



## 7. Fatherly Education Today

*Fr Kentenich's exile began in 1951 and lasted 14 years. In keeping with the practice of senior Church authorities at that time, especially in Rome, such decisions were made without any reasons being given and without the accused being able to defend himself. In practice it always bore the taint of a punishment. Since no one knew what was the matter, it was easy for them to jump to the conclusion that something serious must have gone wrong if the highest Church authorities took such measures as to separate a founder from his work, and transfer him somewhere far from it, while limiting his freedom to move around. It naturally gave rise to intense speculation, and speculation gave rise to rumours.*

*Fr Kentenich was an educator. He had devoted himself to the greatest possible extent to serving actual life. The largest share of his strength and time had been devoted to the education of women, first and foremost the Sisters of Mary. In the Sisters' community he had the office of a father, which enabled him to concentrate intensively on the spiritual lives of the individual Sisters. He allowed personal bonding in order to solve serious conflicts in their souls, to heal illnesses and to unite them at great depth with God.*

*During his exile the rumour circulated that in the course of his relationship with the Sisters sexual aberrations had taken place, because of which he had been sent into exile.*

*For many years Fr Kentenich remained silent in the face of such rumours and calumny. In view of his approaching Golden Jubilee of ordination to the priesthood on 8 July 1960, and to defend the Sisters, because they were also cast in a bad light by such rumours, he felt the need to draw up a defence document entitled "Apologia pro vita mea". It was written in February 1960.*

*It gives us a deep insight into Fr Kentenich's fundamentally fatherly and educational attitude in view of the special pedagogical challenges the Church is encountering in our times. The following text is taken from the book "Zum Goldenen Priesterjubiläum", Berg Sion 1985, S. 113 - 115. (Cf. Texts 1 & 3, which are taken from the same document, also, Collected Texts I, p. 369 ff.)*

Whoever does not remain in constant contact with the modern soul, which is often not in the best of health, will have no idea how obsessions make the lives of countless people of all walks of life and social classes – priests and religious by no means excepted – into a sort of hell, or at least an unbearable purgatory. It is a cheap way out to simply absolve such people and not make any effort to bring about inner healing. *Paternitas* (fatherhood) that is deeply anchored in God thinks and acts very differently. It takes its bearings from our Lord's self - portrait depicted in the ideal of the Good Shepherd – the Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep. He does not stand on the shores of the stormy seas with folded arms; he does not look

calmly and without interest into the raging waters where countless thousands are exposed to the wind and waves, and struggle helplessly against destruction. Nor is he satisfied with throwing a life jacket to the drowning people from a safe distance. He personally risks his life and jumps into the water in order to save what can be saved. This is how he carries out our Lord's words, "The Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep". It should not be too difficult to apply the image meaningfully and in a timely way to the people just described. Allow me to repeat, eternity will one day reveal how great is the number and variety of people whom I have been allowed to lead through these obstacles to the full freedom of God's children, and up the mountain of perfection.

Already very early on I came into theoretical and practical contact with the problem under discussion. I am here studiously excluding the experiences of the young spiritual director behind "cloister walls". Hardly had doors and windows to the outside world opened before him, however, than patients came to him from all sides. They were laypeople and priests. This happened already at the beginning of the 1920s. At the time, immediately after World War I, Dr Bergmann, who had a practice and clinic in Kleve, was considered a specialist in this field. As a priest I was allowed to continue and complete in a psychological, ascetical and religious way what he had begun from a medical point of view. Often this was a thankless task. It would have been much easier not to get involved, and to distance myself from these people with some general pious phrases, as do so many priests. However, they are not acting as the good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. The good shepherd does whatever he can – even if it costs him a great deal of study, nervous energy and time – to protect them from harm and restore them to the full freedom of God's children, as far as this is possible.

Since we priests and theologians for our part are often not even ready and able to apply the ancient and proven moral principles and pastoral rules courageously, prudently and in an enlightened way, the consulting rooms of the psychotherapists have filled – as can regrettably be seen everywhere – while our confessionals have increasingly emptied. The pastor who knows the times and souls is aware of the profound and comprehensive crisis of people's lives today, and the practical effects this has on his followers. He has the courage and daring to grapple with the problem, to look for remedies, and to apply them carefully and circumspectly. If he doesn't do this, he sees himself as a man who talks and acts irresponsibly. He is justified in fearing that in this way – naturally without wanting to do so – he will drive certain groups of his followers into the anti - Church camp, or abandon them on the battlefield as cripples.

J. Folliet has written an important study (1951) about Christians at the crossroads of time. He gave it the title, "*Der Christ am Scheidewege – Christians at the Crossroads*".<sup>46</sup> I quote,

„There is nothing more disappointing than to read the commentaries on Thomism, Billuart or Gonet, when you consider that at the same time Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau were also writing. Learning and life were overthrown in a dreadful way, yet the pastor and theologian did not seem to notice it. The rationalism of philosophers destroyed tradition. Mechanism, liberalism and capitalism turned society totally on its head. However, theology remained dumb, or, if it spoke, it only repeated old formulae. It was still stuck with its controversies about effective and sufficient grace.“

Aren't we often in the same, sad state today although on a different level? Since history shows that it can be dangerous for Catholics to take a creative and daring stand to the crises of contemporary life, the danger is great that for our part we will not offer any, or sufficiently effective, contributions to solving them, and as a result either become completely out of touch with reality, or find ourselves caught up in the slipstream of foreign outlooks on life.

This applies to all the questions and crises of life today. It applies not least – although we would like to cover it up or hide it – to the sexual crisis and the crisis of sexual pedagogy. If you want to see things more clearly in this regard, you could study the existential philosophers. With a brutal lack of consideration they tear away the covering veil from the depths of the soul and show the whole tragedy in this field. Or, if you like, you can let our Catholic psychotherapists tell you how large the number really is of those professing celibacy, but who with the best will in the world are unable to cope with it, although they wear its toga outwardly and also have not changed their mind about it. How often, therefore, the question is raised among

---

<sup>46</sup> I have not found an English version, so this is my translation.

intimate friends, "Is celibacy justified for people today?" ... And if the answer is given in the affirmative, the question remains, "What do we have to do in order to effectively guide the sexual need, which all too often develops into sexual duress?" Every pastor knows how great the obsessions can be in this regard. Yet where are the helpers in this need? That is to say, where are the men who see the reality, who have the courage to withdraw the veil from it, and who have the wisdom to show means and ways to heal and sanctify?

It would take us too far if I were to show from here what we have contributed towards a solution in this regard. What we can offer seems at first glance to be as simple as Columbus' egg.<sup>47</sup> In essence it has to do with carefully cultivating and realizing the idea of the organism, especially from the point of view of organic childlikeness that penetrates into the subconscious, and there works something like "miracles of transformation".

---

<sup>47</sup> In the face of complicated theories, the simplest solution is usually the answer. Columbus asked his detractors whether they could make an egg stand upright on the table. When no one could answer, he thumped the egg on the table, where it remained standing.