

# Divine Providence

Texts by Fr. Joseph Kentenich  
collected by Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, July 2000

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## Part 1: General Introduction

*In this first section excerpts from Fr. Kentenich collected for the book Rediscovering the Father (Mumbai, 1999) provide a first survey of the meaning of Divine Providence.*

### 1. God the Father's threefold Providence

Retreat for the Bethlehem Fathers, 1937

A sound, Catholic theology acknowledges a *threefold expression of faith in Divine Providence*: there is a general faith, a special and a very special faith in God's Providence.

*A general faith in God's Providence*

The Book of Wisdom (14,3) tells us: "It is your providence, O Father, that steers [the] course" of the universe. What does this presuppose? That through his kindness, through his power and through his faithfulness God directs all things to their goal: the birds flying through the air, the plants, the lilies flowering over there ... That is God's general Providence. Am I the recipient of this general Providence? Without doubt! But I am more: as a person I am the recipient of the heavenly Father's special love. Besides this there is a

*Providence in the narrower meaning of the word.*

Theologians tell us that beings endowed with a soul and grace are the objects of this *providentia specialis* (special Providence). They base this on all the passages in the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testament, which compare the heavenly Father to a hen, a mother, etc. We should look for such passages and meditate on them time and again. You could perhaps compile your own book of meditations. Your meditations should repeatedly take up such passages. Consider the beautiful pictures: a child at the mother's breast; a child dandled on her knees (Is 66,11-13); a child about whom it is said: a mother cannot forget her child, and even if she were to forget it: "I would

never forget you!" (Is 49, 15). Or the picture of the hen and chickens (Mt 23,37; Lk 13,34). Or the passage in Matthew's Gospel (6, 28-30 par): consider the lilies of the fields, the birds of the air. Your Father cares for them. How much more he cares for you, you of little faith? The Father is concerned about every least detail in us and around us. At the highpoint of the Old Testament the people believed in God's special Providence, but they applied it only to the people as a whole, not to the individual. The New Testament never tires of telling us that the Father loves the individual person, he is concerned about every person and every detail. We should take up these things like a new Gospel! There is still a

*providentia specialissima* (a very special Providence).

This (very special and very personal Providence) applies to the chosen: to those who receive the grace of perseverance, to those who are not merely graced, but who attain glory. Now comes the difficult question: may I consider myself one of the chosen who are surrounded by the *providentia specialissima*? I then belong to the company of those for whose sake the whole world was created, as Paul put it (cf Ro 4,13 ff; 1 Cor 3,21-23). Who would dare to answer that question? I have only posed the question. At any rate I am the recipient of the *providentia specialis*, so God loves me personally. And if I may suppose that I am also the recipient of the *providentia specialissima*, it means that I am uniquely loved by God.

You know that theologians and spiritual teachers, who know the dogmatic context far more deeply than we do, like to look for *criteria* that enable us to conclude to some extent whether *someone is one of the chosen*. One of these criteria is a deep and tender love for the Mother of God. They tell us that this is one of the surest criteria. However it is only a probability, it is relative. A mystery remains a mystery. Those who are really childlike know how to jump over the abyss. Why should I not suppose that the theologians are right?

## 2. The Crisis of faith in Divine Providence today

*Texte zum Vorsehungsglauben* (as quoted in: *Rediscovering the Father*, p. 54f. Original source: Letter to Fr. Turowski, Dec. 8, 1952)

How rarely it happens that people who represent God prove to be graphic, although shadowy likenesses of the divine mastery in connecting the *providentia generalis et specialis*, and in this way, according to the law of the transfer of affections, clearly point beyond themselves to God the Father and lead people to him! Once again we touch upon the importance of genuine fathers for the renewal of the world.

To put it in other words - faith in the *providentia divina specialis* does not, or does not sufficiently come alive, it remains a pale, religiously coloured idea. In practice we feel and know that in governing the world God - certainly motivated by a general benevolence - makes use of us, or even misuses us, for certain purposes, but we are not taken up personally, individually, we are not cared for, we are not protected and cherished. As a result people are not sufficiently anchored in God, they do not feel valued and upheld by him. Instead they feel depersonalised, objectified, treated as a cipher, even though to serve divine ends. That is why faith in Divine Providence does not become a vital force in the lives of individual people or nations. Then times of extraordinary catastrophe create total confusion and drive people into the arms of movements opposed to God.

This is particularly true when, as is the case today, these movements consciously attempt to deprive God of his *providentia generalis* by creating gigantic financial organisations with the character of a brilliantly functioning machine that can provide for the world. They lay claim to running the world better than before, but with purely secular means, and in this way hope to detach the world completely from God. Then through theory and practice, that is, through their teaching and life, they proclaim depersonalisation and the loss of identity with warmth and passion, with enticements, threats and the

use of force as the only means to save people from the needs of the times, and as the ideal. The individual then disappears into the crowd. The pale, religiously coloured expression of God's *providentia divina specialis*, where it still exists as a scanty left-over, is then swept away at a single blow.

So today God and his ape, the devil, confront each other in the field of Providence as elsewhere. It could be that sooner or later the suppressed *anima naturaliter christiana* (the soul that is naturally directed towards Christianity) will rebel against it and again call out for a metaphysical, religious anchor, and so find the way back to God. But when will that happen? Humanly speaking - we don't want to think of miracles to start with - will not many generations have to die out before such a turning-point is reached? ... Think of the time of the Reformation. ... What began then has survived until today; as the die was cast then, so it has remained until today. This could convince the people living at this present moment that they have been given the mission to set the direction for the next centuries in one way or the other.

Whoever sees and interprets the teaching on practical faith in Divine Providence, and way of life that results from it, from such a perspective will begin to suspect how important Schoenstatt's message in this regard is. They will also be able to evaluate the importance of the corresponding charisma for the individual, for people and nations, in the service of saving the personality and community, and the acknowledgement of God's presence in world events.

### 3. Suffering because we cannot understand God

Chronicle Notes, 1957 as quoted in Texts on Divine Providence

Dostoevsky experienced very personally and to an extraordinary depth that he could not understand God's ways of governing the world, and he depicted it brilliantly. Most of the heroes in his writings never come to terms with this incomprehensible God. He is the source of unbearable anguish to them. Time and again they cry out to heaven: "God has been a lifelong torture to me." Or: "God torments me. Only God torments me. But what if he does not exist?" Or again: "It is not that I do not accept God, please understand me correctly, I do not and cannot accept the world he has created. The apparent senselessness and injustice in world events, which cries out to heaven, forces the outcry from my tortured breast: I do not understand ..., I don't even want to understand ..." This passionate rebellion against God is constantly nourished by every form of cross and suffering to be found in world events. Incomprehensibility after incomprehensibility wherever we look! "This little word WHY? has been poured out over the whole universe - even from the first days of creation, and each day creation cries out to its Creator: WHY? By now 7000 years have passed and it has received no answer." - "In the first place there is the unspeakable suffering of innocent children which Ivan quotes as a reason for his passionate revolt against God. Unforgettable pictures pass before Ivan as he rejects Aljoscha - pictures of the naked boy, who in his terror had almost lost consciousness and who, at the order of a General, was hunted to death by a pack of dogs. A dreadful impression is left by the tale of the five-year-old girl who is plastered with faeces by her own mother and locked up at night in the latrine where in the darkness and cold she beats her sobbing, starving little breast with her little fists and prays in childlike despair to 'our dear little God'. Even the greatest harmony means nothing to the modern Job as long as a single, martyred child still weeps. Ivan was obviously right in saying that God is in the weeping child - and not in the eloquent apologists who, like Job's pious friends, try to defend injustice, which causes the harried suf-

ferer to burst out in indignation. All these terrible facts force Ivan again and again to ask why such senselessness was created. I do not understand, he confessed in outrage against the Almighty, and I do not even want to understand, because the world is based on senselessness. Nothing would happen without this absurdity. It is the vast sea of human tears with which the earth is saturated from its crust to its core which causes Ivan to reject every higher harmony in principle."

If we try to discover the ultimate reasons for such an attitude in a writer who had an extraordinarily deep religious disposition, and whom we could expect to have taken the correct religious standpoint with regard to the incomprehensibility and injustice in world events, we will not be far out if we state that Dostoevsky personally never found the way from our crucified Saviour to God the Father. Buber even believed that Dostoevsky clung in a one-sided way to the Son, because he rejected the Father. I think that this is justified. It must only be understood correctly. In everyday life the searching spiritual guide is not seldom confronted with people who are extraordinarily religious, but who think and feel in the same way. They see much incomprehensible suffering around them and they are also personally marked to an extraordinary degree by the cross. In their helplessness they close their eyes to God the Father, who seems to them to be an absolute and incomprehensible stranger in the face of such horrors, and they flee into the arms of our crucified and spiritually tormented Saviour in order to express their sympathy with him, who has also been so incomprehensibly maltreated by the Father. What is certain is that the figure of Christ, especially as the Crucified, posed no problem to Dostoevsky, while the ideal and figure of God the Father always caused him great confusion and alarm. He never came to terms with it until the end of his life. He loved Christ almost passionately. He saw it as his mission to see to it that the Russian people embraced him not just with their minds, but also with their hearts, their whole hearts. It was in this context that he spoke of a Russian Christ, that is, a Christ that could be loved in the Russian way with one's whole heart and soul.

#### 4. The world's fundamental law of love

Retreat for the Bethlehem Fathers, 1937

The essence of God's nature is to be a Father. This *fatherhood* is in keeping with God's *fatherliness*. From this follows the great fact of the world's fundamental law of love. Whatever God does, he does *out of love, through love and for love*.

*Everything out of love*

*The main motive of all God's actions is his fatherly love.* There are other, secondary motives, for example, his justice, his creativity, but the main motive is his desire to give of himself - it is love. This love is so creative that it motivates his justice and his creativity.

Fatherliness in God should not be confused with being a grandfather. God the Father can also cause suffering. He is also our just God, but his justice is always motivated by his mercy, by his fatherly love. Whatever God does, his main motive is love. What does that mean? The answer is most important.

*Everything through love*

God wants to draw people to himself through tangible proofs of his love. This is how we should understand the incarnation, the crucifixion, the tremendous acts of kindness God pours out on us. The heavenly Father wants to attach our ability to love to himself through tangible signs of his love.

Here we see the wonderful educational genius of our almighty God. *God has placed the drive to love in the human heart as its noblest, most basic drive.* You must be convinced of this if you are to recognise the nature of your Institute. The most essential basic drive is not fear, but love. This is proved, among other things, by the fact that if I have taken hold of a person by the corner of love, I have the

whole person. Through fear I only have him as long as he is subject to my influence. The drive to love is the most essential basic drive. Listen, for example to *St Augustine*. He called love the soul's force of gravity. *Francis de Sales* stressed that just as the body is created for the soul, so the soul is created for love. The great Artist, the great Builder of the world, our infinitely merciful, kind and almighty God, knows that the human drive to love is most strongly aroused when a person is surrounded by prodigal proofs of love. God, the great Artist and Pedagogue, wants to bind our drive of love to himself.

### *Everything for love*

What does that mean? What is God's plan for his creatures? He wants to bring them into a deep union of love with himself. That is the meaning of creation and redemption: we should enter into a very deep and intimate union of love with God.

