



## 72. The Council's Image of the Church and its Challenge

*It was impossible not to see how much Fr Kentenich involved himself in his last years with the changes in the Church which coincided with the Council and the time that followed. A central subject for him, as well as the Council, was the way the Church saw and understood itself. In sermons and talks, above all to priests, he repeatedly enlarged on this subject.*

*The previous text shows the extent to which Fr Kentenich felt that developments at the Council were an endorsement for himself and his foundation. He saw how both Schoenstatt and the Council were the work of the one Spirit creating co-operation and unity, and assigning a special mission to the Blessed Mother for Schoenstatt: to be the heart of the Church.*

*The following text complements what has already been discussed. Fr Kentenich focussed less on Schoenstatt's relationship to this Church, but rather on the Church itself as it understood itself in the spirit of the Council. The Church had changed its priorities and was entering into the various currents of the times; it had begun to move.*

*Two things need to be noticed in Fr Kentenich's explanation:*

*Firstly, it is remarkable how carefully and circumspectly Fr Kentenich emphasised the new priorities, but integrated them into the total image of the Church. Between the lines it becomes evident that Fr Kentenich clearly saw the dangers posed at the time by the new developments, which could cause the pendulum to swing to the opposite extreme. That is why he struggled to see the new image of the Church in the context of tradition and the more ancient images of the Church.*

*Secondly, the text makes it clear how much the self-understanding of the new Church ascribed responsibility to the individual members of the Church, and how much each of the Faithful, including the priests, were being challenged to believe in a daring and existential way. So the second part of our selected text is not so much an exposition of the new image of the Church, as a challenge to live by vital faith in Divine Providence.*

*It could expand our horizon if mention is still made of the fact that Fr Kentenich saw the present-day Church in a far greater framework than is expressed here. The structure of the retreat course, from which our quotation is taken, mentioned the following points, which were not discussed: The Church and its relatedness to the world and to eschatology, and how it demands personal decision. So it is completely in keeping with Fr Kentenich's thinking that such a Church, which is on pilgrimage through time, and aiming for the eschatological goal of complete union in God, has also to enter into dialogue with other religions.*

*The text has been taken from the second conference of a retreat for the Institute of Diocesan Priests in Würzburg, 24 November 1966.*

My dear Confrères,

We have been able to distinguish between a progressive and a traditional tendency in the reaction to the decisions of the Council. With regard to the progressive line, we are talking, on the one hand, about an urge towards what is new, and on the other, about an urge to stress experience.

Those are actually two starting points which clearly confront us in our present times. The question now is how these two elements press developments forward under Satan's sun, or under God's sun.

Under Satan's sun: We have discussed this starting point together. Openness towards what is new becomes addiction to innovation, the rejection of all that is traditional; and openness to experience become addiction to ever new experiences, which in their turn are separated from a sense for the intellectual, rational and supernatural realities.

We would now have to pose the second question: How do both these elements find expression under God's sun? If we want to summarise what has been said, we could follow a double path.

**First path:** We could string together and reduce to a common denominator what we have already emphasised in the comparison.

**Second path:** However, we could also take a closer look at the decisions of the Council. The best way to do this would be to meditate on the Church's self-description. We may assume that in this regard everything God's Spirit expects of us and has foreseen for us has already been worked out.

How does the Church of today see itself? Allow me to point out that we may not think in extremes. If the Church sees itself in a different way today, when compared with the past, we must understand it as merely a change of emphasis. There isn't negation on the one hand, and affirmation on the other.

Let me summarise what can be said about the Church's self-understanding.

The Church sees itself in a very pronounced way as **the People of God**, and as the **Pilgrim Church** with a strong relatedness to the world, with an **eschatological attitude** and **characterised by decision**. Of course these are expressions that each contain a world of meaning.

### [1. The Church as the People of God]

When I explain the concepts, you will immediately understand what the background must be like. The background is composed of the former self-understanding of the Church. If we say that today it primarily sees itself as the People of God, it means it in comparison to the past. At that time it saw itself as a hierarchical structure in which the leaders and the led were contrasted starkly: here the leading Church and there the led Church. This became particularly strongly marked from the time of Constantine the Great. Of course, we know that by virtue of divine right the Church has a hierarchical structure, so that one part of the Church has the task to lead.

