



49. Priestly Fatherliness

The covenant of love, as the central event of our history and the core of our spirituality – on which the personality structure and personal history of our founder has unquestionably set an essential stamp – has given rise to a whole host of insights into the nature of God and his creation, and the spiritual emphases that arose from them: Faith in Divine Providence; the awareness of being an instrument; a clear formulation of our mission and objectives, and the Marian modality of salvation history; as well as insights into anthropology with a more precise definition of the nature of the (new) person, man and woman, the community and the uniqueness of the individual (personal ideal); and the teaching on the organism of bonding.

As an outflow of his teaching on the organism of bonding, and in conjunction with an analysis of our present times, Fr Kentenich integrated a multiplicity of psychological principles and pedagogical consequences into his spirituality. They are so central that he characterised Schoenstatt as an educational movement of educators. The question that occupied him throughout his life, therefore, was not just how human beings have been created according to God's plan, but also, how they are to grow and be educated. On this subject Fr Kentenich conducted ten courses on spiritual direction in the 1920s and 30s, which were then continued in a series of pedagogical conferences. The seventh course on spiritual direction held in 1931, from which this text has been taken, was advertised as "General Principles of a Modern Asceticism for Youth". The course was held once for teachers and once for teachers and priests. As such the course fits into the category of pedagogical conferences. The course for teachers, that is, the feminine version, was published with the title "Ethos und Ideal in der Erziehung" – Ethos and Ideal in Education. In a passage not included in the present text, Fr Kentenich said,

"What applies in essentials to the leadership of men, also applies to the leadership of women.

We must only find another way of expressing it, and here and there indicate a shift in attitude."

So we have taken the liberty to transcribe the discussion in the published conference on "priestly motherliness" as one that more explicitly includes "priestly fatherliness".

When you study the text, your attention is drawn to two main points-of-view:

- 1. Education is not primarily a method, but originates in an ethical fundamental attitude, which is composed of a creative tension between firmness and kindness, and between the acceptance of attachments and passing them on: priestly fatherliness or priestly motherliness.*
- 2. For the young people in our present-day society it is particularly important that they are allowed to attach themselves personally to an educator, and to experience both what it is like to be sheltered, and what it is like to encounter firmness. This presupposes that the educator can accept personal, and even intimate, attachments with the correct attitude, leaving freedom and not becoming dependent on such attachments.*

The text is particularly suited to giving us a glimpse into Fr Kentenich's fatherly soul.

Our adaptation of the text is taken from "Ethos und Ideal in der Erziehung", Vallendar 1972, p. 105-124.

When we struggle in these days to discover a general teaching on the principles of a modern asceticism for youth, we are actually touching upon the question that has to be raised here. In the process we don't want to presume that we are able to work out a system in every least detail. At any rate, we want to make a serious contribution to this question, which interests everyone.

General Teaching on Principles

To start with, you may not expect me to constantly dwell upon individual examples. It is of no use to us today. This is because, if we have solved the individual problem without penetrating to the ultimate principles, we will never have the expertise that will enable us to deal with assurance with a different instance. Further, please do not expect a detailed explanation of certain pedagogical problems. To do this we will have to agree upon another conference. For example, we may be interested in the sexual education of our young people, or how to engage the youth at the vocational schools. These are subordinate questions that also have a place in a general teaching on principles, but only to the extent that they concern ultimate principles.

On what are the ultimate principles based?

At a conference for educators in Berlin a Protestant professor presented his thoughts on Protestant education of young men. The "song" he sang always ended in noting the dubious quality – that was his expression – of all norms of education. He argued that the earthy subsoil of every Biblical truth is open to doubt. Also what is to be found in the Bible as such is open to doubt. There I have characterised all that I want to attack: Don't always present questions that are open to doubt! We want to be honest. However, ultimately there has to be clarity at some point. In the realm of nature and grace, therefore, we have to penetrate to ultimately valid general principles.

This echoes in the expression "a general teaching on principles", or in the other expression, "fundamental questions of a modern asceticism for youth".

Which chapters would such a teaching on principles have to contain?