Do you know what I have just described? The great fact that God is not just a Father, he also has the attitude of a Father. His fatherly attitude is the proof of the great law governing the world: Everything out of love, through love and for love.

## **5. God's loving plan - a mysterious fabric**

Sermon in Milwaukee, December 25, 1964

We could now look away from ourselves and take a look at the world today with its chaos and all the circumstances we have been talking about, and which we can expect to encounter. Isn't there a plan behind them, and isn't this a loving plan? That sounds strange! Behind everything there is a loving plan, a wise plan, an omnipotent plan, although it seems as though the Lord God is helpless in the face of world events today. Let me ask you to take my pessimistic picture seriously. I must express what is really going on in my heart, what my mind broods over constantly in quiet moments, what I cannot cope with. Is there a plan behind it all? To put it another way, was St Augustine right when he said (he was able to express the problems of life brilliantly): Yes, God drew up a plan from all eternity - an omnipotent, wise and loving plan. He drew it up most carefully - this is put in human terms. In this plan I am not just a cipher that can be played with, or a nameless being which can fill a hole and about which no one, least of all the eternal, infinite God, spends a thought. But, he added, this plan is naturally a mystery. It is not something God places before us like a mirror so that we can look at it and see: that is the plan, how does it compare with reality? Oh, no! By no means! That is not what happens! Things would be too easy. We would then know exactly how things are and how things will turn out in the end. A plan, but this plan - as St Augustine added (we know the image he used) - is a fabric, it could be compared to a wall hanging. So it has a right and left side. On the left side we see only a chaos of threads. Who is allowed to look at this side? People with an aesthetical bent are unable to even look at it. Chaos! Yet, when we look at it from the right side, it is a brilliantly conceived pattern, a wonderful plan has been carried out. A plan of life. Does the plan of my life look like this? How wonderful it would be, after I have grown older, after I have had it shoved in my face anyhow, if I could dare to take a look at my own life, my own fate? How wonderful it would be if it were possible to look at the tapestry from the right side for a moment!

St Paul, whom we like to study, once offered a magnificent answer to the questions that weigh us down today: *Diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum* - we know that all things work together for good for those who love God (Ro 8,28). For them everything ultimately resolves itself in a way that causes them great pleasure. They know that even if their lives have been really hard, even if everything was in disorder, not just their hair or clothes, but also their unfortunate bodies, if they were beaten and tortured, they know and constantly repeat: behind everything there is a loving plan, a wise plan, an almighty plan of love. I repeat, it is not as though we merely want to believe this now! Theologians tell us - and those of us who are in touch with the times can empathise with what they say - that one of the most essential sources of our bliss in eternity, besides seeing God face to face, will consist in looking back into the history of our times and the world (and we have all been part of world history) to see the wonderful wisdom of God's plan and the part we have played in carrying it out.

## **Part 2: Living the Relationship with God as a Provident Father**

*This second section of excerpts from Fr. Kentenich comes from the very important retreat for the Bethlehem Fathers which he gave in Switzerland in 1937. The excerpts shed light on how we can live the relationship with God as a personally caring and provident Father. They also underscore the dynamic nature of the relationship with God, including how it is not always easy to come to grips with the things God sends us.*

### **6. How Can we Develop the Art of Living in and with God?** (Retreat for the Bethlehem Fathers, 1937, Seventh Conference)

We now come to the practical question: Given this foundation, how can we develop the simple art of living in and with God? I would like to give you a popular answer which you can pass on to your students. I may stress that there is hardly anything so natural as the simple, continual dialogue with God, since God is so concerned about us and lovingly works in us and on us. It is actually a matter of courtesy for us to turn our attention to God. He is continually turned toward us in his essence, his love, his kind activity. Therefore our souls ought to turn toward God as the sunflower turns toward the sun. Perhaps our parents and grandparents practiced this simple way of living with God, oblivious to the theory behind it. It is not so much something we learn from ascetical books as from life. It is quite a simple life-process, only the analysis tends to make it look complicated. Therefore what I have now analyzed you must see in practical living as a single, great process of life.

This life-process can be seen from three angles. If I observe how simple, good-hearted people speak and live with God I will find:

1. first, they look at him often with the eyes of faith;
2. secondly, they converse with him often and lovingly, and
3. thirdly, they make frequent and significant sacrifices for him.

Remember, this is a single life-process! In a given moment one aspect may be stressed more, in another moment another aspect. How naturally this threefold act arises from what we have discussed so far! Let us learn this lesson and apply it to our lives!

**First: We must look often on God in faith.**

We are doing desperately little if we are only *thinking* of God often. Psychologically spoken, we must not deceive ourselves. A complex of ideas, even if it is God, has little impact unless it is likewise a complex of values. To give this proper weight and to prevent a certain mechanization, I prefer to say that we must frequently look on God in faith. The life-process of faith is not only a function of the intellect, but also of the will.

*What is faith?* You may view faith as a *sharing in the self-knowledge of the Triune God*. This is a simple paraphrase of dogmatic truth.

A group of German scholars once had an audience with the late Pope Pius X. In his simple way, Pius X gave these scholars a talk about "the divine worldview," namely the Catholic faith. The Catholic faith is "the divine worldview"—think about that! What is our faith? A *sharing in God's worldview*. I want to and may and must view the world as God views it; to which I might immediately add—not the God of nature but the God of revelation, the triune God of revelation. (...)

Apply this to your lives. We have said that we must look on God in faith. How and where? We should look on him in his person and in the places where he meets us. Where is he? In the hearts of those in the state of grace. We should see him there in the bright light of faith. Here we encounter the high *law by which we make all created things transparent to God*. The light of faith enables me to look through man as through a glass and discern the Triune God in his heart. By the light of faith we can grasp that Christ is present in the tabernacle and see how he is present. Only the light of faith can give us warmth and brightness. If we only think in mechanical categories, we fail to do creation justice.

If I would now ask our parents and grandparents or other serious Christians how they live this frequent, unaffected looking on God, what would they tell us? They would say they meet God in his activity. This is the simple faith in Divine Providence of our Christian faithful. The simple believer in Divine Providence perceives whatever comes his way as a gift of love and an invitation to love from the eternal, gracious, and infinite God. Perhaps that is the correct expression: *In the light of faith every event that takes place within and around us wants to be viewed as a gift of love and an invitation to love sent by the heavenly Father*. Is this not how simple Catholics live their faith?

If you observe how the simple faithful take the blows of fate, you will find that they use this faith as the preferred way to apply the spirit of faith.

*Simple people look upon the blows life deals them as greetings from God which challenge us to greet God in return*. Faith in Divine Providence views nothing as coincidence, for everything comes from God's providence. Faith in Divine Providence tells us:

God is Father,  
God is good,  
Everything He does is good,

even that which causes our nature to rebel. Great *calamities* are seen by such simple people as *the switching of the tracks* along which we travel like a fast train. At the last moment the switch is thrown. Who was responsible? God! The train shudders—passengers are injured, have broken bones—but their lives are saved. This is how we may look upon the calamities we have suffered in our lives—both in our personal lives and in the lives of our community and family. A simple child sees God the Father behind everything. God is Father, God is good, everything He does is good!

It might be worth our while to take a moment to *review our past* from this standpoint. Did not major blows of fate turn into periods of blessing? If I look back and let it sink in, I will be much calmer in the future. Then I can even think of the future of the family without worry. I know that at the bottom of all world events is a steady and loving Father-hand. Think of the great turmoil of our times. Or think of your apostolate. The ground is quaking under our feet. In such a situation only a child can remain calm. God is Father, God is good, everything he does is good; the most effective way is to always measure things by God, to always see a kind and loving Father-hand behind all blows of fate, behind everything that happens. Continue this line of thought on your own in this or a similar fashion. For what I need to accomplish right now, it is enough to have pointed you in the right direction.

Look on God often in faith! Perhaps you will ask me: *How often?* Let me first give you a general answer and then state it more precisely: *Quantum potes, tantum aude* [as often as you can]—*as often as your faith and love allows*. Here all of you who work with youth must see to it that their life with God does not become too mechanical. I don't think it would be wise to start with a directive like: every hour, every half hour, every quarter hour. I would advise against it, even though you find something like this in almost every ascetical manual. From practical experience I know that these things are usually discarded later if they are too mechanical. If the forms are not carried by love, are not made fruitful

by love, then it will only be a mechanical action and will not last very long. We tend to discard anything which does not become our own, from the inside. [Therefore the directive:] As much as you can.

### **Second: We should try to speak often with God.**

I must confess: for us men this may well be the most important thing. For, given the way we are formed, it is relatively easy for us to see how events connect to God, to theoretically grasp the divine greatness of a certain action. And we can speak eloquently about all these things. But we sense how religious thinking [alone] fails to make us devout. God wants religious *love!* For us men, religious love must show itself in a simple speaking with God. God speaks to me and therefore I respond to him. It's that simple.

*What does this speaking look like?* Think of ejaculatory prayer. It doesn't have to be a "patented" ejaculatory prayer with so-and-so many indulgences. We must *dialogue with the heavenly Father in a simple and down-to-earth manner.* That is one of the essential qualities of genuine childlikeness. What counts is therefore not this or that ejaculatory prayer, but the loving dialogue with God. Because we are so superficial, so mechanical in our dialogue with God nowadays, we cannot do enough to remind ourselves that what matters is speaking with God in a simple and down-to-earth manner, just "as it comes naturally." I can even scold him in a reverent way. If we could only learn this again! This is childlikeness. Then our religious lives could perhaps gradually awaken and grow, perhaps even grow rapidly—but in any case more steadily. Instead we make the sad experience of so many serious Christians who once were great prayer people as teenagers, trying everything under the sun! But it was not organic, not healthy. When we came more down to earth, we discarded it. The burnt child avoids the fire. We tried what was in the books, so we don't even want to try again. We must therefore learn to talk with God more simply and unaffectedly, just as our parents and grandparents did. They did not know a lot of theory, but the Spirit of God was with them. Speak frequently with God! But not with the lips—we must keep our freedom in the matter—I must speak with my heart!

If you ask *how often one should speak to God*, I am now in a position to tell you. The answer can also be applied *mutatis mutandis* [with the necessary changes] to the first point of how often we should look on God. It seems to me personally that, psychologically speaking, it is extremely

important that we give the answer from the right starting point. Where must we begin when it comes to speaking with God? Let me begin with *two answers.*

*First, we should try to see and use our spiritual exercises<sup>1</sup> as a school of love.*

What does "school of love" mean? It is the time when our hearts warm up to God. Hence, we should not too easily dispense ourselves from our spiritual exercises. If we would succeed in using them as a school of love, something of this ardor of love would radiate back into our everyday lives. Was this not the case with Moses, even to an extraordinary degree? On a lower level we probably experience something similar. Moses was allowed to speak to God. Afterwards his face was radiant (cf Ex 34, 29-35). Our souls, too, become radiant through the bright and ardent dialogue with God during our normal prayer times and spiritual exercises. It is therefore worthwhile to work on improving our lives in this area and ask: What can I do in order to make Holy Mass a school of love, or the breviary, or my spiritual reading, etc.? You must make an effort here, especially since the ideal of childlikeness is so crucial to our spirituality and it demands that we grow in love as quickly as possible.