Through Constantine the Great the episcopacy accrued princely and state powers. So in the course of the centuries we find a hierarchy that is uniquely endowed with power. Today people often stress that power is often a greater danger to an institution than even the lowest sexuality. From this we can understand how greatly the hierarchy of the Church was exposed to the danger of abusing its power.

In the meantime we have a strongly democratic tendency in the whole history of the world. People stress that this democratic tendency was pushed through by the French Revolution. In its description of itself the Church is now adapting itself to this. It looked for a common denominator to which both segments – the leaders and the led – can be traced. This common denominator is **the People of God**.

This does not mean that the Church wants to give up its hierarchical structure. It only emphasises once again what is common to everyone: the shepherd and the flock are the People of God. God is superior to everyone, and what unites everyone, the shepherds and the flock, is the People of God.

All the other principles proclaimed by the Council repeatedly underscore this fundamental understanding of the Church as the People of God. That is why also the Blessed Mother, despite all her privileges, is seen and contemplated according to the same principle: she is also a member of the People of God. This has been so strongly emphasised that a danger became apparent with regard to the special position of the Blessed Mother in the People of God. Although it was generally accepted that within the People of God the Blessed Mother is second to none, yet over and above this there was even a danger for a time that it would not be acknowledged that she also has a mediating position between God and the People of God, that she also represents a world on its own, that beyond this – and now I am using the terminology of the Council – she is not only the most perfect member of the Church, the *Mater Ecclesia*, she is and will always remain the *Mater Ecclesiae*.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> That Mary is not only the most perfect member of "Mother Church", but also "Mother of the Church".

Proceeding from this democratic tendency, which the Church has discovered as a part of its nature and intends to emphasise more strongly, it is also understandable that the concept “partnership” has become more popular. So is the idea of brotherhood, sisterhood, membership. They are all part of the same tendency. We must only remember that we are dealing here with a change of emphasis, a stronger emphasis, not with something completely new, something that never existed before. And if the emphasis is placed more and more strongly on the People of God, this does not mean that everything the Church said of itself in the past no longer exists.

Incidentally we should adapt to the present-day terminology, but not put into it something that isn't there. So if people say today that the whole People of God is united by the bond of partnership and brotherhood, this does not mean that there is no longer any fatherhood.

On the contrary, I think we have to say that to the extent that brotherhood, sisterhood, partnership are stressed, fatherhood must also be stressed. We are brothers, sisters, or partners to one another, because we have the same Father. It doesn't matter whether this refers to fatherhood in the supernatural, or also fatherhood in the natural-supernatural order.

Personally it means a lot to me to allow new expressions, such as partnership and brotherhood, to inspire me. They highlight changes of emphasis that help me to enrich the essentials in my basic approach. I allow myself to be inspired to be a true father to my Family. If you do something similar in your pastoral work, you will never become spiritually tired. You can be physically tired, but every advice you offer will promote life: it will be part of the life principle you have assimilated from others, and part of the life principle that originates in you.

[...]

Now I have explained the concept People of God. You understand what God's Spirit wants: we have to cultivate a profound sense of community more strongly in ourselves. Not always lord and underling,<sup>276</sup> I'm above and you're below; we have to cultivate a fervent, genuine communion of hearts, lives and loves, without compromising our legal position.

## [2. The pilgrim Church – in contrast to a sedentary Church]

Secondly, in the Council they talked about the **pilgrim Church**. What sort of Church is that? Its opposite is a **sedentary Church**, a Church that has got stuck, that is bound to tradition.

The pilgrim Church is constantly on the move: away from being sedentary into a movement of life towards a divine goal, but in an indissolubly fraternal communion, a communion of life and love, with Christ and Christians.

Again, what is important is the change of emphasis which does not negate what is not expressly stated. Otherwise it would be a poor Church that constantly moves like a pendulum. We are used to seeing the Church as a rock that remains immovably rooted to the spot. The Church wants to

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<sup>276</sup> A German idiom “*Wie der Herr, so's Gescherr*”, which is drawn from farming. The farmer is the lord and his animals the “*Gescherr*”. The corresponding English idiom is: Like father, like son, but it doesn't give what is meant here.

remain so also in the future. However, if we want to do justice to its character as a pilgrim, we have to imagine the rock in motion. It moves onward like a ship on the high seas of life until it reaches its boundary, which is eternity. However, the high seas through which the Church is guided are churned up by elemental forces. To right and left it takes on board all who are called, and invites them to take a place in this ark.

