



## 59. Our Image of Christ

*The texts we have selected on Fr Kentenich's and Schoenstatt's image of Christ are drawn from two sources. The first is taken from a letter written by Fr Kentenich to Fr Turowski, the Pallottine Superior General at that time, which he began on 18 December 1952 (published by Heinrich M. Hug with the title "Nüchterne Frömmigkeit" – Down-to-earth spirituality, Berg Sion 1999, p. 445- 448. The second is taken from the "Chroniknotizen 1955" – Chronicle Notes 1955, p. 181-183.*

*The first text sheds light on Schoenstatt's typical image of Christ. The various spiritualities and devotions over the centuries have worked out clear and very different emphases on Christ's personality, and applied them to their spirituality. Thus the image of Christ the King corresponds with the Benedictine spirituality and Romanesque architecture. Franciscan spirituality meditated more on the poor and suffering Christ, and identified itself with him, which found expression also in Baroque art and architecture. Jesuit spirituality saw Christ as the General in the great battle between God and the devil. Naturally all these emphases are valid.*

*The emphasis that is typical to Schoenstatt takes up a statement of St Paul, "He is the image of the unseen God ..." (Col 1,15). Fr Kentenich expressed this idea in a typical and often repeated statement: Christ is the face of the Father turned towards the world. Our almighty and eternal God the Father comes close to us in his Son, he appears in human form.*

*The second text also mirrors a specific Schoenstatt approach. A spirituality of the "organism of attachments" will emphasise in a special way the inner context of reality, its connection and reciprocal influence and complementation. Christ is the Mediator, the link, between God and his creation.. So if we see him in this mediating position, it is inevitable that Christ is seen in his relationships. In the text presented here, Fr Kentenich briefly and succinctly shows Christ's relationship to his Father, to Mary his Associate, and to us.*

### **[Proof of the connection between God's *providentia generalis et specialis* in the Person of Jesus Christ]**

In order to convince us human beings that despite his attitude of seeing the totality of world events in vast perspective, despite the fullness of his infinite perfections, despite the incorruptibility and implacability of his truth and justice, and the inaccessibility of his holiness, despite the love with which he embraces all that he has created, and to show that he loves each individual person deeply and warmly, taking a personal interest in each least detail, he allowed his only-begotten Son to adopt human nature with all its noble and human inclinations and passions. "*Et verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis* – And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us."<sup>162</sup>

In his incarnate Son we see God's mysterious and utterly personal interest in each one of us, which we find very difficult to imagine because he is a spirit and immutable. He is mirrored to us in a way we can discern with our senses; he has become incarnate. ...

### **[The Father's face turned towards us]**

The only-begotten, who is for us the Eternal Father's human face turned towards us, reveals to us in a way we can grasp with our sense and in a truly human way, how we may imagine the spiritual interest of God the Father in each one of us in human terms.

Newman put it tellingly,

"Wonderful indeed, and adorable is the condescension by which He has met our infirmity. He has met and aided it in that same Dispensation by which He redeemed our souls. In order that we may understand that in spite of His mysterious perfections He has a separate knowledge and regard for individuals, He has taken upon him the thoughts and feelings of our own nature, which we all understand is capable of such personal attachments. By becoming man, He has cut short the perplexities and the discussions of our reason on the subject, as if He would grant our objections for argument's sake, and supersede them by taking our own ground."<sup>163</sup>

### **[The mysterious connection between God's *providentia generalis et specialis*: God's love for us is tender and considerate]**

God's personal interest in us has two main features: It is infinitely tender or affectionate, and infinitely considerate. That is to say, in his Son it is as though the Father has given us a mirror from which his infinitely tender and considerate fatherly love shines out to us and becomes comprehensible, even if we cannot understand more exactly how God's profound love for each individual can be reconciled with his other qualities. However, if we remember what we have already heard from Pascal and St Thomas about tension and harmony, and about the complementary virtues of holiness in human likenesses of the All-holy God; and if we then assume that these take on infinite dimensions in every respect in God, the person who can think abstractly will be on the way to seeing what seem to be irreconcilable opposites dissolved to create unity.

### **[Savouring Christ's love for us]**

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<sup>162</sup> Jn 1,14.

<sup>163</sup> J. H. Newman, Sermon 9, A Particular Providence as Revealed in the Gospel (5 April 1935), p. 120, in: *Newman Reader – Works of John Henry Newman*, 2007.