The most important thing? No short cuts! Learn from the saints. They will tell you that they did not begin to become heroic until the moment they experienced how specially God loved them. I must therefore stress in my spiritual life the meditation of God's benefits, must swim in the mercies of God. Again and again I must immerse myself in the ocean of God's gifts. My favorite occupation should be to say over and over again: Dear God, how much you love me! How much you really love me as the apple of your eye! In the liturgy we should not just repeat the texts but vibrantly grasp them as an expression of what we ourselves experience. The point: to let our spiritual exercises become more and more a school of love.

You may then find it useful to devote, for instance, your meditation to reliving and resavoring all the good things God did for you yesterday and the day before. Or, when your community history is written and you want to be a more complete child of your community, review and observe how God's Fatherly hand hovered over your community, how, when all seemed

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<sup>1</sup> Meant are the various moments of prayer and religious practices which we have during the day.

lost, victory was suddenly snatched from defeat! In fact, reliving the ways of God's love in our lives should really become our daily bread; that is what keeps the average Catholic going.

This is one starting point: I learn to speak with God during my regular spiritual exercises. If I do this, it will radiate something into everyday life without my even making a particularly great effort.

*Secondly*, it seems to me that *we should really discover*—each one in his own unique way—*when our soul is more naturally inclined to God*.

For the one or the other, the evening hours may be the time when the soul catches fire for God. This is often the case. Many a novice will tell you: What a pity that I have to be in bed so punctually! Just then I feel the strong urge to kneel down for a quarter of an hour. I would advise you, apart from the novitiate, to make use of such times when God apparently wants to reserve the soul for himself (why else would he prompt the soul this way?). For others the attraction is stronger in the morning. Those who have hard jobs, however, are usually tired in the morning. We must be very down-to-earth in this regard and let experience tell us when we feel most inclined to speak with God.

*Experience also tells us that a religious soul feels the strongest urge to seek refuge in God when faced with cross and suffering*. Think about it. There are *two reasons* which make this so important:

First, it helps you better understand why the Divine Gardener trims us, his vine, so much (cf Jn 15,1f).

Secondly, because we usually have a hard time finding our way to God and he gets our attention by knocking on the door of our souls through cross and suffering.

Once I have this clear, what will my first reaction be to cross and suffering? It will not take long before I pray, "Dear God, what good do you want to do for me now?" The usual answer is, "What did I do wrong again?" This is not the child's answer. A true child, even if cross and suffering are a punishment, always sees the love behind it. The first reaction must therefore always be: "Dear God, what good do you want to do for me now?" I say a heartfelt thank you, even when I do not know the reason for the cross and suffering, for I know that it has been sent to me because he loves me! We cannot always live on "cloud nine," especially given the many struggles we must deal with in everyday life. But we can live in the presence of God. That means we should hear God speak to us

through the events of our life. After all, we must live the life God gives us! We cannot always pull back from our activities and make an hour of adoration or the like.

*We should examine our everyday lives for God's knock*, because daily life is where God knocks. I believe that there are many Christians, also among yourselves, for whom practical everyday life is the faster road to holiness than cloistered adoration. In cloistered adoration you might lose your motivation. The adoration we keep is before the will of God in everyday life. In that sense we, too, keep a perpetual adoration. In fact, apostolic vocations typically find that life is what challenges them to come closer to God. (...)

May I indicate to you a few ways that God knocks more strongly at the door of the soul, drawing us more quickly to himself? One way is when *we experience a special joy in our souls*. Noble souls are especially aware of how joy lifts them more strongly to God. The way I see it, we moderns are terribly proletarian toward God, not even noticing the many ways God makes us happy. What a shame! A noble soul always has a "Thank you, God" on his lips. I would like to suggest the motto: *Don't take anything for granted!* It is not, for instance, just a routine fact that you and your community can live so undisturbed while other communities in neighboring countries are immersed in crisis. It is not just a matter of course that you have such a wonderful house. Think about it: have I already personally thanked for God having given me the very best? In that regard we are such mass-men. Here, too, the principle should apply: Let each one view the community as if he himself founded it. Each detail sent by God affecting the community, including everything noble and good, should be an occasion for our personal gratitude. That is the means used by the simplest Christians to remain close to God. They may not know much, but they *live* it! (...)

As I have said, if we want to speak often with God, we must find sound starting points. This brings us to the second question: *How should we use these starting points?* Let me give you the simplest possible answer: We should make our dialogue with God

deeper,  
simpler,  
more varied.

With that I have given you a whole system for acquiring a deeper interior life. What does this mean in practice?

*First, our dialogue should be deeper.* We should educate ourselves to especially value individual prayer. You can do this very well because you have very few prayers said in common! Even when you are all together in the chapel you can pray what you like. Community prayers are truly kept to a minimum. I would advise you—and I tell myself the same—we must make fuller use of the times when we feel more strongly drawn to God. Other things can wait! If the soul is ready, savor prayer to full advantage! Turn inward and let this time last longer.

*Secondly, simpler in the movement of the heart.* This is something we should stress much more. Many of us make a good meditation, but continually tell ourselves, "I can't meditate." Why? We worry too much about following certain rules. Don't let this drag you down! The best meditation is the interior prayer of the heart. It is worth much more than formal, methodical meditation. You must not confuse the method with the aim. It is only a means to an end. If the means is not helpful, let it go. All that matters is that we are with God! Be simple in your dialogue with God! Happy are those who work a lot with children. In teaching them how to do things one learns to be simple. The simpler the better! You will find that the more mature the soul, the more it rests in God with a simple affect of love. The saints could do this—and do not think that it was extraordinary. We often turn God out because we think this simple prayer is not what prayer should be. The saints could rest for months in a single affect. Think of St. Francis, whose soul rested in the affect "My God and my All!" It was his interior nest; he lived from this one sentiment. He did not say afterwards: I did not meditate because this is all I did! We drive out the Spirit of God because we cling too much to formalities. Forms are crutches which we need in the beginning. Later they can often become dangerous. Your own way is unique, but you can orient yourselves on the principle: The more down-to-earth, the better! I must speak with God like a child speaks with his father, just "as it comes naturally," even if it is not written that way in any book. Books can be written for others!

*Thirdly, we must add to the number of our starting points.* This is obvious. How many more? I do not dare fix a number. *Quantum potes, tantum aude!* [As often as you can]. I think that if you use the starting points I mentioned, you will not have to worry that your dialogue with God is becoming mechanical or forced.

With that I think I have spelled out the two elements clearly enough: We must first look often on God in faith, both in his being and in his

actions, and secondly speak often with God using simple, unaffected prayers of ejaculation.

### **Third: We Must Make Sacrifices for God**

I may come back to this later. For now I want to give a brief overview so that we can come to a certain conclusion.

#### *Reasons*

Why do we have to make little sacrifices for God? Let me give you *two answers*.

Our dialogue with God is a dialogue of love. For a *true dialogue of love with God, I must become more and more detached from self*. It should not be a dialogue of love with self, but with God! The dialogue of love with God, however, demands a corresponding detachment of the soul from self and from all that is not God and is opposed to God. We must therefore make little sacrifices so that our entire life becomes one great act of love; that is what it must become—it is the reason we are here! The freedom which our community allows us is all the more reason to take the initiative and find the means to reach this end. In this context let me remind you of the beautiful words of St. Ignatius: *Deum quaerere et diligere in omnibus tum in rebus cum in hominibus* [(Our goal is) to seek and love God in all things and persons]. I seek God in all things and behind all things and love him in all things. But to love God I must detach myself from my morbid self-will, from my morbid love of created things.

We want to be children of the Father, because we are brothers of Christ, i.e., children of the Father who follow the example of the only-begotten Son of God. Then you will recall how St. Paul viewed the Mystical Body of Christ: I complete in my own sufferings what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1,24). *If Our Lord as the only-begotten Son of God had to suffer so much, then I must suffer too* and, like him, let the power of my love flow back to the heavenly Father.

#### *Characteristics*

What do these sacrifices look like? I will only touch on this now to keep on schedule. My acts of sacrifice must be: first of all, enlightened, secondly, positive, thirdly, powerful and serious.

## 7. Ita Pater

(Retreat for the Bethlehem Fathers, 1937, Ninth Conference)

As we proceed, Our Lord's call to "become like little children" gains in meaning. Unless we, like children, become a reflection of the Father's simplicity, we cannot enter into heaven!

We considered what this simplicity toward God involves. The answer has two parts: the concentration of all our faculties in God and the detachment, the freeing of all our faculties from all that is not God and is opposed to God. You will surely agree that this is the attainable pinnacle of simplicity.

In order to urge ourselves on a little during this retreat so we can successfully reach out for this summit, we considered a number of motivations. Perhaps the thoughts at the end of the last talk helped make us want to reach out for the constant recollection of our faculties in God.

Let me add, though: What I said was not really the core; *the most central thing is love*. If we experience profound growth in love, the constant recollection of our faculties in God will become second nature to us.

### Detachment from All That is Not God and is Opposed to God

We now want to pursue the same train of thought, namely detachment.

Here, too, I may mention secondary motives. I do so deliberately. I could simplify my work by just saying: If we really had a deep love of God, detachment would follow as a matter of course. But it cannot do us any harm to examine the secondary motives.

It goes without saying that attachment is not possible without detachment. It is also clear that our degree of attachment depends on our degree of detachment. This detachment from things that are not of God or opposed to God can be both active and passive.

### Active Detachment

Active detachment entails self-denial and mortification by conscious exertion. By my own activity, and supported by grace, I must detach myself from all that is not good. However, in our context I do not want to stress this so much, especially since we have already discussed it. Today I want to stress *passive detachment* instead.

### Passive Detachment

I begin by pointing out to you that God himself, our heavenly Father,

takes the pruning knife to cut and trim us. The Father prunes the vine so that it may bring forth more fruit (cf Jn 15,2). What must *I* do? I must lie down on the "operating table" and let him cut. I have to keep silent and merely say again and again, "Yes, Father. Do to your child whatever pleases you!"

Let me give you *two motivations* to support your interest in pursuing this attitude.

### Negative Motivation

First of all, let me state that *whoever is incapable of saying this simple, profound, unaffected, childlike Ita Pater [Yes, Father] hinders God in his educational activity*. That reminds us of the thought we already heard from Pestalozzi. This thought is too profound to grasp in one hearing.

Again: If I do not say a courageous and childlike *Ita Pater* in the face of all crosses and suffering, I hinder God in his profound pruning, in his educational activity and work. I don't think that I must prove this to you again. The thought was clearly explained the first time. I would rather reverse the perspective and state positively the

### Positive Motivation

*Whoever is capable of saying this childlike and humble Ita Pater in the face of every blow of fate and prays and acts accordingly, can be certain of two great advantages*: First, in some practical way the mysteries of my personal life will become clear. Second, I give God the chance as my heavenly Father to treat and form me in some way as the apple of his eye.

I believe that these two thoughts are capable of filling our souls with joy and gratitude.

While I speak in abstractions, you must think concretely, think about your own suffering and that which is so difficult for you in community life or in your personal troubles. I shall speak on this subject in much more detail the day after tomorrow. I think I am obliged to do this so that we gradually learn to transform our inmost lives.

But for tonight I just want to give you the one or the other insight.