Recently, when the new head of the Prussian Centre took up office and held his introductory speech, he referred to his two predecessors and stressed: the one distinguished himself as a politician by always following a clear policy, the other by his imperturbable tactics. Both tried to be resolutely consistent.

Those are the three chapters that a general teaching on the principles of a modern asceticism for youth will have to consider:

policy¹
tactics
consistency.

Now let us dwell in detail on the whole complex of thoughts and values I have mentioned here. Since we are dealing with a teaching on general principles, we will have to be satisfied with large and fleetingly presented trains of thought and arguments. So I will have to express myself as briefly as possible in the individual chapters; perhaps it will be too brief for those who are absorbing such trains of thought for the first time.

So the first chapter is entitled “policy”.

1. We will have to observe a great policy in the whole of our educational work, especially in capturing and forming our young people pedagogically. It is a double policy: the one concerns the educator, the other the person to be educated. In the educator the policy is called fatherliness; in the pupil it is called the ideal. This gives you a tailor-made description of all that can be compiled about educational wisdom and praxis. If this two-fold policy is meaningfully connected and united, that is, fatherliness and the ideal – either as a community ideal, or as a personal ideal – we will be able to proceed with assurance, and we will possess a modern ability to form and adapt, connected with utterly Catholic eternal principles.

Now let us attempt to delve into this double policy. Today we want to remain with the policy of the educator. We can feel from this how strongly we place the human person at the heart and centre of our pedagogical conference: The person who educates and the person to be educated.

I want to organise the huge quantity of material that has to be dealt with here in two ways. I want to describe to you

Fatherliness in the light or battle of our times

Fatherliness in the light of faith.

1. Fatherliness in the light or battle of our times

I have already mentioned the two big conferences in Marburg and Berlin. At both of them they discussed the nature of genuine leadership. In Marburg they consciously excluded the Catholic priesthood from the possibility of leading the people. At least, that is how the representative of socialism presented it. He called Catholic priests not the leaders of the people, but the great seducers of the people. In Berlin Professor Goldbeck spoke on the same subject, the psychology of

¹ *Linie* – Literally “line”. So far no adequate equivalent has been found for this concept. “Policy” was chosen because it captures some of the meaning: A broad, rather than narrow, set of principles that are followed consistently, but allow for adaptation to individual instances.

leadership. He is not a Catholic. He formulated the achievements of a long life of academic work and praxis as: The essence of genuine leadership is to be found in priestly fatherliness.

Let us examine both expressions: priestly fatherliness! How are we to understand the concept “priestly”? According to Professor Goldbeck, it is doubtlessly not meant in the sense of the ordained priesthood. That was not his objective.

Every leader, whether political or anti-Catholic, has to embody the basic elements of true leadership; so men have to make the fundamental attitude of priestly fatherliness their own, and women priestly motherliness.

Professor Goldbeck meant that a genuine leader has to come from a “next-worldly”, metaphysically founded and grounded world. He has to stand on rock. To start with this does not have to be religion, but there have to be ultimate metaphysical truths in which the genuine leader is at home.

From this you can immediately conclude that youthful leaders will not be able to exemplify the concept of leadership in the full sense of the word, because they are insufficiently at home in this “next-worldly”, metaphysical world. Their whole being cannot be hewn from rock. Yet this is necessary if a genuine leader is to carry out his task. We Catholics are easily and naturally inclined to transpose these thoughts to the religious sphere, especially when we are dealing with religious education.

So where must the true religious leader be at home? He must come from the supernatural world; he has to be at home in the world of faith. Every least fibre of his being has to be connected with it. From it he receives the strength to stand like a rock in the ocean. This is certainly one of the essential characteristics of a true leader: a human being of calibre, standing on the rock of a supernatural world.

Later, when we speak about priestly fatherliness in the light of faith, I will have to prove to you that in fact every Christian actually shares in the ordained priesthood; that we are all ontologically consecrated. We have received the priesthood of the laity, so we also have an ontological basis for this pedagogical evaluation.