However, if we want our hearts to be gripped by God's personal love and attachment, we may not be satisfied with such abstract philosophical reasoning. Nor may we settle for the teachings of the Sacred Scriptures on the *providentia divina specialis*,<sup>164</sup> or with our usual way of carefully and constantly savouring God's personal mercies in our own lives and in our Family history. We have to go further and understand, savour and learn to return Jesus' warm emotions as the humanly tangible expression of God's fatherly love. So it is as though Jesus calls out to us in this spirit, "Whoever sees me, sees the Father".<sup>165</sup> "No one can come to the Father except through the Son."<sup>166</sup>

No one can understand the Father's personal interest and individual love very deeply unless they see it mirrored in the image of his only-begotten Son.

### **[On the quality: Tender]**

Our present-day, ailing feelings may take offence at calling Jesus and his relationship to us human beings tender. We far prefer – if it absolutely has to be said and nothing else is possible – to speak about the delicacy of love. However, with a side glance at such a dismissive attitude, we deliberately use the word tender, partly because it expresses better what is meant, and helps us tellingly to overcome false ideas about God and God's Son, and partly because it forces the collectivistically inclined people of today to sit up and take notice.

Besides this, we can find it in the same context in the vocabulary of the medieval mystics, as well as of the great Cardinal Newman. The philosopher does not find it difficult to discover in the word "tender" what is meant by *amor affectivus*, and in "considerate", or "attentive", the *amor effectivus*.<sup>167</sup>

### **[Devotion to the Sacred Heart and faith in Divine Providence]**

This sheds light on devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for all who want to become masters, examples and apostles of Divine Providence. Of course, they have to climb upwards from the divine Heart to the Father, as is required by the law of transmission.

From what has been said, it is clear that we love to immerse ourselves lovingly in our Lord's life, and linger with those episodes which illustrate the tenderness and attentiveness of his personal affection.

God's fatherly wisdom goes one step further. In the God-Man we at times see and experience an incomprehensible and mysterious array of contradictions that connect in him to become a divinely ordered unity, which can, however, not be grasped by our tiny human intellect.

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After this understandable digression, which has to be seen as deepening what has been said, let us take up the original thread again. As we said, all Schoenstatters are simply children of the Father. In saying this we invoked a special grace of pilgrimage. However, there are other reasons for doing so. To start with, please don't forget the importance of practical faith in Divine Providence to us. All of us take it for granted that on this account all Schoenstatters are thoroughbred Providentia children *per eminentiam*.<sup>168</sup> There is obviously not far to go between being a Providentia child and

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<sup>164</sup> God's special providence – as distinct from his general providence.

<sup>165</sup> Jn 12,45.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Jn 14,6.

<sup>167</sup> Affective love, or the love of the heart, and effective love, love in action.

<sup>168</sup> Children of Providence in an eminent sense.

becoming a distinctive child of the Father. The same applies, vice versa, to a child of the Father: a child of the Father is automatically a Providentia child. They are simply a condition for, call for, and promote each other.

The one cannot exist in the long run without the other – at least not in a fruitful and profound way.

A second element has to be added: the idea of the organism has become second nature to us. It always takes its bearings from the objective ontological order. In it God the Father is the ultimate origin, the ultimate resting point, and ultimate goal of everything. The whole natural and supernatural order proceeds like a single stream of love from the Father, flows through creation and returns again to the Father. In a certain sense all creation can at least by analogy pray with our Lord: “I have come from the Father into the world, and return again to the Father”.<sup>169</sup> All the verses of the Gloria in the Instruments’ Mass<sup>170</sup> follow the divine stream of love indicated here.

Zeitler describes it in these words,

“... Seen from God’s perspective, the mysteries of Christianity appear as the Triune God’s communication of himself to humanity, and at the same time as his greatest glorification. From our perspective, they form the mystery of our salvation through which we, who are by nature his creatures, ‘come to share in the Godhead, who deigned to adopt our human nature.’ So Christ appears as the only centre of the supernatural world: Every participation of redeemed humanity in his divine nature finds its reason and measure in the intrinsic union of his Godhead with our human nature. The communication of the divine life, however, takes place in such a way that in Christ it is first given as a privilege to Mary, his Mother and Helpmate in the process of begetting children of God, and through Mary to the Church, who, in the second phase of redemption, becomes the Mother of all the Living. So, in this vital union with Mary, the whole of redeemed humanity has the ground and measure of its life in Christ, and its vital union with Christ as the ground and measure of its life in the Triune God. However, according to the order of its divine origin and the inner necessity of its starting point, the Church’s Marian life in Christ converges on the Father; so the whole Church is filled with a single movement: From Mary to Christ, from Christ to the Father. This movement of the Church to its perfection in the Trinity includes turning away from sin, indeed from all the forms of existence in the world that are still not transfigured. However, this is only able to take place through a bitter battle with the forces of evil that pretend to be the lord of the world. This battle has in principle been decided for the Church in Mary. When the Church finally makes its way with such invincible power through all the ages to its final perfection, where God will be all in all, in whom its essence is most perfectly embodied, it will have been brought there by Mary. Mary’s power is drawn only from the power of Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, whose aim is to return to the One from whom he originates: the Father. So in its deepest essence the whole of Christian existence is borne by the principle: We no longer belong to ourselves, but through Mary to Christ, and in Christ to God.”

