



73. Dilexit Ecclesiam

During the most difficult time of the exile in Milwaukee imposed by Church authorities, Fr Kentenich said for the first time: When he died – even if he died in exile – he wanted the inscription on his gravestone to be “DILEXIT ECCLESIAM” – He loved the Church.

On a number of occasions, especially after his exile, Fr Kentenich repeated this wish. His explanations then clarified how much he identified himself with this epitaph of Cardinal Mermillod,²⁸¹281 and the dimensions in which he saw it in relation to his own life. The three texts we are quoting here testify to this fact.

When Fr Kentenich died on 15 September 1965, it was taken for granted that his grave would bear this inscription.

We are closing this collection of texts in the Kentenich Reader with Fr Kentenich’s personal testimony about his epitaph. The inscription points beyond his death and has to be seen as his legacy and a commission. From it we can study our founder, remain united with him, and bear him into the time ahead by serving his work for the Church.

The text is compiled from three talks Fr Kentenich gave at the end of his exile and just after his return from Rome to Schoenstatt. The first two are taken from talks for the whole Schoenstatt Family on 31 December 1965 that can be found in “Propheta locutus est”, Vol III, p. 255f. and 268. The third is taken from a talk given on 3 January 1966 to the Schoenstatt Priests of the Diocese of Münster (Propheta locutus est, Vol III, p. 98-101).

²⁸¹ Gaspard Mermillod (born at Carouge, Switzerland, 22 September 1824; died in Rome, 23 February 1892) was a Bishop of Lausanne and Cardinal. He was one of the great preachers of modern times.

There is no doubt that we have arrived at a new period in our Family history. What do we want to do in the period that now follows?

I would prefer to write over the gateway to the following years and decades the saying I once wrote to the Holy Office, "*Dilexit Ecclesiam*".²⁸²

This saying implies that I want to have the words "*Dilexit Ecclesiam*" inscribed on my gravestone, so that it is recorded for posterity. How can we describe this love of the Church?

In these days I have told you what I promised our Holy Father on the occasion of the unexpected audience:²⁸³ Our Family as a whole – that is to say, the Family as a whole that has been taken down from the Cross – wants to try in the time to come to make use of all the means at our disposal to help the Pope to carry out the post-Conciliar mission of the Church. So the words *Dilexit Ecclesiam* will be given a distinctive and profound interpretation: *Dilexit Ecclesiam, Schoenstatt dilexit ecclesiam* – Schoenstatt has loved the Church. Our love for the Church motivates us to support the post-Conciliar mission of the Church as perfectly as possible and in every possible way.

Truly "*Dilexit Ecclesiam*"! Love for the Church has urged us to call Schoenstatt into life, or, to express it better, it caused God to decide to give us this mission for the good of the Church. "*Dilexit Ecclesiam*", love for the Church motivated us to allow the Church to impose the Cross of the Lord, the crucifixion, on us, and to cause us to follow the Lord's stations of the Cross.²⁸⁴ "*Dilexit Ecclesiam*".

"*Dilexit Ecclesiam*", love for the Church motivates us also now to love this Church that has persecuted us, to love it with endless warmth, to forget the past and to commit ourselves now with all our strength so that our Family can carry out its great mission, and help the Church to push forward victoriously to the shores of the newest world; that is to say, to bring about the ideal of the Church at the newest shore.

When we now look back on the past, I think we may all repeat a saying that Cardinal Mermillod had inscribed on his tombstone at that time, "*Dilexit Ecclesiam*". We know that from the first we have loved the Church warmly and energetically, with joyful and active readiness for sacrifice. Love for the Church motivated us to call Schoenstatt into life. Love for the Church also motivated us to allow the Church to nail us to the cross. We confirm our love for the Church by being grateful – in our case especially to Bishop Tenhumberg – because through him the Church has taken us down from the cross.

²⁸² Cf. Letter to Cardinal Ottaviani, 15 August 1965, in: *Fürchte dich nicht – rede nur – schweige nicht*. Letters from Fr Joseph Kentenich dealing with the 31 May 1949, Vol. 5, p. 1622f.

²⁸³ Audience with Pope Paul VI on 22 December 1965. Cf. *Reader I*, p. 276f.

²⁸⁴ Fr. Kentenich used to compare the 14 years of exile from 1951 to 1965 with the 14 stations of the cross of our Lord.

Dilexit ecclesiam – what do those words imply? I had just begun to tell you a little about my audience with our Holy Father.²⁸⁵ He is the one who has been given the “Schoenstatt vision” for which we so ardently longed; he has reinstated me, and during his Papacy Schoenstatt has been blessed and crowned. In gratitude I promised our Holy Father that we would help him to carry out the post-Conciliar mission of the Church in the fullest sense of the word.

Then came that important statement – it is a saying that Bishop Tenhumberg bears on his coat-of-arms, *Sub tutela matris*, that is, under the protection of the Blessed Mother – we want to see to it that the post-Conciliar mission of the Church is carried out under her protection. Since the whole audience was conducted in a very relaxed way, our Holy Father intervened at this point and emphasised what is obviously a favourite thought of his. He thought I had meant: *sub ecclesia matre*.²⁸⁶ “No,” I replied, “*Sub tutela matris!*” “Yes”, he said, “that’s right”. I then added the third thought I spoke to him as I handed him the chalice, “The chalice is meant for the new Church that is being planned to bear the title: *Matri ecclesiae!*”²⁸⁷ Then I added, “*in ecclesia, ab ecclesia, pro ecclesia; a matre ecclesia, in matre ecclesia, pro matre ecclesia*”.²⁸⁸

Now, from a dogmatic point-of-view I could follow one argument after the other in order to show you the inner relationship between *Mater ecclesia* and *Mater ecclesiae*.²⁸⁹ It runs in the blood of the Catholic Church: its model is the Blessed Mother. That is why, even if only for the sake of its own existence, the Church may not distort the image of the Blessed Mother. From this we can understand why Protestants cannot come to terms with the image of the Blessed Mother. They instinctively identify also their own image of the church with the image of Blessed Mother. And since their own image simply cannot be reconciled with the features of the Blessed Mother as we see them, they cannot acknowledge our love for Mary in all its purity. So, if we want to help to carry out the post-Conciliar mission of the Church, we may not overlook: *sub tutela matris!* We also want to have the courage – and today it requires courage even in the circle of our own priests – to give our heartfelt affirmation to the position of the Blessed Mother, especially under the title of “*Mater ecclesiae*”.

When I look back in this way, what an amazing time that was after the First World War when our Marian devotion was so controversial! What a battle we fought at that time in honour of the Blessed Mother! And since she has glorified herself in our Family as part of the Church, it will always remain our task to see to it that the Blessed Mother is recognised in the Church; indeed, not only that she is acknowledged, but also that she is accepted as the great Bearer of Christ, Servant of Christ and Mother of Christ for the new era!

²⁸⁵ Paul VI., 1879 - 1978; Pontificate 1963 - 1978.

²⁸⁶ Under Mother Church.

²⁸⁷ To the Mother of the Church.

²⁸⁸ In the Church, from the Church, for the Church; from Mother Church, in Mother Church, for Mother Church.

²⁸⁹ Mother Church and the Mother of the Church.