### **[Pilgrimage as a procession]**

Since the Church is moving towards a religious goal, we could also say that it is taking part in an eternal procession – from altar to altar. Where I live with my parish I have to erect an altar. The coming generations who wake up in the Church also want to be affirmed in their own way. So the Church is constantly changing. The masterstroke in the Church consists in combining what is unshakable and immovable with what is changeable.

So we can feel that a change of emphasis has taken place in our image of the Church: In contrast to stressing the static element in the Church, the emphasis has moved to the pilgrim Church, and highlights its tremendously strong dynamism.

At this point I want to place the emphasis on the pilgrim Church in contrast to the static and sedentary Church. The older generation in particular comes from a static Church, and for them it was its characteristic feature. Such a Church wants to affirm and define itself in juridical terms. In a static Church everything may not be in motion, although not everything is inflexible. So its need to define itself in juridical terms is fully justified. The danger of a static and sedentary Church is that its members feel satisfied if they have accepted all the laws, and then fall prey to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who followed an inner and outer formalism.

A sedentary and static Church also has to safeguard itself financially; again this is justified. But where is the danger? That we insure ourselves in every possible way. Then the sedentary state embraces the whole being of Catholics who are at home in a static Church, indeed it embraces the whole nature of the Church itself.

### **[The daring faith of a pilgrim Church]**

I consider the most dangerous thing of all is that in a sedentary Church the faith's characteristic daring is levelled and destroyed. The following example taken from life typecasts it:

The mentality in a sedentary Church is that we should have a good time here on earth. However, because the Church also prepares us for happiness in the next world, because we should have a good time also in heaven, and because this requires us to have faith, we come to the conclusion: Why shouldn't I have such faith? It doesn't cost me much; I am having a good time. As a result faith is given a strange character: the daring that characterises it is removed. And that is one of the worst things that can happen.

However, if we are dealing with a Church that is constantly moving, that is tossed about like a ship on the stormy seas, we won't manage without daring. At least one answer to the question as to

why our faith has become consumptive today is that we have to say that it is the fateful consequence of the faith of a static Church. Faith demands daring, as can be shown by drawing from various sources.

### **[The Biblical view of daring faith: Peter jumps out of the boat]**

If we examine the Biblical sources, we have one of the most classic examples of the daring required by faith in the action of St Peter: Peter was in a boat. Suddenly the Lord appeared walking on the water. Peter's immediate reaction was to jump out of the boat into the waters of the lake – motivated by his love alone. He had forgotten that the water has no floorboards. He dared to do something really great, but was obviously rapidly shocked by his daring and began to doubt. Then came his cry of fear, "Lord save me, I am drowning!"

What does this mean when applied to ourselves? Just suppose that we had to take Peter's place with our usual form of faith. I think we would hardly have had the courage to jump out of the boat. We would have been convinced that the water doesn't have floorboards. Who of us would have the courage to expose ourselves to destruction? And even if we dared to do so, I think that as soon as we felt the water under our feet, we would have clung with both hands to the boat. The character of daring!

Listen, faith does not simply require us to surrender our intellects, but our whole selves, and in this instance we do so to the God who is Love, the God of revelation.

What is important to me at the moment is to explain the daring quality of faith. When we look into the history of our Family, and when we hear what the Holy Spirit is requiring of the Church today, we will understand that he is requiring precisely this daring, the death leap of mind, will and heart into the arms of the living God, who often hides himself from us in darkness.

If we don't see these things in their context, we will be helpless in the face of the situation today.

Let us follow up another line of thought that sheds light on the character of daring from a more psychological point-of-view. "The just man lives by faith."<sup>277</sup> I would have to say this of all who have passed through my school: my followers live by the spirit of faith.

### **[The daring of faith from a more psychological point-of-view]**

What does the spirit of faith give us?

### **[Faith as sympathy for God]**

It gives us a mysterious and positive bias towards God. It gives us sympathy for God. With regard to sympathy, I would like to repeat a saying of St Augustine: The heart is the best possible medium

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<sup>277</sup> Cf. Hebr. 10,38.

for knowledge. If we feel sympathy for someone, we are actually in the best position to understand that person. If there is apathy, if indifference, or an attitude of couldn't care less, dominate, we will never be able to understand someone.

