



## 58. The Hidden Longing of the People of Today for the Infinite God

*The text we are dealing with here is interesting and typical from two points-of-view:*

- 1. It bears witness to Fr Kentenich's ability to interpret the spiritual currents of an era with prophetic insight and from God's perspective: The drive to expand, the tendency towards absolute and unlimited freedom in the people of today, is ultimately a hidden cry for God, the Infinite.*
- 2. However this God is only, or at best, accessible to us in all his greatness and infinity in the way he reveals himself and draws closer to us. His infinity becomes finite, and hence accessible to us, because he reveals himself as the Father, sends his Son to us, is at work in us in the Holy Spirit, and incorporates us into Christ's work of redemption. The Blessed Mother is our model in this matrix of relationships that are orientated to God. This text speaks of God and at the same time shows his relationship to us.*

*The text has been taken from the "Oktoberbrief 1949" – 1949 October Letter (Vallendar 1970), p. 99-105.*

*The 1949 October Letter is strongly influenced by our founder's insights and experiences while he was in the concentration camp at Dachau, while at the same time bringing home to the Schoenstatt Family the legacy and specific mission of St Vincent Pallotti. Pallotti's image of God, as the Infinite towards whom all creation tends, was taken over by Fr Kentenich and integrated into his Marian and organic spirituality.*

Pallotti is the dawn of the future to us. He himself was the anticipation of the image of God, human beings and society that was soon to be commonly accepted by many and varied groups of people. He embodied the ideal indicated by all the motivating forces of the past and present, all the aberrations and positive achievements of the past four hundred years, as their ultimate meaning and great, mysterious and God-intended goal.

The most characteristic feature of his [Pallotti's] nature, the most original quality of his soul, was the tendency towards the infinite. He was captivated by the next world,<sup>149</sup> the divine, the supernatural, but all from the point-of-view of the infinite. All that is finite, created, earthly, was for him constantly bathed in the glow of the infinite; it is only a mirror, a pointer, a transparency, a gateway. That is why he understood them less in their intrinsic, and far more in their symbolic worth. This explains two things in his life: his closeness to and distance from all that is earthly, created, of this world. His work may be seen as an extension of himself. That is why we find this universalism everywhere, this tendency towards the infinite, just as the Third Founding Document proclaims it: Universalism in the height, depth, breadth and length.<sup>150</sup>

From this perspective we can discover a strongly Platonic-Augustinian tendency in his thinking and aspirations. Everything in him urged him with elemental force towards the First Cause, God, the Infinite. Secondary causes remained very much in the background. When he was dealing with created beings, with what is finite, he knew no rest until he had taken everything along with him to the Eternal, the Infinite.

Although it may seem improbable, this touches upon a tendency that is second nature to the people of today. Their fault, their sin, consists in drawing God, the Infinite, into the finite; they have secularised and naturalised this tendency. This explains why the people of the West are so strongly motivated to conquer the world – they want to exercise intellectual, political and economic dominance of the world. The new nations have taken over the same tendency and allow themselves to be driven onwards by it. That is why people are trying everywhere to discover and make use of all nature's secrets and forces without exception.

Each new advance has the same effect on all earthly and created things – it leaves behind a profound sense of dissatisfaction. Then the searching and researching begins again. In the end people are left with matter, the collective. They can hardly sink deeper; they can hardly go more astray.

Perhaps there has been no other time in history that is as strongly motivated as ours by the restlessness of the drive towards the infinite, but also no other that has tried to satisfy this drive as strongly and one-sidedly in this world, so there is no other era that is as dissatisfied, restless and unhappy as ours.

Pallotti emphatically points upwards with every fibre of his being: *Sursum corda!*<sup>151</sup> The secularised tendency towards the infinite has to be liberated from its aberration, the fetters of its slavery have to be loosened, so that, in a similar way to Pallotti, it [the world] can develop freely through looking with faith at the Eternal, the Infinite, and through personal self-surrender to a personal God, who satisfies all our longing, and who alone can make us free and happy.

The people of today already call more and more loudly to every created thing; this is also done not least by the things they have created, and into which they have bound, called out, groaned and embodied their longing for infinity: I am not your God! Climb higher!<sup>152</sup> Will the world of today experience a repetition of the pre-Christian Advent? Is this very evident tendency a good or bad omen? Who will dare to answer? We may welcome the fact that the question is even asked. It is only reprehensible that today countless corrupters of the people are at work to dominate them

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<sup>149</sup> *Jenseitige*.

<sup>150</sup> *The Founding Documents*, p. 83ff., Cf. also Text 68.

<sup>151</sup> Lift up your hearts. The priest's invitation at the Preface as he introduces the Eucharistic Prayer.