So, when we trace to ultimate principles the whole complex of questions and life that arise in this connection, we will find that two laws are at work:

The law of transference.

The law of disengagement.²

When we talk about these two laws, we direct our gaze to the person to be educated, the object of education. I stand here as a leader endowed with priestly fatherliness, and opposite me is the person who is to be educated.

If you would like to examine whether these laws are true, the best thing to do would be to remain with what you have experienced in your own life. Do you know what ultimately attaches the person to be educated to the educator, and what has to regulate this attachment? It is these two laws.

² *Loslösung.*

The law of transference attaches; the law of disengagement relaxes the attachment for the sake of a higher good. From our Christian and religious standpoint it is for the sake of God. The law of disengagement relaxes the inner attachment to the educator and increasingly connects the whole inner life with growing force to the ultimate pole of our being, God.

Perhaps we should look more deeply into the development of our own soul. I would then have to ask: Have you really loved someone who gave expression to priestly fatherliness towards you? If you can say yes, I would call you exceedingly fortunate. Whoever has not had this experience is a spiritual cripple to some degree. Normally a person has to have had a graced educator, a spiritual mother or spiritual father, at some time in his or her life.

However, you may not misinterpret these concepts. Do you know what ultimately urges a person – no matter of which sex – to such an educator, and attaches him or her to that educator? It is not a tendency to submission. By no means! To say that would be to see things incorrectly in a psychological sense. It is **the need to be sheltered**. That is simply part and parcel of a human being, both boys and girls, even mature people of both sexes. Every person has an exceedingly strong need to be sheltered.

When we develop normally, this need to be sheltered is no longer sufficiently satisfied by our parents once we have entered puberty. This is normal in boys; in girls the onset of puberty does not have such a strong effect in this regard. Today we would have to say that there are countless young people in whom the need to be sheltered has never been satisfied in their normal family life. On other occasions we have formulated it in this way: Today there are countless young people who have never been children in the deepest and truest sense of the word. In practice this means that their need to be sheltered has never been fully satisfied.

Every soul instinctively struggles to find a firm support, that is, a person who is hewn from rock, but who is at the same time kind and adaptable. The soul can only attach its need to be sheltered where both are present: a person in whom it finds this priestly strength that comes from a supernatural world, and who at the same time attempts to be fatherly or motherly.

The law of transference

So what is transferred? Our need to be sheltered is detached from our natural parents and transferred to spiritual parents, a spiritual father or a spiritual mother. If this inner bonding is not present, if there is only outward attachment, education that penetrates to greater depths is impossible. If we do not achieve this inner bonding, we cannot think of true education. This also applies in religious communities with regard to the superiors. A superior has to be a leader; he has to develop priestly fatherliness. If he doesn't do so, he may well have outward authority, but inner bonding will not come about.

This applies wherever we are working as educators. If these inner bonds are not present, we can pack and go, because we won't be successful as educators. We can generate pretence, but genuine education is not possible, because it only becomes possible to the extent that this inner bonding comes about.

We are not dealing here with something that can be measured, or with sections of a law. I can't learn it by intensive cramming. These are very mysterious threads connecting and uniting people. Also from this you can conclude that if we really want to work as educators, we have to be strong

personalities. Otherwise the drive to be sheltered will not find anything to hold onto. If I am personally a doormat, someone people walk over, I may well crack my whip outwardly, but inwardly no true education is possible.

However, you may not overlook that we have said too little if we only describe this strong and metaphysical security and ability to offer shelter. At the same time there must be, on the one hand, motherliness, and on the other, fatherliness, as well as strength. If kindness becomes weakness, you can do what you want, others will never feel sheltered in you. The law of transference will also not have an effect in the long run. It is possible to describe this very sensitively in psychological terms. Of course, we have to know life as it really is.

Perhaps you will say that it is dreadfully difficult to be an educator. Of course it is difficult. To be an educator means having yourself in hand. To be a leader means constantly working on yourself. While I am educating others, I have to educate myself as well. If I don't do so, I will face a fiasco. I will never be able to carry out my task clearly, surely and permanently.