This has also to be applied to the Blessed Mother. If we feel sympathy for her, we are in the best position to understand her in her totality.

In our context the concept has to be applied to God: Sympathy for God. The infused spirit of faith, which has grown through constant practice, gives us sympathy for God. We then find it easier to discover God behind everything that happens, and to affirm him. Can you notice how closely this is connected with faith in Divine Providence?

When I returned from Dachau, I was able to answer the worries of those who had been in prison and then attended the retreats, by repeating the simple expression that arose from simple faith in Divine Providence and the world's fundamental law of love: God has always prepared the best pampers<sup>278</sup> for me. When I was down in the bunker, this was the best pampers for me. Even if those pampers contained thorns and thistles that constantly wounded me: the best pampers! Normally I can only say this if the spirit of faith has given me a profound sympathy for the living God. "Nothing happens by chance, everything comes from God's kindness."<sup>279</sup>

Where can we find the key points of the post-Conciliar teaching of the Church and the education of our people? All the ecclesiological questions, all the liturgical questions, are certainly of importance today. However, the most central question today is the question about God. You may never overlook this.

This does not mean that in the spirit of the Council we shouldn't affirm and do everything that was said there. However, the most central point concerns God. The idea of God is not secured only by education in the liturgy; it isn't enough. From this vantage point you will be able to understand far better what we are aiming at with the law of the open door, and the God of life. We have quietly anticipated the central question of our present times. The central question is and remains the concept of God!

What should we try to achieve? The spirit of faith gives us sympathy for God. Naturally it is difficult to prove to an opponent that this or that event can only be understood in the light of God. We can understand and explain many things without him, but if we have sympathy for God, we will discover him intuitively everywhere.

### **[Faith as instinct for the divine]**

Allow me to use another term: The spirit of faith gives us an extraordinarily secure divine instinct. Of course, this doesn't allow us to prove everything like two plus two equals four. There is so much that is imponderable. However, if there is so much in the natural order that we cannot understand, why should it be otherwise with regard to God?

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<sup>278</sup> What was once called nappies has meanwhile diversified in the English language into diapers or – using a brand name for the whole – pampers.

<sup>279</sup> A popular saying that illustrates the spirituality of those times.

## **[Faith as siding with God)**

Let me use another term that means the same: This divine intuition, this divine instinct, also means that we instinctively side with God. I am always concentrating on the most central questions. Hence an instinctive partisanship for God, indeed for God the Father, more precisely, for our richly merciful God the Father. God the Father is the One who has mercifully led me into this impasse. God the Father's mercies have prepared for me this or that disappointment. The whole world takes on a whole new look. That is this supernatural view which the people of today have without exception lost, and that includes us priests.

Now let us listen to what the Blessed Mother wants to give us as a grace of pilgrimage from her shrine: the grace of a spiritual home, but also of spiritual transformation. The intellect is transformed. It is given a new light; it sees in God's light. The will is also transformed. How is it transformed? "The just man lives by faith".<sup>280</sup> The Blessed Mother wants to see to it that in every respect we exemplify a colony of heaven.

Supernatural people are clear seeing and prudent people who see profoundly. They see things others can't see. They are not just clear seeing and prudent, they not only see profoundly, they also become daring people. It is so important to be daring today. ... Whoever does not see clearly, and doesn't aspire to do so, will remain forever stuck below. Although they can be clever, in the long run they will not attract others. However, whoever has God as their Partner – we would do better to say "the Father" – will always be victorious, because God is simply God. Ultimately the supernatural person is the person who is certain of victory.

So we can feel that a pilgrim Church presents a tremendous challenge to the people of today who are in the Church. Allow me to use a favourite saying of the Bishop of Mainz: The Council has made it difficult for today's Catholics to be Catholic. It has to do so!

By the pilgrimage of the Church, therefore, we understand a constant movement of the Church towards a supernatural goal, towards the divine reality in the next world: The road leads home-wards to the Father!

This pilgrimage has to be undertaken in a constant communion of life with Christ and Christians. This shows us the Church as a single great Family of God.

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<sup>280</sup> Cf. Hebr 10,38.