*First, in a practical way the Ita Pater resolves all of life's personal riddles*. One often talks about the insoluble tangle of world events! This is decidedly true. It is not so simple to untangle the confused jumble of world history. It is an insoluble riddle. Why this? Why that? But if I have a *simple faith in Divine Providence* which says again and again this simple, childlike *Ita Pater*, then I can likely say: for me each mysterious riddle is

solved. I know that what God sends me is always for the best. For a simple child that is enough. After all, it comes from the Father. As a simple child I do not need to know all the whys and wherefores. I only know that whatever each moment brings, God my Father has foreseen it—either directly ordained it or permitted it. In the *Ita Pater* the simple child always has the answer to all of life's riddles. I only need to speak it in each second. The next second will demand a new *Ita Pater*. At any rate, I do not torment myself by constantly trying to figure out: What will happen next?

What a pinnacle of sanctity is available to us through simplicity! And we all know it, especially those of us who are given to brooding or who are embittered. The moment of light when the clouds are driven away will come! For now I only need to know: *Ita Pater!* Sculptor God, strike with hammer and chisel! I am your stone! Sculptor God, strike with force, I am your child! You know what you are doing. You see the masterpiece that I could be and you wish to form it; this part and that must be chipped away from the stone. Sculptor God, go to work, I am your stone. When I resist, when I say "no"; when I begin to take my fate into my own hands, that is the worst thing that can happen. *My very greatest care must be*—I think that this is a slogan which we must take to heart, for it transmits so much profound wisdom—to be, each second, endlessly carefree. This is no frivolity. Why? Because the Father is at the helm!

Though storm may rage and wind may howl,  
and lightning strike again,

I think as does the mariner's child:

My father is at the helm.

You must imagine this scene: A heavy sea. Storm upon storm. A ship tossed by the waves. A child sitting near the helm, calmly looking into the churning sea and amazed by its fury. That is the way of a child; the father is in command. As long as the father is at the helm, nothing bad can happen! There is, of course, much ignorance in this childlikeness, but that is not the point here.

Should I not apply this saying to my personal difficulties, even when I must admit that my difficulties previously made me turn away from God? I never understood. Why not? Because my simple, childlike faith in Divine Providence, my simple *Ita Pater* was still too weak!

My only care must be:

to be, each second, endlessly carefree!

Ask yourselves: Does it not concretely solve all the riddles of my life

when I have the simple faith of a child, when I let myself be formed by the heavenly Father, knowing that he is making me into a work of art?

Let me briefly outline the *second advantage*: *By simple willingness—for instance, letting God 'work' on me even when I do not understand his final purpose—I give God the chance to educate and form me as his beloved child, as the apple of his eye.* This is such a simple thought, but such an insightful truth! What is God's purpose in fashioning me this way? What intention does he have for our family when he sends such tremendous cross and suffering? First, he must detach us from our inordinate self-will. Secondly, he must detach us from our inordinate self-sufficiency and pride. Thirdly, he must free us from all disordered attachment to creatures. You immediately see the ulterior motive! If God wishes to possess every fiber of my heart he must perform this threefold operation on me.

1) *He must break my inordinate self-will.* As a consequence of original sin, do we not hinder the hand of the Divine Master from forming us again and again by asserting our inordinate self-will against his Divine Will? Our self-will is so laced with this disease and perversion that the poison cannot be removed unless God himself applies the knife.

Have the courage to apply such simple thoughts to your community's crosses and sufferings! If we have done everything in our power to prevent the suffering, we can rest assured that God has permitted it for my best and the best of the family. Even if we cannot say with certainty that it is the will of God, we still know that whatever he has in mind is something good!

As I have said, I will revisit this when I speak about obedience. I will do so because I think we need a healthy *understanding of obedience*. Obedience must, of course, be allied with frankness, but it must also be capable of submission of the will when God clearly shows that he wants to lead the community in a different direction from what I feel is good. This is what it means to go God's ways in simple faith in Divine Providence!

To wit: What does God want? To break my sick self-will so that every fiber of my will ultimately belongs to him.

2) *He wants to break my inordinate pride and drive to succeed.* It might be good for us to briefly recall how filled with pride we priests are without our really knowing it. Think of how much we can lecture others and work on their faults and sins! Therein lies the great danger of smugness. The more one fights sin in others, the more one can become complacent with self. Or think of the successes we have in our profession. In short: stand back and see how much opportunity we have to feed and

nourish our pride.

Recall, on the other hand, how almost every suffering sent or permitted by God involves *humiliation*. Consider, for instance, your disappointments in your situation in life, in your superiors, in your fellow-workers. Do they not all include a certain humiliation? Or, works of mine which took great effort to build up are destroyed. The very ones for whom I sacrificed so much cast stones at me. Are not such humiliations almost part of daily life? Why? Original sin has caused pride, in one form or another, to become almost second nature to us. This is why God must wield the hammer and chisel. Conversely, if God does not send us suffering or humiliation, we should almost fear that he is forgetting us, that he is no longer treating us as the apple of his eye. Of course, everything he does is out of love, not to torment us. His motive is to free us from this poison so that our souls can fly to him with greater simplicity.

3) And finally, let me remind you *that God must free us more and more from our disordered attachments*. If you ask what purpose and meaning *created things and persons have in God's plan*, you will find that they have a *threefold purpose*. First of all, they must *attract* us. Think of a created thing or person. What should it stir in me? Now, if it is a person, he or she should awaken in me (for instance, through certain attractive features) my drive to love. The same applies to created things. Secondly, they must *transmit, i.e., refer us on to God*. Every creature should point beyond itself to God. But because we are, as a rule, enslaved to things or people, they have a third function—*to disappoint us*.

### **The Function of Disappointment in Created Things and Persons**

We must hear this as mature persons. I ask myself: How many disappointments have I had—professionally and in family life! Now be sensible enough to say to yourself: It is *normal* that creatures disappoint us. The most you could object is: Why this form of disappointment? You are quite right. But we are not in a position to choose our disappointments. In simplicity, we leave that to God. We try our best to prevent trouble and to change what can be changed. If that is not possible, then both the mature man and the simple child (and here the two are the same) must accept the disappointment.

Why do creatures have this function? Why must they hurt us so much? *Not to make us bitter, but to awaken our inner strength*. It is the way which most surely awakens our deepest, most vibrant power to love. You will

find confirmation of this in the lives of the saints. They had to suffer great disappointments. Who should I mention first? Think of so many religious founders. What happened to them? Take Alphonsus Ligouri—thrown out of his own community after he had devoted his whole life's strength to its foundation! We should not cling too much to human institutions and human things. Since there is the danger of becoming enslaved, God's fatherly hand is always at work, cutting and pruning, especially through disappointments of every kind. (...)

We should teach our youth to expect disappointment. If you fail to do this, you fail to prepare them for life. The proof of true character is that disappointment does not make one bitter! Of course my first reaction can be bitter; this is only human. But I must not let it turn me into a bitter person! Let me use an image: We should make the mighty boulders of our disappointments and all of life's difficulties into a staircase. We then use this *staircase* to calmly and surely ascend *to the heart of God*.

I know that this is more easily said than done. But can you name one man who has achieved greatness without using this bridge? Name me any community and there will be human failings. That's life! Difficulties have one name here and another name there. What determines the greatness of a community is how quickly its members see the difficulties [as a staircase to God] and begin to ascend. If we had no difficulties something would be wrong. Things could certainly be different, but since they are what they are, my task as a man and a child is to persevere. I know my duty. I want to remain firm, make no concessions to my weakness, but as a holy priest use every trial in order *to grow beyond myself*.

Don't you sense that this is the right way? How something comes over us like the Holy Spirit or a living power which lays hold of us and never lets go? In such situations there is not much point in sulking in the corner. That does no good for the community, nor for God nor ourselves. This is when the true man stands out. Where is the enemy? What can I achieve in spite of the circumstances? We have our community and in it we stand on firm ground. What I can do, I do in a manly and childlike way. God will bless us.

Meditate on these thoughts again. It is perhaps a little confused but the main idea should be clear. "Unless you become like little children..." The height of simplicity consists in the concentration of all our powers on God, in the detachment from all that is not God or is opposed to God. Unless we become like children, God cannot use us.

In conclusion, a few well-known *prayers* might warm up our hearts for this simplicity. I recently took part in a pilgrimage to Sachseln<sup>2</sup>. The prayer of St. Nicholas of Flüe was explained to us in a talk. It is a marvelous illustration of what we call the pinnacle of simplicity:

"My Lord and my God,  
grant me all that leads me to you!"

Do I have the courage to ask for everything—including crosses and suffering—if this leads me to God?

"My Lord and my God,  
take me from all that keeps me from you!"

Take everything, including the love of those who lead me and the respect of those I lead, if this comes between you and me! Listen to this great simplicity! St. Nicholas continues:

"My Lord and my God,  
take me from myself and give me completely to you!"

This is the height of simplicity. If we dared to pray like this, we would be ready to strive earnestly for sanctity. We must be true in prayer, even when our poor hearts tremble.

Or would you like to meditate on other prayers of this type? You could refer to the well-known prayer of St. Ignatius, "*Suscipe Domine...*"<sup>3</sup> This prayer, too, is an example of simplicity: You may take all things; you gave it to me; let me be yours. "Only give me your grace and love, and I am rich enough..."

Or another prayer: "Lord, when I seek you, bless me; when I seek myself, punish me!"

You can find many more prayers of this kind, but we must be serious when we say them. If we only had the courage to reach for this pinnacle of genuine holiness! Half-hearted men are broken by certain trials; only those who are wholehearted can rise above them. We should be whole-

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<sup>2</sup> To the shrine of St. Nicholas of Flüe in Switzerland.

<sup>3</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, Fourth Week (No. 234): "Take, Lord, all my liberty. Receive my memory, my understanding, and my whole will. Whatever I have and possess, you have given me; to you I restore it wholly, and to your will I utterly surrender it for my direction. Give me the love of you only, with your grace, and I am rich enough; nor do I ask anything besides." Fr. Kentenich unfolded this prayer in his own way while a prisoner of the Nazis (1941-45); see *Heavenwards* (Waukesha, 1993), p. 109-110 and 174.

hearted because we want to become entirely childlike. Childlikeness implies the mastery of all these serious difficulties. You may equate childlikeness with manliness. In the end, they are the same. We prefer to say that we should be children because this word expresses our supernatural attitude toward God and also corresponds to our ideal as family.

### Part 3: Discerning God's Will

*In this third section we want to consider how to discern God's will. The first text will provide background on the different sources God places at our disposal for knowing his will. The second text gives more consideration to criteria for discerning what God is trying to say. The third text is about a method of meditation which can help us be more attuned to God's will.*

#### **8. The Sources of Knowledge that God gives us as His Instruments** (Study on Instrument Piety, 1944, in *Schoenstatt's Instrument Spirituality*, p. 62-72)

Because being an instrument always requires us to orient ourselves on God's wish and will, we must place much emphasis on how to recognize it. It is practically second nature for the instrument to make constant use of the instrument character of created things as his or her source of knowledge, be it such things as the spoken word, freely acting secondary causes<sup>4</sup>, the ontological structure of objective reality, and current trends and world events or the things God sends us and allows to happen to us in our personal lives.

