



67. The Original Mission of the West in Salvation History

In the years following the First World War, a book by Oswald Spengler with the title “The Decline of the West” (the first volume appeared in 1918, the second in 1922)²²⁸ caused quite a stir. Romano Guardini also published a book entitled “The End of the Modern World”.²²⁹ Both books, and many others which do not mention the “West”²³⁰ in the title, dealt with the question: Has Western culture, which is stamped by Christianity, come to an end? Has a Christian culture been replaced by a civilisation which, despite retaining Christian elements, has lost its uniting Christian foundations, and hence ended in pluralism?

There is no doubt that the First World War and its consequences, and the technical and economic developments that followed, contributed to such questions being posed. New concepts and structures came into existence, but they were no longer “baptised” and integrated into a Christian foundation.

Fr Kentenich, with his hand “on the pulse of the times”, felt this particularly keenly. After all, his concern was to see and create harmony between nature and grace, which he considered the typical contribution of the original mission of the West. So “saving the original mission of the Christian West”²³¹ became one of Schoenstatt’s three goals. This did not mean that he wanted to save the West, but to save its original mission at the moment when it seemed lost. This mission has been given to all peoples. In a world that has been changed, and continues to change, as a result of globalisation, this mission consists in forming many and varied cultures so they are inspired and borne by Christian values. It becomes clear how comprehensive this task is when we look at the urgent challenges of our times: the co-operation of the world religions, the task of enculturating Christianity in the Asian and African traditions, as well as globalisation and militant fundamentalism.

²²⁸ Original Title: *Untergang des Abendlandes*. Translation republished 2010 and available from Amazon.

²²⁹ Original Title: *Das Ende der Neuzeit*. Translation: ISI Books, Delaware, 1998, available from Amazon.

²³⁰ The German word, *Abendland* (literally: evening land, land of the setting sun), describes the sphere of cultural and political influence emanating from Western Europe, in contrast to the *Morgenland* (the morning land, land of the rising sun) which describes the sphere of cultural and political influence emanating from Eastern Europe or – on other occasions – from the Orient. At the heart of these two phenomena are the influence of Western and Eastern Christianity embodied on the one hand by Rome and the Latin Church and, on the other hand, by Constantinople and Moscow and the diverse churches of Orthodoxy. In the Reader, *Abendland* will be translated as the original West.

²³¹ There are divergent views about the translation of *Abendland* as used by Fr Kentenich. He never used the concept “West”, although he must have been conversant with it also in German. In the context of this text *Abendland* refers to a mentality, rather than a geographical entity, so will be rendered as original West, to differentiate it from the usual understanding of West as a political and geographical area.

In this context it is necessary to point out that Fr Kentenich's great controversy with Church authorities, which led to the "Third Milestone" of 31 May 1949 and fourteen years of exile, is intimately connected with this mission. The "new person in the new community" (first goal), can only become a reality and create history when, through a new, psychological approach, the harmonious interplay of nature and grace in the individual person, society and the world around, brings about "organic thinking, living and loving".

The text that follows stems from the last year of Fr Kentenich's life. It shows clearly how much the rescue of the original mission of the West was a central objective of his life, starting with the Founding Document. In order to make this text more readable, the spoken word has been greatly smoothed and some passages abbreviated. If we could listen to the talk as it was given, the inner involvement of the speaker would become much more evident.

The text has been taken from the third talk of our founder to priests in Oberkirch on 4 September 1967, and can be found in "Propheta locutus est", talks and addresses by Fr J. Kentenich given in the last three years of his life, Volume XV, 222-235.

The question that was posed contained two elements:

First of all, what do we mean when we talk of "the West"?

Secondly, what do we understand by "mission in salvation history"?

Today almost all terms are in flux. So, when dealing with such questions, we are forced to distinguish between *in sensu proprio* and *in sensu latiori*.²³²

1. What do we understand by "the West" and "the mission in salvation history"?

Originally when people spoke of "the West", they meant the "ancient world".

What do we mean when we talk of a mission in salvation history? If I may explain it *in sensu proprio*, the answer is quickly and easily given. According to the Sacred Scriptures and the teaching of the Church, to start with, Adam and Eve were given a unique mission in the history of salvation. This mission was quickly thwarted by the Fall.

Then the Jewish people were given a very special and distinctive mission in salvation history.

Please read what Guardini had to say about this in his well-known book "*The Lord*".²³³ You will then realise clearly that according to God's plan the mission carried out by Jesus in the history of salvation was meant to be passed on by a chosen people. Guardini emphasised how we should envisage this mission in salvation history if the Jewish people, with their natural and supernatural disposition and grace, had consented to this mission. We cannot really imagine how this would have impacted on the course of salvation history. So also here, the mission in salvation history was thwarted, sold, broken.

Then through St Paul the West was drawn into this mission, and the people of the West adopted it. That is the original mission of the West in salvation history *in sensu proprio*.

