



39. Recognizing God's Will

According to Fr Kentenich's established teaching, Schoenstatt's spirituality contains a threefold message: the covenant of love, faith in Divine Providence and faith in our mission. This threefold message corresponds to a threefold spiritual path: covenant spirituality, everyday sanctity and the spirituality of an instrument.

Even at first glance, the three fundamental categories of our spirituality indicate that besides the covenant of love, faith in Divine Providence is central to it. If we look at it more closely, we will soon see how much this message of faith in Divine Providence also gives expression to Fr Kentenich's particular and original character, as well as his mission and spirituality. This original character shows itself if we ask: How are we to recognize God's will within his providence? Current theology and spirituality quickly point to the revelation of Jesus Christ found in the Bible, tradition and Church teaching.

Fr Kentenich chose a more comprehensive starting point. What mattered to him was to place resources at our disposal for the decisions of everyday life – everyday sanctity! These resources include those not determined by the will of God as formally revealed in divine revelation and Church teaching. What does God want of us in that area where we are free to act according to the Ten Commandments, moral teaching and dogmatic truths? For instance: Which state in life or calling should we choose? How are we to interpret a blow of fate, or a special offer? How are we to decide when there is a conflict of duties, or an open choice between praying or helping, for example?

In this area of decision-making, criteria come into play that have to be derived more from the order of creation, that is, the laws of being within which God created the world. This does not in any way contradict revelation or grace, but requires of us a constant struggle to bring about harmony between those truths which, since the Fall, cannot always be naturally and spontaneously correlated, but have repeatedly to be brought into harmony.

The text presented here enlarges on Fr Kentenich's criteria for recognizing God's will. It is not by chance that we find his explanation in the study on "The Spirituality of an Instrument", because, if we understand ourselves as instruments in God's hand, we have the best fundamental attitude and disposition for recognizing God's will.

Since the spirituality of an instrument relies on God's wish and will in everything, it has to emphasize their recognition very strongly. By nature it constantly uses the instrumental character of created things as its source of knowledge, whether these are the spoken word or freely acting secondary causes, the ontological structure of things, the tendencies of an era and world events, or the designs and dispensations of Providence in our personal lives.

God's Word

1. God speaks to us through the Sacred Scriptures and through inner inspirations and enlightenment.

For this reason people who live the spirituality of an instrument gladly submit themselves to the influence of the inspired Word of God, that is, they gladly, frequently and fruitfully read the Bible and conscientiously heed the inner inspirations of grace. In order not to go astray, they hold onto the explanations of the Church in the first instance, and in the second, they cultivate childlike openness towards a confessor or spiritual director.¹⁸³

Freely acting secondary causes

2. God created human beings to be free, and out of respect for this freedom he likes to use them as co-regents in governing the world. This is how we are to understand the saying, "*Deus operatur per causas secundas liberas*".¹⁸⁴ So the law of organic transference to God may be meaningfully applied to its praxis, that is to say, Eternal Wisdom transfers some of his qualities to human beings, for example, some of his wisdom, power, kindness and faithfulness, in order to lead and win people and to bond them to himself. Through them God usually makes his wishes and intentions known to others. This is how he treated Paul at that time. Instead of giving him detailed instructions, he referred him to a disciple called Ananias, who would tell him what he had to do. The spirituality of an instrument trains people to be receptive for all the instrumental sources through which they can recognize God's will. They do not wait stubbornly for God to express his will directly; they are and remain fine of hearing for all that God tells them, his instruments, through free secondary causes. That is why they like to take their bearings from the wish and will of the Church and their superiors, as well as the Constitutions and customs of their community. God is the one who speaks clearly and unmistakably through these media. As long as people listen to them and obey them willingly, they will avoid the danger of self-deception and the suggestions of the devil.

How strongly this source of knowledge has flowed with us, and been used by us from the beginning, can be discovered from the laws of the organism of bonding and its sub-sections, which are well known to us as the law of organic transference, organic transmission and deepening, and organic transition.