<sup>152</sup> "But what is my God? I put my question to the earth. It answered, 'I am not God', and all things on earth declared the same. I asked the sea and the chasms of the deep and the living things that creep in them, but they answered, 'We are not your God. Seek what is above us'." St Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, 6.

arbitrarily, and to harness them to this or that coach. Is it possible that what has remained sound in the people of today will soon object to this, and shake off the yoke and unbearable burden? Is it not to be expected that the eternal and constantly growing dissatisfaction will one day blow up the prison walls of this world with elemental force, and send all corrupters into the desert, so that they can find the way upwards to God, to the Eternal, the Infinite?

Then along comes existential philosophy and allows the glow of the divine, the heroic, to fall on bearing and forbearing with this dissatisfaction. Unfortunately this is again a postponement of the conversion. So once again the drive towards infinity is driven more deeply into this world. Who will still manage to unlock the gates of the next world?

We believe firmly and confidently that this is the task of the Blessed Mother in our present times. She brought us the Redeemer at one time, she will do so again today. That is our great hope. That is why she has set up her throne in the shrine at Schoenstatt and called a movement of world renewal into existence. Like her we, who belong to her Movement, constantly bear in our hearts the longing for redemption. We do so on behalf of all who have not yet been touched by grace, or who do not try to co-operate with her. She, the great Woman who bore Christ and gave birth to Christ, she, the permanent helpmate of our Lord in his entire work of redemption, has in her school preserved our drive towards infinity from going astray. She has allowed it to become stronger and stronger.

Of course, the development of our Family as a whole has been slower than was the case with Pallotti. For a long time we had to live the first Founding Document of 1914 conscientiously. This protected us against naturalism, so that the gates to the next world always remained open to us. The Second Founding Document had to be added. It extended and deepened our supernatural attitude, our tendency towards the infinite, in every respect, which then only broke through with elemental force in the Third Founding Document and became our home. It was only then that the covenant of love with the Blessed Mother became perfect. It has extended to become a covenant of love with the God-Man, the Triune God and the whole world. The International<sup>153</sup> came into existence and aims at the same fourfold attitude in the covenant of love: infinity in the height, length, breadth and depth in as many individual souls and continents as possible. This is the reason for our serious and laborious attempt to build daughter shrines in every country, so that the MTA<sup>154</sup> can work as efficaciously there as she does in such rich measure from the Original Shrine.

Our covenant of love includes all the factors contained in Pallotti's spiritual nuptials with the Mother of Mercy at the end of 1832. Of course, an essential difference remains: His espousal is a bridal covenant of love and is part of a higher, unusual and mystical order, while ours is a childlike covenant and an act within the usual order of grace. It moves on another plane that can be made accessible to every striving Catholic. However, this does not prevent us from acknowledging that the graces flowing from both covenants are very similar. After all, we are dealing here with the supernatural order in both instances.

Pallotti spoke about himself in the third person when he related the great event that formed the climax of his spiritual life. It allows us to draw conclusions about the greatness and warmth of his

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<sup>153</sup> The spread of Schoenstatt beyond Germany began in 1934; the International as such was constituted in 1944 in Dachau after members of the most varied nations had entered into the covenant of love as representatives of their people. During Fr Kentenich's overseas trips from 1947 it was purposefully enlarged.

<sup>154</sup> *Mater Ter Admirabilis* – Mother Thrice Admirable, the title by which Mary is honoured in Schoenstatt.

love for Mary until then, and explains his mysteriously deep relationship to the most Blessed Trinity that followed. He wrote,

“In a miracle of mercy, despite the ingratitude and incomprehensible unworthiness of this most miserable creature who ever lived and can live as a subject in her realm of mercy, in her great kindness the great Mother of Mercy deigned to espouse herself spiritually with this subject on the last day of the year 1832.

As marriage portion she gave him all that she possessed, allowing him to know her own divine Son more deeply, and as Bride of the Holy Spirit promised him that his innermost soul would be completely transformed in the Holy Spirit.<sup>155</sup>

Merciful Jesus, without hesitation you hear the prayers of your Mother for an unworthy and ungrateful, godless human being, for the worst criminal that ever lived on earth, or ever will live on it.