²³² The actual meaning – and the wider meaning.

²³³ Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, Chicago 1966 & 1996.

2. Loss and acceptance of the original mission of the West in salvation history

What was the West meant to do? See to it that the mission of the God-Man in salvation history was borne into the whole world.

Now, if we distinguish a general cultural mission from a mission in salvation history, we have to admit that the West has introduced a cultural change into the whole world. However, with regard to its mission in salvation history, that is, Christianising the world, we have unfortunately to admit to an enormous number of flaws. That is why people have been asking for years: Hasn't the West, in much the same way as the Jewish people, squandered its mission?

You will probably remember that at that time I wrote with some agitation from prison²³⁴ about Adam's Fall, the Fall of the People of Israel, and in this context Europe's Fall, the Fall of the West. At that time I posed the daring question: Haven't we been called to take over this original salvific mission of the West in a special way? So, don't we have to be on our guard lest we, the Schoenstatt Family, have to give an account of a new Fall in the near future?

If you were now to ask how I arrived at this audacious opinion, you will have to consider how we came into existence out of nothing, as it were. You will then have to meditate on the fact that what is meant with taking over the mission of the People of Israel in salvation history by the people of the West, was already alluded to in the First Founding Document when I spoke of placing Germany at the head of the new world.²³⁵ Of course, this was not said with regard to the economic or military culture, but to what was our great ideal from the beginning: the holistic transformation of the soul. You see, even as early as 1914, when we could hardly utter a cheep, this universal and almost shockingly enormous concept came into existence. A vision, of course, only in the merely natural sense of the word.

Also here I would like to draw your attention to how important it is for us to strengthen our sense of history, precisely when we are dealing with spiritual currents. You will again notice how important it is for us to take note of historical facts, to understand and interpret them, in order to adopt historical responsibility for them, and to pledge all our strength for the mission connected with them.

3. The content of the original mission of the West in salvation history

Have we understood the original mission of the West?

In the first place this concerns the *Christianisation of the whole world*. This presents us with a first rate universalism. However, I must immediately add that our concern was with an *original Christianisation*.

Now the concept "saving the mission in salvation history" is given a deeper meaning. In what does the originality of Western spirituality consist, which we Schoenstatters have assimilated in a distinctive way? We are concerned with the fundamental relationship between the First and secondary causes. I think I have to state that **the most original character of the mission of the West consisted in mediating the fundamental relationship between the First and secondary causes to**

²³⁴ Letter for New Year 1940/41. Cf. *Kentenich Reader*, Vol. I, Text 19, p. 202.

²³⁵ "... I demand this sanctification of you. It is the armour you have to put on, the sword with which you have to liberate your Fatherland from its overpowering enemies and place it at the head of the ancient world."

the world.

We know how important it was for the Arabs to come to Europe and bring along the philosophy of Aristotle. Until then the Christian world had been strongly influenced by **Plato**, the Neo-Platonist school and **St Augustine**. Ultimately everything revolved around the First Cause. This First Cause was always understood as the cause of the nature and mission of human beings. Everything had to centre on God. Then along came the opinion of **Aristotle**. It introduced a shattering innovation into the thinking of the West: unlike Plato it affirmed the independent action of people as free secondary causes, according them an autonomous place in the record of human history. **St Thomas Aquinas'** great gift to the West and the whole Church was that he took up the teaching on secondary causes and Christianised it. This is the source of the well-known saying we have quoted on countless occasions: *Deus operatur per causas secundas liberas.*²³⁶ The essential thing is not to separate secondary causes from the First Cause.

Examine sometime how strongly we have taken over this mission. If you study the present ferment of life in Schoenstatt's spirituality from this point-of-view, you will soon notice that it is actually the most splendid, the most original, and also the most widely developed, element we have to give our times and world: the adoption of St Thomas' teaching: *Deus operatur per causas secundas liberas.*

When I began to proclaim Schoenstatt outside Schoenstatt's walls, what was probably one of the very first great defining topics was the long and detailed discussion on the generally valid principle: *Gratia praesupponit naturam, gratia elevat et perficit naturam.*²³⁷

St Thomas gave us the philosophy of secondary causes and thus helped to ensure that the fundamental relationship between secondary causes and the First Cause is seen in such a way that the secondary cause always works by virtue of the First Cause.

4. The psychology of the fundamental relationship between the First and secondary causes

What we are now adding is the **psychology of the fundamental relationship between the First and secondary causes.**

How can we describe God's great **law of government, law of leadership**? God always works, when he works through secondary causes, according to the great law **of organic transference and transmission.**

With regard to the **law of world order**, the fundamental relationship between the First and secondary causes implies that the lower order **submits to the higher, and hence shares in its perfection.** The lower order is, to start with, composed of all secondary causes in relation to God. Of course, there is also a lower and higher order of secondary causes.