[...]

The ontological structure of things

¹⁸³ Today known in some countries as the "spiritual accompanier".

¹⁸⁴ God works through free (co-operating) secondary causes.

3. All along the ontological structure of things has played a special role with us, since we were constantly trying to discover God's wish and will, and still are today. "*Everyday Sanctity*" points to the great law governing this source of knowledge, and, as can easily be seen, it can be followed like a golden thread through our customs and our pedagogy. *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi* – the objective ontological order is in every detail the norm for the ordering of our entire lives. In this we take as our starting point the idea that created things are not just incarnate thoughts of God, but also an expression of his wishes. If we regard every created thing as a word from God and about God, it means that all created things, both in the natural and the supernatural order, are God's great picture book, a reader about him, God's living teaching, that seldom leave us in the lurch if we are trying to discover God's wishes.

St Paul was very familiar with this idea. That is why he seriously and bitterly accused the pagans of creating false gods and leading immoral lives. He declared their actions inexcusable, because they should have been able to recognize God's commands and wishes from the creation they could see.¹⁸⁵

It is not surprising that in our present times this source of knowledge has been blocked for very many people. When everything is directed to movement, dynamism, life, people are not open for being and the ontological structure of things. So it can happen that, as a result of the great confusion about concepts, and the manifold uncertainty of life and ways of life, even Catholic circles have forgotten how to take their bearings unswervingly from this ontological structure.

We never tired of questioning it. Among other things, we had to do this because we as a Family wanted only as many obligations as were really necessary. So in all our actions, in our Constitutions and customs, we were completely dependent on adapting ourselves to this ontological order in its finest ramifications. Besides this, there is our fundamental attitude of generosity that motivates us to react everywhere to God's least wishes, and not just to his commandments. In our journeys of discovery and campaigns of conquest we received a clear and definite answer to most questions from the structure of things, often when other sources of knowledge failed.

To guide a comprehensive research process we can distinguish between a natural and supernatural ontological order – both in general and also in their concrete manifestations in individual things and people – and finally the connection of the two orders.

Those who live the spirituality of an instrument keep all three forms in view, question them in cases of doubt, and uphold a clear answer unwaveringly, even when nihilism and cultural Bolshevism¹⁸⁶ go completely different ways.

All this sounds very theoretical and abstract, but it becomes comprehensible when we look into the history of our Family's development, and call to mind its theory and praxis with a few brushstrokes. For this purpose, examine, for example, the basis on which our education of girls and our sexual pedagogy rests, whether this concerns self-education or education by others. Recall how, in the first instance, we always invoked the nature of women when we made

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Rom 2,14f.

¹⁸⁶ When Fr Kentenich referred to Bolshevism he meant all forms of collectivism – those practised in Russia and by the Nazis at that time, while not excluding China or other countries. At the time of writing this study he used Bolshevism primarily to refer to the Nazis and all they stood for.

demands. How often it was said: Since woman's nature is attuned to being "all soul, all purity, all self-surrender", we therefore require, for example, a comprehensive cultivation of the heart ...; hence we were also concerned to protect the integrity of our whole being ...; hence we also decided on the form and length of our dress as an expression of our essential character, despite fashion going in a completely different direction ...; and hence also our distinctive education through love and for love, etc.

[...]

The meaning and purpose of our sexual drive according to natural law made us aware that the perverse use or dissipation of our sexuality is a complete inversion of natural law, and hence contrary to our Creator's will, and is therefore a serious sin.¹⁸⁷ The organic integration of the sexual drive into the total structure of nature, even in its finest ramifications, document God's wishes to us, and are a constant appeal to cultivate a sense of shame and modesty, diffidence and a sense of decency. Only those people who see God himself behind these insights and impulses will receive the strength not only to understand them as a norm for their entire education, but also to carry them out purposefully. As time goes by they will become second nature to them, and form and mould their feeling for life and their lifestyle profoundly. Then, when they can no longer wear a distinctive dress or receive outward support, indeed, when on the contrary both speak a completely contradictory language, those words will apply: *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi*.