So that is the law of transference. What is transferred? Our need to be sheltered is transferred to the natural parents and spiritual parents.

To this must be added **the law of disengagement**

What is that? Once the finest fibres of a soul have become rooted in another person, and if the person being educated is sound and develops normally, the law of disengagement will automatically become a reality. It will do so on account of a third person, in our case on account of God; on account of personal and community ideals. So the law of disengagement has gradually and organically to become a reality.

Please don't misunderstand what has been said. The things I am describing here as an ideal, are in real life such that we have to be very, very careful of misunderstandings. In the way education takes place today, people think: Start right from the beginning with the law of disengagement! That is absolutely wrong. I urgently warn you against doing this, if you don't know exactly what has to be done.

Recently a member of a religious community told me the following: He came into the Novitiate and tried to make contact with his Novice Master. The latter responded harshly, "What on earth are you thinking? You aren't married to me!" He was an old man when he told me this, and even now the tears came into his eyes. At that time his whole life was wrecked.

You may not touch these things clumsily. I am describing things in the way they should be. Unfortunately they seldom happen that way, and as a result there are so many unsound souls among the laity, as well as among religious, because these laws are not seen clearly and lived. So allow me to warn you urgently against making use of this process of disengagement. Unless you know these things to the least detail, you should not concern yourself with this process of disengagement.

Do you know why we have to be so careful in this regard? This exceedingly delicate childlike relationship to the spiritual parents, because that is what it ultimately is, has two great advantages which cannot be replaced by anything else. I am speaking in the first place purely as a psychologist and will leave aside the supernatural element for the moment.

Firstly, the child or person to be educated, who has really savoured the parent principle, assimilates his or her entire image of the world through the personality of the educator.

Don't underestimate it! I can guarantee that if, as the educator, you have really become the spiritual father of your spiritual children, you will have protected your spiritual children from a whole host of problems with the faith, as well as moral crises, because all these difficulties will have been resolved through your personality.

You may not think that this is something erotic or sexual. It doesn't enter into the picture at all. It is the soundest possible process. And for a woman it is the only process by which she will or can become healthy. From this you may conclude that the less such things are experienced in life, the fewer sound people there will be.

Of course, you may not overlook that such a childlike relationship includes a huge amount of suffering, especially when we are dealing with religious people. If, for example the relationship becomes clouded, they jump to the conclusion: So the heavenly Father no longer loves me! So the Blessed Mother "no longer likes me." Whoever does not see, and has not experienced, these fine principles, cannot guess how profound the life process is. This bridge between the spiritual parents and the supernatural is so valuable that we educators have to be on our guard to ensure that this very fine, inner, spiritual connection becomes a reality one day.

Often there is then the inner fear: "Stop! Something is not in order. There is a tiny fibre that isn't attached!" Then the soul, especially a woman's soul, is profoundly unhappy. This is a sign of an extremely healthy soul. Of course, the fear then easily arises: "Now comes the disengagement ..."

Allow me to repeat: Please don't apply the law of disengagement yourselves!

The first great advantage, therefore, is that the person being educated sees the whole world through the educator.

Secondly, the person being educated always feels sheltered in the educator. If I may express it in ultimate terms: He feels sheltered throughout his life. He even still feels sheltered in his educator beyond the grave, and all enigmas are solved.

Seen and evaluated purely in psychological terms, an educator can be the spiritual mother or spiritual father to a large number of spiritual children. It is a great fallacy to think that spiritual childhood and parenthood requires a tremendous amount of time, and that spiritual parent and child have to be together a great deal. That would be wrong. Of course, there are periods when they need to be together, even if only to allow these very fine connections to be made in the soul. However, the time will come for everyone when this need to be outwardly together is no longer there. Then as a child I already feel sheltered in the awareness that I have parents.

It can happen that for years there is no connection between us, and nevertheless the effect of parental concern and spiritual childhood remains, until later in life the severed fibres are again connected with the spiritual parents and the experience of having a father and mother is restored. Think of how many people there are who have seldom had contact with their spiritual parents and have nevertheless felt sheltered. This also happens in relation to their physical parents! .