In the past we learnt that there is a mineral world, a plant world, an animal world, an angelic world, and God's world. We are a microcosm, an offshoot of the macrocosm, a summary of all the levels of being that exist. Sharing in the mineral world combines to form a unity in an animal. The mineral world submits to the plant soul, and hence shares in its perfection. The same applies to us: the animal soul submits to the spiritual soul and shares in its perfection. In brief: the lower order

²³⁶ God works through free secondary causes.

²³⁷ Grace presupposes nature, it elevates and perfects nature.

submits to the higher and as a result shares in its perfection.

Besides this, **the lower order has symbolic value in relation to the higher order.**

a. It is an **expression** of the higher order. Self-surrender to a secondary cause has, therefore, to be seen as an expression of self-surrender to the First Cause. This is the crux of the matter. The problem of our present times, in my opinion, consists in the way the First and secondary causes cooperate, so that God can be seen, sought, and found everywhere.

The congress of theologians in Rome²³⁸ expressed this very clearly. What was worked out so comprehensively at the Council, for example, with regard to the Liturgy – using the vernacular, the ceremonies, the new Code of Canon Law – was all very important. However, the central question was not touched: It is the question of God. Does God exist? Can we really affirm our faith in the existence and activity of God?

So the most central aim of the Council is what Jesus formulated in these words, “I have come that they may have life, life in its fullness”.²³⁹ What sort of life? The divine life! That they may have it in its fullness. That is the central point, that is the crux of the matter. If we don’t lose sight of it, we can and should do everything that the Council has brought us. However, in the process we may never overlook that actually saving the idea of God has to be valued far more highly.

So, let me repeat, everything that has been drawn into the foreground of discussion today is more the means and way. The goal is always the great question: How can we once again make God present in the thick of life today?

I repeat: The lower order is the expression of the higher. So, when I surrender myself to another person within the divine order, it has to be an expression of my love of God. I have to draw the love of God into the foreground all the time. This also applies with regard to our love for the Blessed Mother. Love for the Blessed Mother, love for a person, that is, love for a secondary cause, has always to be an expression of love for the living God.

b. Yet not just an expression, but at the same time also a **means**. People have to love one another; let us see to it that we love them, that we learn to love them with sincere and fervent love, because the nature of human beings also consists in being a fellow human being; so love for our fellow human beings must always be seen as a means to learn how to love God in the end. So we may never refuse to love one another, we must cultivate it while ensuring that according to the law of organic transference and transmission love ultimately finds its way also to God. *Deum querere, Deum invenire, Deum diligere in omnibus rebus, in omnibus personis, in omnibus circumstantiis.*²⁴⁰ That is precisely what we call the meaning of everyday sanctity.

c) It is not only a means and an expression, it is also a **safeguard**. That is so important! If, once we have found God, centring on him leads to our separation from what he created, we will end in nihilism overnight. According to the law mentioned above, we have ultimately to find the way to God. “My God and my all!” But this has always to be seen organically, not mechanically. God always wants to harbour the whole world of secondary causes in himself. Do I love everything in God? Only when I have climbed up to God and taken everything I love with me, will I begin to be able to climb down again from God to his creation. Then, on the whole, I can love quite safely – of

²³⁸ From 26 September to 1 October 1966, an international congress of theologians took place in Rome as part of the post-Conciliar process.

²³⁹ Cf. Jn 10,10.

²⁴⁰ Seek God, find God, love God in all things, in all people, in every circumstance.

course, in different ways – because now love of God will outshine earthly love.

So in what does the West's specific mission in salvation history consist? To connect Christian transformation into God with the transformation into God through secondary causes. That is the whole thrust. That is what we mean when we talk of the mission of the West, in contrast to the mission of the East. Towards us the East has the mission to save us from the great danger to which the West is very extensively exposed, that is, to become so attached to secondary causes that it forgets the First Cause. What is our contribution to the East? Christ and the Christianisation of secondary causes. The East, including Eastern liturgy, is too one-sidedly attached to the First Cause. It has to learn to affirm secondary causes, and we want to learn from it to affirm the First Cause.

I think that with that I have given a dense answer to the question: What do we mean when we talk of saving the West's original mission in salvation history *in sensu proprio*?

5. Additional questions

And *in sensu improprio*?²⁴¹ We have also to ask: So what is the relationship between this mission in salvation history and the redemption of the world? Today it is generally held that the West embraces the whole world. From what point-of-view? Because the cultural achievements of the West have already spread all around the world. Of course, this is only a partial mission. Nevertheless, the term West has been extended as a result.

Now the term "saving the mission" – the mission remains unchanged. Of course, a great deal depends on whether the Family as a whole is thoroughly imbued with the connected realities. Although we cannot expect each member to take the time to fully understand the specific metaphysical, psychological and sociological questions, it is worth our while, and would actually reward us, because of the spiritual confusion today, if we reserved some time to think through these thoughts thoroughly, as far as possible, and then arrive at a clear standpoint.

²⁴¹ In the wider sense.