##### *1. The Word of God*

God speaks to us *through Sacred Scripture and through inner inspiration and illumination.*

Instrument piety likes to place itself under the influence of the inspired Word of God, i.e. likes to read Sacred Scripture, and reading it often and fruitfully, while being conscientiously attentive to the inner illumination of grace. To avoid false interpretation, the instrument holds to the interpretation of the Church and tries to maintain an open communication with his or her confessor or spiritual director.

##### *2. Free Secondary Causes*

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<sup>4</sup> See note 4, page 49.

God created man with freedom, and out of respect for this freedom chooses to use us as co-regents in the government of the world. That is the meaning of the axiom, "*Deus operatur per causas secundas liberas*" [God works through free secondary causes]<sup>5</sup>. The law of organic transference can thus also be applied in an analogous manner to God and his practice, namely: Eternal Wisdom transfers to us human beings a portion of his wisdom, power, kindness, and fidelity so that—*through us*—he can lead others, win them over, and bind them to himself. We are the normal means he chooses to communicate his wishes and will. That is how he dealt with St. Paul after his conversion. Instead of directly telling him what to do, he referred him to a disciple, Ananiah, who would tell him what he should do (cf Acts 9,10-19).

Instrument piety, which has learned to be attuned to all God's instruments as sources of knowledge of the Divine Will, does not stubbornly wait for a direct locution of God's will, but is and remains completely alert for everything God communicates through his instruments, through freely acting secondary causes. For that reason the instrument likes to take his or her bearings from the wish and will of the Church and of one's superiors, from one's constitutions and [community] customs. It is God, after all, who speaks through these vehicles in clear and unequivocal terms. As long as one listens to them and willingly follows them, one avoids the dangers of self-deception and whisperings of the devil.

That this source of knowledge has been important to us from the very beginning can be seen in the now familiar laws of the organism of attachments, including the laws of organic transmission,

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<sup>5</sup> By "cause" is meant an object or person which stands at the beginning of a "cause-and-effect" chain. Since God is ultimately the cause behind all causes, he is theologically referred to as the Primary Cause, while all other causes (then used by God as his instruments) are spoken of as "secondary causes." Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I 102, 6; 116,2; 19,5; 83,1 ad 3. See also Second Founding Document, No. 66.

immersion, and transference<sup>6</sup>. (....)

### 3. *The Order of Being*

For many years now the *ontological structure of objective reality* has played a predominant role [in our thinking]<sup>7</sup>. We have constantly sought its counsel when searching for God's wish and will and do so even today. This is the source of knowledge which is pointed out by the great law found in our everyday sanctity, our customs, and our way of education like a luminous star: *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi* (The order of being is the norm for the order of action).

The order of being in even its finest details is the norm for the entire order of our life. In this we are guided by the realization that all creatures are not only an incarnate thought of God, but also willed by God. If we look on each creature as a word by and about God, however, we may also view all creation, both natural and supernatural, as a big picture book of God, as a textbook about him and a living theology which rarely fails us when we need to discern God's wishes.

This thought was no stranger to St. Paul. Because of it he makes

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<sup>6</sup> The concept "organism of attachments" was coined by Fr. Kentenich to express that man is not just an autonomous individual, but also one that can and must stand in deep and meaningful relationships on many levels (with persons and things, natural and supernatural, familial and professional, etc.) interwoven by the laws of God's love and his sharing of that love with us (e.g. the laws of organic transference and transmission). See *Schoenstatt's Covenant Spirituality*, p. 77-86, 147-167.

<sup>7</sup> Both Fr. Kentenich's inborn drive to penetrate to the deepest foundations of God's plan and the searching ken of the young generation of Europeans he worked with in the 1920s and 30s led to a heightened sensitivity to the "*ordo essendi*", the "order of being" or ontological structure of all aspects of life. Behind these philosophical terms is a concern that things be perceived and respected for what they *are*, both in themselves and in God's plan. The personal ideal—to take one example of an application—is therefore not just a "psychological trick", but a wrestling with who one really is, including such finer details as one's temperament or the dynamic of growth, so that one can really be a full cooperator in God's plan for one's life.

serious and bitter accusations against the pagans for creating false gods and leading immoral lives. He lambasts them for this because they should have been able to discern God, his laws and wishes by observing the visible order of creation (cf Rom 1,18-23).

It should come as no surprise that in our own times this source of knowledge remains untapped. In an age defined by movement, dynamism, and life, there is no longer any appreciation for the order of being and the ontological structure of objective reality. One can therefore expect that in the great confusion of terms and the many faces of uncertainty in the life and lifeforms of today, even many Catholics will have forgotten to firmly orient themselves on the order of being.

We have never tired of consulting the ontological structure. Among other reasons, we had to do so because as a family we wished to have only as many human juridical bonds as were really necessary. Because of this, we had to take particular care that we were always in tune with the ontological structure in even its small and smallest details. To this we add our fundamental attitude of magnanimity which seeks to act even on God's smallest wishes and not only on his great commands. In this quest of discovery and conquest we receive a clear and decided answer to most questions through the ontological structure of things, not infrequently even in cases where other sources of knowledge fail.

### *Reading the Ontological "Ordo"*

As for the comprehensive process of how to "read" the order of being, one can distinguish between

a) a natural and

b) a supernatural order of being—both on the level of the overriding context and on the concrete level of the individual object and person—and

c) finally the connection of the two together.

Instrument piety keeps all three aspects in mind, consults them in case of doubt, and holds fast to the clear answer it gives, even when it means bucking the trends of the times.

That all sounds very theoretical and abstract, but becomes clear when we examine our family's history and remind ourselves of its theory and practice in just a few broad strokes. Look, for instance, at the pedagogical foundations—both in self-education and education of others—for our work with young women and our views on sexual education. In the former case we have always established our standards in concordance with the essential character of women. We have so often said: Because the natural inclination of the feminine character is to be "all soul, all purity, all surrender," we have, among other things, recognized the importance of integrating as one all our emotions, the intactness of our entire being, the form and length of our dress as an expression of our deepest character even when it flies in the face of contemporary fashions, and an outspoken education of love. (....)

The present age breeds confusion, shatters what were once commonly accepted mores, and tests the true worth and viability of questioned values by exposing them to contrary and competing values. Because of this, our times do a good job of showing what is firmly rooted and what is only a vernier, a pretense, and so many masks, what has truly formed society down to its deepest roots and what has only remained on the surface. The gentle observer might often shake his head in dismay and seriously ask why so many years of education have, even among the "elite", had so little impact on the beast within and been so little able to transform noble personalities in their inmost hearts. Now, when we are forced to stand naked, as it were, for years on end, with the most intimate parts of the life of the other laid bare to public scrutiny, every pretense to deceive self and others must fail.

One instinctively asks the crucial question: How can we help bring about the needed reform? One answer comes from our instrument spirituality which likes to base its demands and practices so much on the ontological structure of reality and hence in final principles, and which strives for corresponding basic attitudes of the soul so that our actions and customs are deeply borne by the power of an animating spirit. This has always been our ideal.

#### a. *The Natural Order of Being*

The natural structure of the human person indicates two ontological levels—a higher and a lower level, i.e. the "animal" and the "angel"<sup>8</sup>. The higher level is meant to have dominion over the lower. That is something which is simply rooted in the essential nature of each level, and is confirmed by what we see in life. In animals the vegetative level of being submits to the higher sensitive level and takes part in its perfection. It is and must be similar in the human being: The "animal", as the lower ontological level in man, submits to the "angel" and therefore participates in this level's perfection. The "animal" is something which must be constantly overcome<sup>9</sup>. The dominance of the "angel", i.e. of the mind and spirit over the "animal" exacts of us a constant self-denial.

Man—alone from the standpoint of his natural character, much less from the standpoint of grace—is the Creator's greatest gamble. He brought together the most contrary of elements—"mind" and "matter", "animal" and "angel"—to forge a single whole, a whole which is constantly threatened by the "animal"'s drive to take charge and the "angel"'s tendency to either let the "animal" take charge or to conduct itself as mind alone. The natural order cannot be attained, maintained or safeguarded if we annihilate or destroy our inclinations, passions, and drives, but only if we ennoble, transfigure, and elevate them. *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi*. [The order of being is the order of action.]

God has provided our human will with a finite freedom encompassing two aspects: the ability to make and to carry out decisions. The primary of these two, as we can see when we compare ourselves with the animals, is the ability to make decisions. Hence the Creator's wish and will that the first priority must be that the human person is educated to make a free decision for God and the

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Everyday Sanctity*, p. 118f.

<sup>9</sup> Not in the sense of suppressing the drives or our natural spontaneity, but in the sense of supporting them with a healthy discipline, or to use a favorite word pair of Fr. Kentenich's: We must deal with our bodies with *reverent love* and *wise strictness*.

divine. *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi*. Anyone who relieves the educand of making inner decisions is acting contrary to the primary purpose of the freedom of will, and bears the guilt of sin or of at least a failing, depending on the gravity of the case. The same applies to anyone who uses unfair means to make a free decision impossible or more difficult.

The basic inclination of our nature makes itself manifest and active in the main passion<sup>10</sup>. To bind the main passion to a goal of moral excellence is to win over the whole person to this same goal. That is the significance of using the particular examination<sup>11</sup>: to ennoble the main passion in the direction of the personal ideal<sup>12</sup>. Once again: *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi*. I could continue in this fashion and trace back any number of our traditions, customs, and institutions to the natural order of being as an expression of the divine will.

#### b. The Supernatural Order of Being

The same can be said of the supernatural order of being. (...) [T]he grace which we receive in the given order of salvation is grace from Christ and therefore grace via the cross. Hence the nature which has received grace must be viewed as *natura cruce signata* (nature marked by the cross) and imbued with love of mortification. There is no perfection of nature without nature's sacrifice. That is how the law "*ordo essendi est ordo agendi*" needs to be universally understood and put into practice.

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<sup>10</sup> The ancient personality analyses of the two main passions (irascible and concupiscent, i.e. power and love) and the four temperaments (choleric, sanguine, melancholic, and phlegmatic) are two ways to better understand one's own personal "ordo essendi". See, *New Vision and Life*, p. 43-45.

<sup>11</sup> The special resolution, usually chosen monthly, which focuses on one area of the character for the area of striving. See *New Vision and Life*, p. 102-104, 127-132.

<sup>12</sup> The personal ideal is the statement, after conscious discernment in both one's personal "ordo essendi" and what God has in mind as one's primary mission in life, of an individual's mission and ideal, his "guiding star" in all he is and does.

#### c. The Connection Between the Natural and the Supernatural

Just as this law applies separately for the orders of nature and grace, it also applies to the connection between the two. Here it takes on the concrete form of "*Gratia non destruit, sed perficit et elevat naturam*" (Grace does not destroy, but perfects and elevates nature)<sup>13</sup>. This is the ultimate foundation and safeguard upon which we rest our "everyday sanctity," our preference for an organic instead of a mechanical approach to self-denial, and our preference for intensifying the transfiguration instead of the baseness of reality [when faced with sin, guilt, or things beyond our control]. Here is also the foundation for our teaching about the connection between each of the autonomous ethical motives and the ultimate motive of love. God, the Creator of the order of nature and grace, speaks to us through both and demands and wishes an appropriate answer through each. Here is the fountain for our entire teaching about the Personal Ideal, both in its sources of discernment (the God-willed favorite inclination, favorite devotion, favorite prayer, favorite activity, favorite motto) and in its constitutive parts—be it the laws of its development and form, or the material and formal steps of love or suffering.