Our present era whirls people around and mixes them together; it destroys customary ways of life and allows crass extremes to clash, in order to test their true worth and their durability. So it is just the right thing to show what people have assimilated as a lasting value for life, and what has only been varnish, a sham and a mask. It reveals what has penetrated to the roots and formed them, or what has remained on the surface. Silent observers may often shake their heads in disappointment and ask themselves in all seriousness: How can it happen that long years of education have so rarely managed to tame "the beast" even in the elite, and that noble minded people have so seldom been transformed to their deepest depths? When people have spent years together in a naked state, as it were, and have been able to see one another even in the most intimate circumstances, all deception and self-deception breaks down.

Involuntarily the important question arises: How can we reform things in this regard? One answer is given by the spirituality of an instrument. Those who live by it like to trace back its demands and practices to the ontological structure of things, and hence to ultimate principles, and try, to start with, to acquire the corresponding fundamental spiritual attitudes. They then try to express these attitudes whole-heartedly in their actions and customs, in the way we have seen as our ideal from the beginning.

[...]

The natural order in human beings reveals two levels of being: a higher and a lower. Put very simply, we could call these "the animal" and "the angel". The higher level is meant to govern the lower. This is founded on their nature and is confirmed by observing life. The vegetative level of

¹⁸⁷ It is necessary to keep in mind that in this context the moral judgement of sexual behaviour is only being seen from the point-of-view of the ontological order. The often compelling force of the sexual drive, as well as the influence of the world around, both of which often limit a person's personal freedom, have to be considered in evaluating a concrete instance, and are not dealt with here.

being sacrifices itself to the higher, sentient animal, and by doing so shares in the latter's perfection. Something similar applies in human beings. The "animal" in the lower level of being submits to the "angel", and by doing so shares in the perfection of human nature. The "animal" is something that has to be overcome. The dominion of the "angel" and the spirit over the "animal" in human beings costs constant self-discipline.

[...]

Even as a natural being, setting aside grace, human beings are the Creator's greatest gamble. The contradictory elements: "matter" and "spirit", "animal" and "angel", have been combined to form an entity, but the integrity of this entity is constantly threatened by the struggles of the "animal" to dominate, and by the threat of the "angel" either being subjected to the "animal", or behaving as though it were a pure spirit. The God-willed order cannot be restored, preserved and secured by the eradication and destruction of our human inclinations, passions and drives, but only by ennobling, transfiguring, and uplifting them: *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi*.

God has endowed the human will with limited freedom that has two dimensions: the ability to decide and the ability to carry out that decision. As the comparison with the animal shows, the ability to decide is primary. So, according to the wish and will of our Creator, our education as human beings has always to give first place to our free decision for God and the divine: *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi*. Whoever spares someone who is being educated from taking personal decisions, acts contrary to the primary meaning of our free will, and either commits a sin or an imperfection. The same applies if we use unjust means to prevent or hamper someone's free decision.

The fundamental tendency of nature reveals itself and becomes effective in the main passion. Whoever has attached someone's main passion to a morally valuable goal has won the whole person for it. For us it is the meaning of the special resolution (PE) to ennoble the main passion in the direction of the personal ideal, because once again those words apply: *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi*. I could go on like this and trace back a whole host of our practices, customs and provisions to the natural structure of being as the expression of God's will and wishes.

[The supernatural order of being as source of knowledge]

Something similar can be said about the supernatural order of being. Recall how seriously we always tried to build our religious demands on strongly dogmatic documents. Our study and observance of the natural order justifies the statement: Our spirituality and asceticism are applied philosophy; our struggle for a theological foundation makes it seem that this spirituality is applied theology. Think of how long we tried to prove the existence of the order of grace, and the originality of our membership in Christ, our being children of God and filled with the Spirit, or Blessed Trinity, which follows from it! This is in keeping with an asceticism that is built on the law: *ordo essendi est ordo agendi*.