Merciful Mother, immaculate Queen, filled with mercy you turn to this most miserable, most ungrateful and most outrageous sinner that ever lived, or will ever live, and through your intercession obtained that he may live as a subject of your realm in the Kingdom of Mercy.<sup>156</sup>

Heaven is full of the mercies of Mary. I want to extol the mercies of the Lord for all eternity, and praise the mercies of Mary.<sup>157</sup> My God and my all!”<sup>158</sup>

What interests us above all in the process is the rich marriage portion the Blessed Mother brought with her in the covenant. It reminds us of the ideas and thoughts that are well known to us. Since we have always understood our childlike covenant of love as reciprocal, we took it for granted that both parties have to bring gifts of love with them, which are determined by the degree of their mutual self-surrender. Whoever has entered into the covenant at the level of the *Inscriptio*<sup>159</sup> knows that the marriage portion on each side takes its bearings from the law *totum pro toto*.<sup>160</sup> Since then we have offered the Blessed Mother all that we can call our own – body and soul, our possessions, all the abilities of body and soul, as well as all our merits – so we expect her to give us everything in a similar way, that is, the Child in her arms, and with him the Father with whom she shares the Child, the tongues of fire above her head, the Ave in her ear, the Magnificat on her lips, but also the sevenfold sword in her heart.<sup>161</sup> That is the same world into which the Blessed Mother introduced Pallotti so deeply. We, too, may expect to receive from her similar gifts to those he received in such rich measure, especially the completest possible transformation into God. Like Pallotti we see it as our task to proclaim this covenant of love everywhere, and to make it easier to do so through our daughter shrines. In this way we enter in very practical ways into his favourite thought, which he expressed when he sent his Fathers out. Pointing to the picture of the Blessed Mother, he used to say, “She is the great Missionary, she will work miracles!” He meant the miracle of spiritual transformation, which we expect to receive from the MTA as a pilgrimage grace, in addition to the grace of feeling spiritually at home, and fruitfulness. His admonition shows what a depth of self-surrender he expected from his followers, indeed, from the Faithful,

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<sup>155</sup> Quoted from Eugen Weber, *Vinzenz Pallotti – Ein Apostel und Mystiker*, Limburg 1927, p.121. There is an English translation: *Vincent Pallotti – An Apostle and Mystic*, Alba House, New York 1964.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. A.P. Walkenbach, *Der unendliche Gott und das ‘Nichts und Sünde’ – Die Spiritualität Vinzenz Pallottis nach seinem Tagebuchaufzeichnungen*, (The infinite God and the ‘nothing and sin’ – The spirituality of Vincent Pallotti according to his diary entries), Limburg 1953, p. 258 and 275.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. E. Weber, *ibid*, p. 121.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, p. 325ff.

<sup>159</sup> The expression “*Inscriptio*” has been taken over from St Augustine, who defined love as “*inscriptio cordis in cor*”, that is, inscribing one heart into the other.

<sup>160</sup> That is, all for all.

<sup>161</sup> Through this imagery Fr Kentenich tried to summarise the Biblical image of Mary. Surprisingly the Cana scene is lacking. The individual images illustrate the gifts of grace we may expect to receive through our covenant with Mary. Cf. J. Kentenich, *The Marian Person*, p. 71-78.

“My Brothers and Sisters, we want to hand ourselves over so completely to our Mother Mary, who loves us beyond all measure, that in word and deed we become enthusiastic apostles not just of the Crucified, but also of his and our Mother Mary. Yes, let us be children and apostles of Mary! Filled with trust in God, let us try to be so transformed into Mary that our heart, our emotions, our words and eyes, our steps and absolutely everything we do, belongs to her. Let us be convinced that all who have truly consecrated themselves to her, will not only save their souls, but through her intercession will become great saints, and will daily become more perfect. So let us be zealous in spreading Mary’s immeasurable fame. We also want, if at all possible, to fill the hearts of all with infinitely fervent love for our exceedingly loving Mother and Queen, Mary.”

The experience of the centuries shows that wherever a spark of Christian thinking and feeling was still alive, people have willingly and joyfully entered into this covenant of love with their Mother and Queen as soon as its essence is explained in understandable terms. If the last spark of Christianity has been extinguished, we will be faced with a world that had once received the great grace of being Christianised, and maliciously rejected it. This is an enigma of unfathomable abysses. In such instances, if God does not place exceedingly rich graces at our disposal, human initiatives are and remain helpless in the face of people’s urge towards infinity. Only prayer and sacrifice, and living example – to the level of the Blank Cheque and Inscriptio – are left as a means to call down God’s mercies once more on a sinking world.

In Pallotti the urge to infinity dominated everything – his thinking and willing, his love and actions. Above all it gave a special character to his concept of God, human beings and the community.

Every religious spirituality is essentially determined by three elements: its notion of God, of human beings (and human society), and the relationship between God and human beings. This applies not only to the individual, but also to the community, for example, an association, a school, or an orientation.<sup>162</sup> God himself has drawn up the plan that regulates our basic spiritual relationship, and sheds light on the original image and its copy. He has laid down this plan in the Sacred Scriptures, and explained it in many ways through history. We have looked at both sources: We have studied the Sacred Scriptures carefully, and listened to its explanation in history. From this we have understood why there can and must be different spiritualities. God is infinitely great in himself. So he can be copied by his image and likeness in an infinite number of ways. No limited being can fathom him or exemplify him completely.

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<sup>162</sup> *Richtung.*