#### 4. Current Trends and World Events

In the broader awareness of the family, the instrument's fourth source of knowledge is even more in the forefront of how we discern God's wish and will than the ontological structure of objective reality. These are *current trends and world events*, the things God permits and provides in our life and the life of the family. It is not difficult to demonstrate how the development and growth of the family has been and is nourished by this source in an extraordinary manner.

How often have we heard and said that it was neither to a vision or a visionary dream that the founding and expansion of our family

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I,1,8 ad 2 and I,2,2 ad 1. See also *Schoenstatt's Covenant Spirituality*, p. 152f.

owes its origin, but to plain and practical faith in Divine Providence, a faith in Divine Providence which clearly saw, recognized, and responded to the Father's kind and mighty hand, the requests he made through the great crises and needs of our times in the great events of world history, and the things God has provided and permitted to happen in our own family. We are therefore exonerated of the Lord's accusation: "You know how to interpret the signs of the heavens and of nature, but not the signs of the times" (Mt 16,3).

The foundation upon which the founding contract and the Founding Document are built is the wish and will of God as it became manifest to us in the spirit of providential faith from the instrument history of the Sodality<sup>14</sup>. One should take particular note of the passage, "How often in world history have not small and insignificant beginnings been the source of great and greatest accomplishments? Why could that not also hold true in our case? Whoever knows the history of our sodality will have no trouble believing that Divine Providence has something special in store for it<sup>15</sup>." It is not man that stands at the beginning of our family's history but God, not human volition but God's plan and wish. Man in his smallness only respectfully seeks and sought to discern the plans of the great, kind God and to make it his own.

It has become more and more our custom ever since, reaching into the depths and touching all aspects of life, to ask in every circumstance and with each event: What is God trying to tell us? What is the plan of Divine Providence? And because we, as a "child of war", have been roundly tested from many sides, this method has become a part of our flesh and blood, nearly becoming second nature to us. (...)

### *In Praise of Practical Faith in Divine Providence*

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<sup>14</sup> Schoenstatt's founding was closing bound up with the founding of the Marian Sodality in Schoenstatt by Fr. Kentenich and the minor seminarians on April 19, 1914. See *New Vision and Life*, p. 66-98.

<sup>15</sup> First Founding Document, No. 7.

When we as a family speak of "mission", we do not mean a mission or task which we have sought out for ourselves, but one which God has given us. That its origin is God and not human illogic, fantasy, or presumption is something we see again when we train our eyes of faith in Divine Providence to our family history and its many turns of events. To be more exact, [we appreciate it from the perspective] of the smallness of the instruments, the greatness of the difficulties that stood in the way, and the greatness of the success<sup>16</sup>.

Must not each religious community, each in its own way, have an outspoken faith in its mission, various though the reasons for that faith might be? In one case it might be the sanctity of the founder, in another a vision or visionary dream upon which the faith in one's mission stands. We, on the other hand, have always given as our reason our plain, unaffected, down-to-earth faith in Divine Providence, exactly as it is found at the core of all healthy, unabashed popular piety and as it is manifested in the constant victories it wins in the lives of the greatest saints. Other communities may have, for whatever reason, lost the faith in their mission or perhaps it no longer consciously guides their living and striving. But that must not prevent us from continuing on as we have previously done. In fact, it should inspire us to even more consciously deepen our mission and to facilitate its fruitfulness in our practical daily lives.

It seems that God has called us to accept the rudimentary, general, and fundamental forces of Christianity in an exemplary manner and make them the foundation of everything we live and strive for, so that, in turn, they may become more and more the common possession of all Christianity. And among the most important of these fundamental forces is a faith in Divine Providence and one's mission which overcomes the world and [the vicissitudes of] life. Day after day, both of these aspects are gaining new nourishment, and we rejoice with all our heart at all the confirmations given us by God in the fatefilled history of our family over the past years. He is the one who used all our foes to assist our family in gaining a visible

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Second Founding Document, No. 60.

victory. Our sense of faith consequently never tires of carefully noting each sign, both great and small, of God's guidance and initiative, of recording and relishing them. God is a God of loyalty, and he will not break the covenant of love which he made with us 30 years ago. We for our part must only make the effort again and again to faithfully and freely retain the same loyalty to him. Then our history will become, even more than it has been already, a single, great victorious march of divine power and kindness and loyalty.

These and similar thoughts lead us, full of astonishment, into the rich meaning of instrumentality. Instrumentality is indeed more than just an all-embracing form of life as instrument piety; it is also a richly upwelling spring and source of knowledge which generously nourishes our instrument spirituality.

## 9. Discerning God's Will

(Sermon on Mount Schoenstatt, Germany, March 18, 1967. In *Schoenstatt's Instrument Spirituality*, p. 179-194)

*Commentary by Fr. J. Niehaus: In this sermon from 1967, Father Kentenich provides more insight into application: How do we recognize and do the will of God?*

*The result is not so much a concrete "How to" (this is left to us), but rather a roadmap which shows the lay of the land so that we can better find the individual way God has in mind for us. In particular, he speaks of three "voices" through which God speaks to us (over and above the revelation given to us in the life of Christ) in normal everyday life: 1) the times (and circumstances of my life), 2) my soul, and 3) the order of being. It is a worthwhile exercise to compare this list of three "voices of God" with the four "sources of knowledge" in Chapter Three. In digesting this material, the example offered at the beginning of the chapter can be of great help. Here Father Kentenich considers St. Joseph and his remarkable attitude to the will of God. Through his example and intercession we may be able to learn more than through many weighty volumes what it means to be a true instrument of God.*

My dear Schoenstatt family!

So many of us are gathered here together at this holy place in order to celebrate the feast of St. Joseph. It is right that we do so in the context of Holy Mass. We can then clearly expect a richer harvest and greater fruitfulness for our everyday lives.

### *A. St. Joseph and the Will of God*

We have every right to assume that Our Lord, who comes down from heaven to the altar day after day to be so close to us, wants to make St. Joseph's form come alive for us today, i.e. he wants to make St. Joseph a reflection on his closeness to Mary, of his attitude towards work and practical everyday life, and not least of all of his fundamental attitude to God the eternal Father.

But this cannot be the only reason, for if it were so, we could celebrate the feast of St. Joseph just as well outside of Mass. No, we expect—which may well be the crux of the matter—that by drawing St. Joseph into this Mass in some mysterious manner these three profound fundamental attitudes<sup>17</sup> will become more our own.

To us, each of these fundamental attitudes is of great importance. At this point in time, however, the one which interests us the most is our fundamental attitude to God the Father. (....)

What does this fundamental attitude look like? Our goal is not to elaborate on every detail, but to briefly summarize what Sacred Scripture says in this regard. From this point of departure we can then move on to still greater insights into the kingdom of God.

We are familiar with the starting point. To summarize what Sacred Scripture has to say [about St. Joseph] is to admit that little is said in terms of words. We find very little about St. Joseph. In both the Bible and in our souls he stands before us as the man of *action*. He doesn't talk much—he acts! And if we would want to put his basic attitude in a nutshell, we would probably have to say that his entire life embodies the petition found in the Our Father, "Our Father,... thy Kingdom come," the Kingdom of the Father! "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!" *Your* will, the will of the Father! Not my will, not the will of the tyrants and dictators, no, *your* will be done on earth as it is in heaven. A brilliant Frenchman once ventured the opinion that the words "Thy will be done" go beyond all others. And if we would now ask why they go beyond all others, I think we would have to admit from our own experience: No words are greater in the mouth and heart of a Christian, and no words are greater in the ear of the eternal Father-God. (....)

And how often do we speak—be it while praying *Heavenwards* or praying from our hearts—of the plans of the eternal Father! Ours is but a single great idea: We want to give our yes to the plans of the eternal Father, be it his plans for the entire family or for our personal well-being, for our personality.

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<sup>17</sup> Closeness to Mary, value of work, obedience to the will of God.

"We have but a single longing:

Lead us according to your wise plans<sup>18</sup>."

Turn now to Sacred Scripture. There you will find a few practical hints as to the particulars. One hint is in the gospel we just heard<sup>19</sup>. We hear about St. Joseph's great dilemma. But a single word from heaven is enough to suddenly resolve the difficulty. Dispelled were all his questions about the honor of his bride, all the doubts he struggled with in his heart. The message from above: "Do not fear to take Mary, your wife, to yourself" (Mt 1,20). What followed? He followed! In other words:

"Yes, Father, yes, your will be ever done,  
whether joy or pain or sorrow from it come."

*Your* will, *your* fatherly will, should always be done! In the great difficulties of the Holy Family, Joseph always relied on God's word from above: "Get up, take the Child and his mother, and go to Egypt!" (Mt 2,13). Here we can sense how clear and yet how difficult it was to carry out this directive. What followed? [He followed!—] "He got up..." (Mt 2,14). Do you grasp the meaning of this? "God's will, be still!" "Nothing is mere coincidence; everything comes from God's providence<sup>20</sup>!"

And when those who wished to kill Our Lord had died, Joseph was told to return to the land of Israel which he had left behind (cf Mt 2,19-21). What followed? He followed!

That is our starting point for peering more deeply into the realm of the supernatural life, into the order of salvation. (....)

### *B. Our Fundamental Attitude to the Will of God*

We now come to the question at hand: What is the *meaning* of this fundamental attitude of conformity to the will of God? This is the same as asking what is the meaning of the yes, the joyful,

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<sup>18</sup> *Heavenwards*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> The gospel for the solemnity of St. Joseph: Mt 1,18-21.

<sup>20</sup> The above three adages on God's will come from popular Catholic piety in Central Europe. See Schoenstatt's Second Founding Document (October 18, 1939), No. 34, in: *Schoenstatt—The Founding Documents*, p. 51.

grateful, happy yes to all the things God the eternal Father does and permits in our lives, and to the ways he expresses his wish and will.

Now this is something which just comes to us naturally. From the very beginning [of Schoenstatt], but especially during the past year, we have never stopped looking at our family from the standpoint of the inbreak of the divine; or to be more precise, from the standpoint of the inbreak of God's will into the heart of each of us individually and into the heart of the entire [Schoenstatt] family<sup>21</sup>. And this inbreak of the divine, as you have heard me say time and time again, should and will and must lead to a "breaking forth" and a "breaking away", not only in the hearts of each individual member and branch, but also in the entire family. God's will is breaking forth! Breaking forth to begin the victory! And to break forth, God's will requires that we break away from our own will's hostility and indifference to God.

*Three questions* spontaneously come to mind and need to be answered in this context.

First question: What do we mean by the "will of God"? Or if you prefer: What is the object of God's will?

Second question: How do we recognize his will?

Third question: How can we put his will into practice?

You can tell right away that we have a lot of ground to cover. It would be enough to fill an entire week. Of course, it is not as if we were newcomers to this topic. The way I see it, there is hardly a word in our vocabulary which resonates with such fullness as "Thy will be done!"

### *1. What is God's Will?*

You may be wondering why I even chose this topic for today. I will give you the answer for that in a minute.

