by the service of consecrated religious, to be focused on the world to come.) And as has been said, prayer has been reduced to looking at different options and variations. I believe Cardinal Rodé called them, “esoteric expressions”, different spiritualities from the East, because prayer is whatever my conscience tells me it is. And if I follow my conscience, I'm as “good as gold.” It all comes back to conscience. Conscience was the key to a false freedom. Conscience was the key to freedom as disobedience. One proves his freedom by disobedience. Jesus proved His freedom by obedience. And that's what we are all about and the Church is driven by the love of Christ, whose sacrifice on the cross was an act of obedience.

Without the replication of Christ's act of obedience in the Church, day in and day out, we cannot really be the body of Christ. So, when religious life gets deconstructed, or redefined, or reduced, this is a crisis more major than the present economic crisis, because this is a crisis that doesn't only pertain to money in time, but it's a crisis that pertains to salvation in eternity.

Obedience + Forgiveness = Love. That's what we have at Mass -the act of obedience of Jesus Christ, His one eternal sacrifice to the Father. We are able to be present to that act of obedience, we're able to be present to that one eternal sacrifice. We're able to join in and sacrifice ourselves, as called to poverty, chastity, obedience, eschatological witness and prayer. We are called to sacrifice ourselves with Christ, in Christ, through Christ, in that one eternal sacrificial “moment” in heaven. And Jesus offered that act of obedience, so that there might be mercy, so that there might be forgiveness. So, in the Mass itself, we are pulled into “Obedience + Forgiveness = Love.” And the forgiveness aspect of this

is not at all unimportant. I talked before about some of us waking up in the morning after the past forty years, feeling embattled, or feeling under siege. Some of us are angry about that. It wouldn't make sense for us to be happy about it, but some of us are downright angry about it.

I think we have to forgive the reality of life in the Church, for in many ways being harsh on us, for the past forty years. I don't think we can pass over it. I don't think we can overlook it. I don't think we can say, "oh now let's move on." I think we have to face the reality that life in the Church, has been harsh on us for forty years and I think we need to forgive that reality from the heart, otherwise there will be no peace or joy in moving on. A lot of us have felt, over the past forty years, like losers, while others were winners. There can be no joy for us in making them feel like losers, while we feel like winners. There are only winners in Christ. There are no losers.

So, we have to really reflect and pray and forgive. And as we think about formation and continuing formation for priests, brothers and sisters, this element of forgiveness needs to be factored in. There's actually a department (this is kind of an unpaid local commercial – but I mean it), there's actually a department at the University of Wisconsin, Madison called the Institute for Forgiveness. And people can go and get a doctorate in forgiveness. It's a combination of psychology with solid underpinnings compatible with our faith. I've had both my priests and seminarians participate. It's excellent. And if I had a concrete suggestion it would be that the need for forgiveness be incorporated fully into formation and continuing education, forgiveness of ecclesial reality for being tough on us for forty years, that's a lot of forgiveness, but it's probably less forgiveness than is needed in the ordinary marriage. So, with God's grace, we're up to it, because we need obedience in Christ, but if we want to have love, we need that forgiveness every bit as much. And the only other concrete recommendation I would have is that, as we form young novices for the consecrated life, or young seminarians or brothers for the religious life, as we engage in formation, we really need to be careful about guest speakers. Cardinal Rodé spoke about attention to where you send people for studies and formation. Great care also has to be taken that formation and continuing formation include strong and clear instruction

with regard to the Natural Law. We need to be very careful about who comes in to speak to priests for continuing education, or who is teaching the seminarians or candidates for religious life. And when things are going in a way that compromises the catechetical mission of the bishop, then the bishop has to push back. And as we look around the country, we're seeing more of that in terms of diocesan policy. I hope that the superiors of religious communities are being very vigilant about guest speakers, because it doesn't make sense for us to spend time and money promoting the discontinuity hermeneutic, that we are trying to move beyond, so that we can have a hermeneutic of continuity. So, I suggest concretely that we give great attention to speakers and I would suggest most strongly that, however we do it, we incorporate forgiveness, into our processes of continuing education. Let's incorporate forgiveness, so that we can go forward with peace and joy, where everyone in the Church is a winner, according to the mind of Christ, where there are no losers, because we all love and trust in the Providence of God.

Thanks for listening to me. Praised be Jesus Christ.