So a community that sees itself as a living member of the Church, and carefully takes its bearings from the objective ontological order, while being borne in all its expressions of life by the idea of

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<sup>169</sup> Cf. Jn 16,28.

<sup>170</sup> *Heavenwards*, p. 19-21.

the organism, can have no other ultimate principle of structure, style and purpose<sup>171</sup> than “*ad Patrem*”.<sup>172</sup> What the “*Hirtenspiegel*”<sup>173</sup> repeats time without number has simply to be acknowledged as the basic law of our Schoenstatt spirituality,

“Let us stand in holy three-in-oneness  
and in this way go in the Holy Spirit to the Father.”

The three-in-oneness referred to here includes the soul, the Blessed Mother and our Lord: but all three are at the same time directed towards God the Father.

This explains a third element. Schoenstatt’s image of Mary and of our Lord is ultimately strongly stamped by its patrocentric character. To put it more precisely, our image of our Lord has three dimensions. It shines out to us mainly from three points-of-view. That is to say, we love to fall in love with Jesus’ fundamental relationship to his Father, to his Mother and to immortal souls. We could also say that our imitation of our Lord has a Marian and apostolic colouring, and is patrocentric in orientation. Or we could also say that we have been captured by Jesus’ bonding with his Father, and his bonding with Mary and souls. This gives us a clearer direction for our lives and striving, and we will know no rest until we are co-ordinated and united with this threefold fundamental attitude.

In relation to the Father our Lord is simply the only-begotten, incarnate Child of God.

He saw and treated his Mother as his official and permanent associate and helpmate in his entire work of redemption.

For immortal souls he is the Redeemer and Saviour at every point of his earthly and transfigured life.

So when with St Paul we say, “No longer I live, Christ lives in me”,<sup>174</sup> we know what that means in detail.

The warm and loving two-in-oneness uniting Christ and his Mother, therefore determines our image of Christ and at the same time our image of Mary. We see the Blessed Mother as the great Christ-formed and Christ-forming Woman. In both instances what she is and does is directed in Christ and with Christ towards the Father.

From this it again follows that Schoenstatt’s Father Year aims at achieving a high degree of education and formation. The educational work requires us to work out a precise image of Mary and our Lord according to the outline indicated. The work of formation aims at our growing in attitude and life into this double image, in order to find the way to the Father as perfectly as possible. So day by day the petition of the groupings indicated take on a greater fullness,

“Let us stand in holy three-in-oneness,  
and in this way go in the Holy Spirit to the Father.”

It is fortunate that in this task we do not have to depend on ourselves alone. The MTA, we may be assured of this, is aware of her great educational task from the shrine. Both the grace of a home and the grace of transformation clearly point in the patrocentric direction. ...

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<sup>171</sup> *Bau-, Stil- und Richtungsgesetz.*

<sup>172</sup> To or towards the Father.

<sup>173</sup> “The Shepherd’s Mirror”, a long poem composed by Fr Kentenich in the concentration camp at Dachau to provide orientation for the leaders of the Sisters of Mary.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Gal 2,20.

From all these deliberations it follows how mistaken all those are who interpret our spirituality when they think we are one-sided in our Marian devotion. This is not the case. Although our spirituality is Marian, it is at the same time also Christomystical and Patrocentric, indeed, Trinitarian in character. That is at the same time Pallotti's fundamental attitude. Let us pray the Prayer of the Leaders in *Heavenwards*. In the introduction we are told, "Following Pallotti's example, this prayer especially emphasizes the love of the most Blessed Trinity and of the mysteries of redemption".

The prayer itself is addressed to the Blessed Mother. It prays,

"Use us as your faithful instrument  
wherever the spirit of Satan must strongly be defied.

Transform us into Christ's loyal guard  
which always stands out in apostolic spirit.

May we proclaim love for the Blessed Trinity  
and bind the finest laurels to the cross.

Through us bless the Church with genuine everyday sanctity  
in answer to the needs of our times."<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. *Heavenwards*, p. 135-137. In this passage Fr Kentenich adjusted the original text from *Heavenwards* to the third person plural (we/us).