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<sup>21</sup> In the years between his return from exile in Milwaukee (1965) and his death (September 15, 1968), Fr. Kentenich made a special point of guiding the Schoenstatt Movement in grasping and appreciating God's guidance and intervention in the difficulties of the exile years (1952-65) when Schoenstatt was often misunderstood within the Church, and in its resolution in the context of the Second Vatican Council.

All of us without exception, both men and women, are usually very narrow in our focus and our love for long stretches of our journey. When we ask about God's will, we typically mean: What is God's will for *me*?

God's will! I think I need to describe it this way: It is the follow-through of God the Father's plan of salvation. These salvific plans are of two kinds. One can speak of

the universal salvific plan

and the individual or personal salvific plan.

Typically, we look no further than the personal salvific plan. (...)

### *a. My Mission and God's Universal Salvific Plan*

A *universal* plan of salvation! What does this universal salvific plan look like? God desires—as we know from dogmatic theology—that all men become holy and happy. If we return to the school of St. Paul for a moment, for instance in the first letter to the Corinthians or the letter to the Ephesians, we will be given an answer which almost reminds us of the thinking of the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin<sup>22</sup>. On the other hand, it is an answer which comes from *Paul* and, if we are not completely mistaken, is somewhat different from the traditional interpretation of this passage.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul reflects on the end of world history. What is the meaning of world history? For him, like for us, world history is always salvation history. What is the end result? "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15,28)—all in all things and all in all people. Do you know what that means? What shall the living God become when, at the end of world history, he is the perfect "all in all"? God in all things, God in all people!

What does it mean to be "all in all things"? To be in all of world history! Be it things, objects, events, people: all in all things! God is the all in all and the all in all *people*. So what is the point? What is the meaning of my life? To see to it that this general plan of salvation may be realized as perfectly as possible. Now what does

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<sup>22</sup> Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), French Jesuit and theologian.

that mean in particular?

If we turn to the letter to the *Ephesians*, we get a very clear but mysterious answer. There we encounter the Apostle's boundless joy that God the eternal Father has now revealed his universal salvific plan. What does it contain? That all men be made holy (cf Eph 1,4). What does it mean to be holy? To be made open for the living God and to surrender oneself entirely to God. But it doesn't stop there; Paul takes the thought to still greater depths.

We first want to summarize what Paul means. So that all humanity might be made holy—and we hear that *all* are to be made holy (cf Eph 1,6)—God, the eternal Father, sent his only-begotten Son as the Redeemer and Prophet of the World (cf Eph 1,7). As the Redeemer of the World, he sees to it that all people become his members, that all people become children of the Father (cf Eph 1,5.10). As the great prophet, as the great teacher of the truth, his task is to see to it that the whole world finds its way in the Holy Spirit to the Kingdom of Truth (cf Eph 1,13). And the Church, the extended mystical Body of Our Lord, is charged with leading and governing the world in such a way that in and through the Church a great Father kingdom take shape in which the Father gains more and more the upper hand of victory with the passage of each year and century (cf Eph 1,22f).

Please read the passages yourselves. You will then quickly grasp where I'm coming from. The most important part is that God has *communicated* his mysterious plan (cf Eph 1,9). Which plan? As one reads the text, once notices how taken aback Paul is, his breath practically taken away. Why? What is God's plan for the entire universe? To unite all, absolutely all things and all people in Christ the Head (cf Eph 1,10.22f).

In our early history we had a word for this—here as elsewhere we are well advised to read from the present pulse of the family backward into its past history—namely: The aim of our family is the "Marian formation of the world in Christ from Schoenstatt." Formation in Christ! We can see that what we proclaim and stand for is truly not some abstract program. [Abstraction] was not the primary task of God's mystery as revealed to Paul, either. What is the task?

[To communicate] God's continuous, uninterrupted presence, God's continuous, uninterrupted working in the universe, in creation! An extremely important, powerful idea which we all have some inkling of and which we may even express from time to time. You see, that's why in God's great mystery of creation, the great mystery of salvation, the living God must not be separated from creation.

In fact, the great tragedy of modern times began when God began to be separated from creation. This separation was followed relatively quickly by a complete divorce. So what is at stake? The formation of all things in Christ.

When one hears about the great problems which occupy even our theologians today, one of them is a crisis in the sacraments<sup>23</sup>. Of course, if I only look on the sacraments as an exterior event, they can become burdensome. Why work with sacraments? But you see, if I know that God is made present, Christ is made present through the sacraments, then the sacraments will become much less an object and much more something personal—for Christ himself enters the person who is receiving the sacrament. Christ is made present!

Doesn't that take us right into one of the key teachings of the [Second Vatican] Council? Granted, the council didn't say anything new on this point, but it is something which has taken on too little shape, form, and life. You see, we also pray:

"Let all things be your kingdom,  
become like you, the Head<sup>24</sup>."

So what does God's universal salvific will look like? What does the universal mystery of God and world entail? It revolves around the God who, at the end of times, is all in all things and all in all people—and "all in all" which is already being realized *today*. Therein lies the task! It will not only be realized in me alone! (...) The great drama of salvation history is a universal one! We must broaden our horizons, widen our hearts, see ourselves as a member

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<sup>23</sup> In the theological turmoil that followed the Second Vatican Council, one of the areas struggled with was the theology of the sacraments.

<sup>24</sup> *Heavenwards*, p. 44.

belonging to this universal society— belonging to the Church and through it belonging at one and the same time to the world.

When we now think of ourselves, then we may not focus solely on ourselves, of course. We want to overcome that. Broaden our horizons! Widen our hearts! Reach out! See the whole *world*! In particular the world as it is in ferment today, as it can be portrayed today: a world constantly fleeing from Christ, constantly and universally fleeing from God.

And *we*? Why are we here? God is meant to be made present in *this* world, in all people, in all places. We must therefore be on guard that we do not fall prey to two dangers. We must not exaggerate our own personal mission, hold it in too high esteem, but neither should we underestimate it. Don't overestimate it! That means it must never be seen separated from the universal plan of salvation. You see, each individual is drawn into and integrated into this drama of world history, of salvation history. I therefore exist in order to make Christ and God present; not just to talk about him, enthusiastic though my words might be. Through me he must be made present. But that is just one minute part of this overwhelming drama. I must not look on myself as so important as if there were ultimately no universal salvific plan at all. I am part of this universal salvific plan. I do not stand alone. My task will therefore always be to see my relationship to the world—a world that can and yearns to be saved—again and again in its whole context. (...)

#### *b. The Universal Salvific Plan and God's Will for my Salvation*

To be sure, we do not want to hold our [individual] part in too high esteem. We are but one part in the grand drama of world history and the grand drama of the mystery of world redemption. On the other hand, however, we may not underestimate our importance. That is: It is not as if my part were inconsequential. Quite the contrary! The history of salvation of the world is essentially linked to the unfolding of my own salvation history. Consequently, how firmly I must be rooted—in my living, in my thinking, in my wanting—in my personal history of salvation, including in my

apostolic activity! In a certain sense, we can say that we hang onto our own salvation history as if there were no universal history of salvation.

That is an adaptation of something St. Ignatius<sup>25</sup> once said. As you know, he once said about the mystery of divine and human cooperation (...): "We must trust [God] as if we could will nothing, and will as if there were no God who would come to our aid." The same applies here. We must live as if there were no general but only a personal plan of salvation, yet retain the calm and animation as if there were only a general but not a personal plan of salvation.

I think that essentially answers the first question. So what are we saying when we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? We are saying yes to the universal and yes to my personal call to salvation.

#### *2. How Do We Recognize God's Will?*

So how do we recognize the particulars of God's will?

At this point I would like to focus on the *personal*, the individual plan of salvation.

To begin with, I can say that in our language we would now explain: How can I recognize my personal ideal? After all, that is the idea which God has had of me from all eternity. How do I recognize that?

#### *a. Through the Revelation of Christ's Life*

Allow me to tell you first how we *don't* recognize it. We do not arrive at our knowledge through *private* revelation. There are more than a handful of people who would readily say, "If I really knew for sure what God wants of me, I would be ready to do anything." We must distinguish between private and *general* revelation. And which one is that? What has been revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

What does that mean? I think I can summarize everything that could be said here by saying: Suppose we would go to God and ask

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<sup>25</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491/92-1556).

for a private revelation, not unlike the scribes and Pharisees of Christ's time who went to him. They wanted to know, "What must I do to obtain everlasting life?" (Lk 10,25). The answer: You know full well! Translated into what we are presently saying: Heed the words of general revelation! What does God's will entail? You know: "You shall love the Lord, your God [with all your mind, soul, and heart]..." (Lk 10,27).

You see, if I were to ask, "Dear God, what do you want of me?", I think his first response would be, "So you demand of me an individual *word*. But everything I wanted to proclaim and reveal to humanity as word I have already proclaimed through my only-begotten Son! (....) Look to the life of the God-Man— there I have said everything that I want to say to the world." "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1,14). The word became flesh! What must I therefore do? Meditate on the life of Our Lord.

What is my personal mission? To take the general mission of the God-Man and to make it my own. So: Immerse yourselves in the study and imitation of Christ! I want to and ought to imitate him in every situation! That is surely an answer which is both plausible and cures our hidden yen and pining for extraordinary signs. That's why, if you recall, we also defined the personal ideal from the strictly theological perspective: It is the idea of the Mystical Body of Christ made concrete in an individual and unique fashion. An individual, unique member of Christ's mystical body! And I am not just supposed to become a member, but a living, individual, unique member of Christ's body.

### *b. Through the Voices of the Times, My Soul, and the Order of Being*

Which brings us again to the question: How can I perceive my originality? After having consulted revelation, i.e. general revelation, and accepting and embracing the universal plan of salvation, the universal act of salvation, we ask: How can I discern through the everyday means at my disposal the part of the body of Christ I am called to embody in the most concrete and individual manner? I don't

think I should dwell on this, otherwise I would have to repeat many of our past courses. I only want to say three words and ask you to think them through in more detail on your own. What should I consult?

The times, my soul, the order of being<sup>26</sup>.

I must therefore consult these three realities.

(1) What do the *times* demand of me? Pope John XXIII once put it so succinctly: "Much of what Scripture says is and remains a mystery. If we want to interpret it correctly, we must ask the times." What does that mean? God also speaks through the times and the historical circumstances.

It must have been a brilliant Frenchman who once said, "Much can be learned from the circumstances and trends of the times." What do the times teach us? What God demands of me through my life and times. Just think! How many people become great or remain small just because of the time they were born in. How many men and women become great because they are propelled upwards by the times, are lifted to the top because they grasped the contemporary currents and knew how to correctly respond to them. As I have said, I do not want to go into this in great detail here.

(2) Listen to your *soul*! What does that mean? Listen to the individual impulses sent to you by the Holy Spirit. An ancient and insightful theologian from the fourth century once said, "The movements of the soul of a Christian as a Christian are the breathings of the Holy Spirit."

With that, of course, we are touching on things which we moderns hardly pay any attention to any more. This is a discernment of the spirits. The Holy Spirit speaks in our soul with unspeakable groans (cf Rom 8,26). Practically speaking, when we are talking with God and listening to what he has to say, must we not often admit: Our prayer is aware of what God wants us to do long before we know [with our minds]? What does this mean? In prayer we are often

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<sup>26</sup> Compare these three points with the elements already considered in Chapter Three.

given such illumination, often have an inkling of the greater context of God's plans which can only penetrate our full awareness a little at a time. Therefore: Follow the inspirations of the living God! Don't be forever flitting like a squirrel from limb to limb—but *stop!* Stand still! Stay in once place! Where should we stay? With all that God speaks in us, expects and demands of us.