Think of all the care we took to explain the objective position of the Blessed Mother in the plan of salvation in a comprehensive way! This is how it must remain as long as the law is valid: *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi*!

The same applies to our Lord, the heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, the angels, the saints, the liturgy, the Holy Souls. Wherever we look we are told first of all to stress their position in the supernatural order of being, and then to attune practical life to it.

[...]

The grace we receive in the present order of salvation has to be called the *gratia Christi*, hence also *gratia crucis*.¹⁸⁸ So the nature that wants to receive grace has to be understood as *natura cruce signata*¹⁸⁹ and be filled with love for mortification. There can be no perfection of nature without the sacrifice of nature. – This is how the law *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi* has to be understood and applied everywhere.

In the way this law has to be seen separately for the orders of nature and of grace, it also points out the way for connecting the two. In this case it takes on the concrete form: *Gratia non destruit, sed perficit et elevat naturam*.¹⁹⁰ Our “Everyday Sanctity” is here given its ultimate justification and security. It prefers organic mortification to mechanical, the method of outshining to that of clouding things over. It is here that we also find the root of our teaching on the connection between the autonomous, ethical motive and the teleological motive of love. God, the Creator of the order of nature and grace, speaks to us through both motives, and requires and wishes us to give him a corresponding answer. Here lies the foundation for our whole teaching on the Personal Ideal, both for its sources of knowledge (the God-willed favourite inclination, favourite devotion, favourite prayer, favourite occupation and favourite motto), as well as for its constitutive parts, and for its laws of development and form, whether these concern the material or the formal stages of *Caritas* or *Passio*.¹⁹¹

Tendencies of the times and world events

4. The instrument’s fourth source of knowledge, from which we can discover God’s wish and will, is even more alive in the public awareness of the Family than the ontological structure of things. It is found in the tendencies of an era and world events, as well as the guidance and dispensations of Providence in our own lives and in the life of the Family. It is not difficult to prove how the Family has been brilliantly nourished from this source in its development and growth until today.

How often we heard and confessed that neither a vision nor a visionary dream, but solely our simple and practical faith in Divine Providence has been the force behind our foundation and growth. Through this faith in Divine Providence we always clearly saw, recognized and answered the uniting and combining, the kind and powerful hand of the Father, as well as the Father’s pleading wish behind the needs and suffering of the times, behind the great events in the world and God’s guidance and dispensations in our small circle. So our Lord’s accusation does not apply to us: “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times”.¹⁹²

The foundation for the founding contract and the Founding Document is the wish and will of God, which our faith in Divine Providence helped us to discover out of the history of the Sodality as an instrument. Please take note of the passage, “How often in world history has not the small and the insignificant been the source of the great and greatest things! Why should this not be the case

¹⁸⁸ The grace of Christ – the grace of the Cross.

¹⁸⁹ Nature signed with the cross.

¹⁹⁰ Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects and elevates it.

¹⁹¹ The stages of love; the stages of passive purification.

¹⁹² Mt 16,3.

with us? Whoever knows the past of our Sodality will not find it difficult to believe that Divine Providence has something special in store for it.” So, at the beginning of our Family history we do not find a human being, but God; we do not find human volition, but God’s plan and wish. The little human being only sought, and seeks with great reverence, to discover our merciful God’s plans, and to bring himself into line with them.

Since then it has always been our custom, which has continuously been deepened and extended, to ask at every opportunity and event: What does God want through it? What is in the plan of Divine Providence? And since we are “children of war”, and have been thoroughly shaken up, so this method has become part of us, so much so that it has almost become second nature to us. In order to deepen what has been said, please read “*Unter dem Schutze Mariens – Under the Protection of Mary*”, pp. 299-305, to see what it says there. Please note in particular the collection of key sayings on faith in Divine Providence in the Founding Document on p. 301.