(3) And finally the third mark of recognition, the third source from which we can draw our individual knowledge: the structure of our *being*. Our being is not something which is merely personal or subjective, but was also created by God. And the way my being is constituted—be it as a man or woman, with this or that temperament, set of traits, [etc.]—is a source of knowledge.

In this way we gain a clearer and deeper knowledge of what God personally wants of us.

### 3. *How Can We Fulfill God's Will?*

What do we now have to do to really fulfill God's will?

Our Lord himself said, "Not whoever says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does the will of my Father" (Mt 7,21).

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent me so that I complete his work" (Jn 4,34).

So what must we do? Two things:

Remove the obstacles and  
work positively.

#### *a. Remove the Obstacles*

Remove the *obstacles!* Of two kinds! The obstacles in me and the obstacles in my surroundings.

(1) The obstacles in *me* which prevent me from seeing and doing the will of God! On the one hand, that might be a nearly uncontrollable fear; on the other hand it might be giving in too quickly and too frequently to our drives. The consequence: Remove the obstacles!

(a) Remove the fears! Of course, we may not reject fear outright.

Because our human nature is a broken one, we must consider fear as a matter of course, an effect, a music which accompanies us throughout our lives.

Because of this, Our Lord also gave us the example of his own fear. We only need to recall his agony in the garden. He was overcome with fear, quaking and trembling, but never departed from his fundamental attitude: "Not my will, but your will be done" (Mt 26,39).

There can be two reasons for fear. It can be a difficult hour that I know I will have to face tomorrow or the day after or in the near future. That was the reason for the Lord's anxiety. His death and the way he would die was immediately present to him. His human nature was deeply shaken. And nonetheless again and again, "Not my will but *yours* be done."

Our fear is frequently grounded in the expectation that something unknown and uncertain is about to take place. One can sense that the world today is in just such a state. We fear that mankind itself, now in possession of the means to do so, will cause the world's destruction. There is an obscure and unknown something which we sense coming, but don't know how to face it!

The remedy for such anxieties is and will always be, of course, the true and right image of God as Father. We must not think that God is out to martyr us in God only knows how many ways. We must be unwavering in our faith that everything God does is done out of love. It is admittedly not an easy task. But we must see to it that we learn how to overcome our fears which act as a steadily growing obstacle to our fulfillment of the will of God. And even if it should truly come to pass in accordance with our worst fears, the wisdom of St. Paul nonetheless applies: "And even if God tests you to the blood, he will not test you beyond your strength. He will always accompany you with his grace" (cf 1 Cor 10,13).

This is the first part: Remove the fears!

(b) The second part is: Be on guard against the *life of our drives*<sup>27</sup> and the tremors it can set off in our souls in connection with objects, values, and things which can draw us more and more away from the will of God. In our context this means: Fight against our inordinate inclinations. How much could I say to that!

(2) But there are also obstacles in our surroundings, namely the world! And in the world do not forget the devil! The devil is real and exercises real power. Evil is not only an abstract reality; the "mystery of iniquity" exists in personal form in the devil! We know, of course, how that is being denied in so many places today, even among Catholics. But we remain convinced. Here I will have to forego giving the reasons, since time is too short. For now it should suffice: The world around us, especially the world of today, offers us so many marvelous things. And today the devil—seen from the apocalyptic perspective—is having a grand old time. Remove the obstacles!

The ancient fathers [of the Church] describe the world as full of cobwebs. Those who become entangled in them will not escape.

#### *b. Work Positively*

Work positively! What should we do in a positive sense? Essentially three things.

(1) First of all, [develop] a clear *understanding* for the mind; an understanding of the plans of the Eternal Father as they are unveiled in Sacred Scripture and as they have been realized in our family and in our own lives. A clear understanding.

(2) On the other hand, [develop] a warm *love* which especially manifests itself in genuine prayer. What does that mean? My heart

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<sup>27</sup> By "life of the drives" Fr. Kentenich means the dynamic of our instinctive urges, both physical and emotional, which are associated with everything we do (even intellectual and spiritual motivation). These forces are given by God and therefore of great value, but because they are generally subconsciously driven and because of the disharmony of human nature after original sin they need to be put in tandem with the guidance of the intellect and will in the light of faith.

must learn how to love; I must be entirely given to God! If I know that I belong to him and if I love him, I will also understand his will. In every regard prayer is the most elemental function of a profound love of God. Do not forget, however, what *Everyday Sanctity* teaches us: In essence, prayer is a struggle to penetrate the will, the will of God's love<sup>28</sup>. If we go through the struggle of penetrating this will of his love, in the long run we will find it possible, even easy to pray in the situations everyday life brings us, "Thy will be done in my life, too, in every situation. I am on earth to do your will, to endure your will."

(3) Finally: See to it that our practical daily lives are evidence and proof of what we hold in our minds and hearts. What does that mean practically? Live lives of *everyday* sanctity! Always say yes in the small and smallest things to the will of the Eternal Father.

#### *Conclusion*

My dear Schoenstatt Family, with that I believe we have at least pointed the way to the great ideal which St. Joseph encourages us to strive for today. We also want to see today's Mass in this light. Our Lord comes to the altar in the form of St. Joseph leading us in the prayer again and again, "Thy will be done! Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..." Thy kingdom come—the kingdom of the Father!

We know that St. Gerard Majella<sup>29</sup>, a plain, unassuming lay brother, lived entirely out of this thought. On his deathbed he asked that a sign be placed on the door of his room with the words, "God's will done here." This sign, I think, is one we should wear at least secretly on every part of our personality: THE WILL OF THE FATHER'S LOVE DONE AND ENDURED HERE. Apply these words to your daily lives. Both when I am doing my everyday tasks and when I am standing in the public limelight, one thing connects

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. M. A. Nailis, *Everyday Sanctity*, p. 80, in German: a "*Hineinkämpfen in die Wertwelt Gottes*", a "battling into the divine world of values."

<sup>29</sup> Gerard Majella (1726-1755), Italian Redemptorist lay brother.

the two: The will of the Father's love is being done and endured! They can throw me in prison or take my honor away, but the words will always be the same: THE WILL OF THE FATHER'S LOVE DONE AND ENDURED HERE. May today's feastday give us this grace. Then we will have properly celebrated the feast of St. Joseph. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **10. Putting up the “Ladder” of Divine Providence (Schoenstatt’s Method of Meditation)**

(Talk for Couples, Milwaukee, May 7, 1956. See J. Niehaus, *Gilbert Schimmel: The End Crowns the Work*, p. 162-164)

*Commentary by Fr. J. Niehaus in the book: Father Kentenich (...) returned to his theme of Divine Providence again and again from different angles. This also gave Gilbert time to grasp his personal cross from the divine perspective. In the talk of May 7, 1956 Father Kentenich provided a practical tool for remaining in touch with God's voice in one's life. It was called "the Schoenstatt method of meditation" or "climbing the ladder of Divine Providence."*

"In Schoenstatt we speak of a great law, the law of the transparency of all created things. This means we see all things with the eyes of faith. It is as if we were always using a looking glass. Through this looking glass I see everything in the light of faith. As a result I will see all things differently from the way others see them. For instance, without the light of faith I will only see how attractive my wife is. But if I use the light of faith I will also see my wife's beauty as a reflection of God's beauty. Then my love for my beautiful wife will be a way that I love my beautiful God. (...)

"If the Blessed Mother wants to help us become holy in the world then she must give us this spirit of faith. Now think over the particular points I have just mentioned. Do you understand them more clearly now? See things in the right way. How? By seeing things in union with God.

"Think of how our Savior gave us a lesson on faith in Divine Providence. He did it in a down-to-earth way. He wanted to show us that the Heavenly Father has designed a great plan—a plan for my life, for the USA, for world history, for the life of my children. How has he presented this plan to us? If God has designed this plan he will also carry it out. And everything he does is so he can carry out his plan. This, in other words, is Divine Providence. What does Divine Providence mean? It means God has foreseen everything. Our

Savior describes it to us in a popular way. He says: Not a hair falls from your head—and think of all the tiny hairs! How many fall and no one even notices them! And now Our Lord says—"Not one little hair falls from your head unless it is the will of God" (Lk 21,18). Do you understand what this means? It is a protest against the fallacy that God does not care for us. It means that God takes an interest in every person and in the tiniest things.

"For example: I have a cold or a corn on my toe that is bothering me. Now think of the tiniest things. Our Lord says that God is interested in all of them. They are part of his plan and he has a reason for it. A spiritual person will have no rest until he can think the thoughts of God in his own mind, until he can say: Dear God, with this or that you certainly have something in mind.

"Suppose your children have colds. Maybe you will say: I don't care; jump around; you'll soon get over it. With *God* it is *different*. He cares about me. Everything is part of his plan. How difficult it is for us modern men to believe this! We can *repeat* the words. But to *live* it inside, how difficult it is! What are we lacking? The spirit of faith.

"In Schoenstatt we have developed our own method of meditation. It is a unique method. How does it work? When you are on the way home, or if you can spare a few minutes or as you sit in the car or in the bus—think quietly to yourself. Do it this way. Ask yourselves: What happened yesterday at work, say, with my employees? Then you may say: How difficult they made work for me yesterday! Now, think it over: Did this happen by accident? I might say: It will not be long before those stupid socialistic, communistic infiltrators will have us by the throat. That may all be true. But in spite of this I must say: God stands behind it, too. The question is: Dear God, what are you trying to tell me through this?

"First, I have to say to myself: God stands behind it. In Germany we have a saying; perhaps you have a similar one in English:

*'God is Father, God is good,  
everything he does is good.'*

In Germany we use this saying to tell children that everything God

does is good. And now: What about the rough treatment I got at work yesterday? I have made progress if I can say: God stood behind it. He permitted it. Then comes the great question: Dear God, what do you want me to learn through this?

"Up until now I sat in my car and said to myself on my way home, 'Business was good today; how can I earn more tomorrow?' Now, however, I will sit in my car concerned with God. I do it in a very simple way. In Schoenstatt we simply say: We put up the 'ladder.' Imagine that God stands at the top. Now in spirit I see a 'church' before me—my business, the way my employees hate me, or my co-workers and their brutality. And up on top—even above this brutality—stands God.

"It is so simple. First I must put up the ladder for my intellect. My mind must climb up to the top and ask in the light of faith, 'God, what do you want to teach me through this?' With a few words God can say a great deal. Perhaps he wants to tell me, 'You, too, are terribly harsh at times. You must first conquer this harshness in yourself. How many people have suffered from your unkindness?' This is putting up the ladder for the intellect. The mind enlightened by faith tries to interpret what God wants to tell us through this or that event.

"Now the ladder must be put up for the heart as well. What does this mean? I give my heart to God and say, 'Dear God, you must help me so that my heart remains kind, that I am not so cruel, hard, and unmotivated in my ways.' Now I will be standing with both feet on the ground of everyday life, but also lifted up to God.

"Please try this yourself. If you practice this more often it will become a habit. The soul will then meditate in this way on everything that happens."