Whoever knows the history and soul of our family, will know that our victorious faith in our mission is rooted in this faith in Divine Providence. Faith in a mission in all its degrees, even to being gripped with zeal for a mission, is part of the essence of Christianity, and it is all the more the essence of the priesthood. Through baptism and ordination to the priesthood, as well as through confirmation, a *character indelebilis*¹⁹³ is imprinted on us. It draws us in a mysterious and profound way into the stream of the God-Man’s mission. In the same way as he was, we have also to be gripped with zeal for our mission and its victory.

St Paul could serve as an example. We should employ what he says about his mission as an apostle for our mission as Christians and priests: To live and work out of the realisation *missus sum*.¹⁹⁴ The first Christians were so deeply convinced and gripped with zeal for their mission that despite their limited numbers they were able to say, “We are the soul of the world”.¹⁹⁵ Unfortunately this victorious faith in a mission has to a very large extent been lost by Christianity today. That is why we encounter so much tiredness, sadness and paralysis.

If we as a Family talk about a mission, we mean a mission and task we did not look for, but which was given to us by God. Through faith in Divine Providence and from the history and destiny of the Family, we can recognize that God is behind it and not human folly, presumption and pretension. To put it more precisely: from the insignificance of the instruments, the magnitude of the difficulties that had to be overcome, and the successes attained.

Is it not necessary for each religious community to call its own a distinctive faith in its mission, no matter how different the reasons may be on which it is based? The one may base it on the holiness of the founder, another on a vision or visionary dream. We have always invoked our childlike, simple, concrete and homely faith in Divine Providence, just as it is the heart and centre of every sound and elemental piety in the people, and as it has constantly been triumphant in the greatest saints. Other communities may have lost their faith in their mission for some reason or

¹⁹³ An indelible character, or mark.

¹⁹⁴ I have been sent out.

¹⁹⁵ This statement can be found in the Church Fathers (*Letter to Diogenes*; PG 2, 1173). In this letter, however, it is seen in a negative context: Just as the soul is imprisoned in the body as though in a cage, so Christians have to liberate themselves from their lives in the world. This is because the world is a prison. Fr Kentenich always understood the statement in a positive sense as related to our mission: Christians have been commissioned to be the soul of the world, just as the soul gives life and vitality to the body.

other, or they may no longer live out of it consciously and progressively. This may not prevent us from continuing on our way as before. Indeed, it should encourage us to deepen our faith in our mission all the more consciously, and allow it to become effective in everyday life.

It seems that God has called us to affirm the elementary and generally valid fundamental forces of Christianity in an exemplary way, and to make them the basis for our entire lives and striving, so that they may again increasingly become the common property of Christianity as a whole. Faith in Divine Providence, and a mission that overcomes the world and life, is one of the main fundamental forces. Both receive new nourishment day by day, and we are happy to have been given all the confirmation from God through the history of our Family in the past years. He has used all our enemies in order to help our Family to a victory all can see. So our faith has never tired of taking up, holding onto and savouring all the small and big proofs of divine guidance and dispensation with utmost care. God is a faithful God and he will not break the covenant of love he entered into with us thirty years ago. On our part we must repeatedly try to preserve the same faithfulness. Then our history will even more than before become a single, great march of victory by divine power, kindness and faithfulness. ...

Whoever employs such and similar thoughts, will stand in wonder before the rich content of the idea of instrumentality. In very truth it includes not only an all-embracing way of life in the form of a spirituality of an instrument, it is also a constantly bubbling source of knowledge from which the spirituality of an instrument is effectively nourished. This is how it has been until now for us; may it always remain so: *Omne regnum iisdem continetur mediis, quibus conditum est.*¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ A kingdom is preserved by the forces from which it was founded.