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August 29-September 4, 1937)

Translated by Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, Schoenstatt Fathers  
(abridged translation)

**Fr. Joseph Kentenich**

# **Childlikeness Before God**

**Reflections on Spiritual Childhood**

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## Introduction to the English Edition

"During our days together I have been thinking that perhaps I should write a little book about childlikeness. Everything about it would then need to be presented in greater detail." (p. 257)

In his long and fruitful life, Fr. Joseph Kentenich (1885-1968) held countless retreats of great impact. As the founder of Schoenstatt he was in a privileged position to know many people deeply devoted to their faith, which inspired him to speak on themes of great benefit to their spiritual growth. No doubt one of his crowning accomplishments was the remarkable retreat on spiritual childlikeness presented in this book. To him this was one of themes crucial to the prospering of the spiritual life in our day and age. Although he never got around to formally composing the "little book on childlikeness" alluded to above, this retreat does it for him.

This retreat was held from August 29 to September 4, 1937 in Immensee, Switzerland for the Bethlehem Fathers. It took place against the backdrop of the brutal Third Reich of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis who controlled Germany and threatened Switzerland. A similar cry and hue sounded to the south in fascist Italy, under the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini. Rumor of war was in the air, and values like "smallness," "innocence" and "childlikeness" were trampled underfoot. In contrast, Fr. Kentenich noticed how the modern soul was wasting away because of this lack of simple childlike spirit, left to flounder in the tidal flood of modern progress and change. Neither fatalism nor God-divorced human activism was the answer, but becoming children and instruments in the hand of God, our loving and all-wise Father.

Fr. Kentenich himself would become a living witness to the power of this childlikeness when he was arrested by the Gestapo in 1941 and subsequently sent to the Dachau Concentration Camp. That he survived and helped many others to spiritually growth in the "hell of Dachau" is a glowing testimony to what this dimension of our faith can accomplish.

### The Bethlehem Fathers

The Bethlehem Father retreat of 1937 was unusually long: seven days. The origins of the Bethlehem Mission Society (SMB) went back to 1895 when a French priest, P.M. Barral (1855-1929), founded a school for missionaries in Immensee. In 1921 a Swiss diocesan priest, P. Bondolfi (1872-

1943), began the founding of a formal mission society. Just one year before this retreat, on March 4, 1936, the constitutions of this community were approved by Rome. Fr. Kentenich was invited in 1937 to help them take full possession of their now approved spiritual identity.

Fr. Kentenich was well-chosen for this task. As the founder of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary (1926) he had chosen a similar approach to the formal bonds uniting members and community. These relatively weak bonds (typical of the later secular institutes) created a greater opportunity for the modern-minded vocation to give himself fully and freely, but also required a more deliberate attention to the spiritual culture and welfare of the community. These themes are a constant "subplot" that interweaves the retreat.

### **Spiritual Childlikeness**

Fr. Kentenich used Article 7 of the new SMB constitutions to provide the motivation for his main theme of childlikeness: "The name and purpose of the community reveal which spirit must rule there and penetrate its members: it is the spirit of that wondrous simplicity which Our Lord Jesus Christ taught, starting in the manger in Bethlehem..." Drawing on his past elaborations of the subject (workshop in 1922, retreats in 1929 and 1932), he opened up the foundations for spiritual childhood in scripture, Church teaching and the challenges of our times. The whole theme found its motto in the Gospel quote: "Unless you change and become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18,3).

As retreat master, Fr. Kentenich did not intend to deliver a polished treatise. His aim was to reach the hearts of his listeners. This book is based on the transcript of the talks made by one of the participants, as becomes clear in the "colloquial" style of the text of this book. Fr. Kentenich works hard to relate the topic to the real-life situation of his audience, in this case priests. Again and again he challenges them to think the subject through for themselves (and not just take them at his word). In addition, he sprinkled his reflections with valuable personal insights coming from his over 27 years of priestly ministry.

This aim of this English translation is meant to open up these treasures in a readable fashion. Some material of tangential interest has been left out to reduce the enormous size of this course. Subtitles have been reworked. It is hoped that the reader can derive great benefit from these pages.

Fr. Jonathan Niehaus  
Waukesha, January 20, 2001

"Unless you change and become like little children,  
you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

*Matthew 18,3*

## FIRST CONFERENCE

## INTRODUCTION

When St. Boniface felled the oak of Donar and suffered no harm, it had a singular effect on the history of the Church in the West. It was viewed, and rightly so, as a triumph of Christianity over paganism. But the tide has now strongly turned the other way<sup>1</sup>. Paganism violently rears its head again, organizes itself in mass demonstrations and now, in its turn, tries to set the ax to the root of Christianity. Will this attempt ultimately succeed? We are all, without exception, greatly interested in the answer to this question—as Christians, as Swiss, as missionaries.

As Christians it is clear that what concerns the Church concerns us, and that the Church's enemies are our enemies.

As Swiss: Even though this paganism has not yet made great inroads into our homeland, you know better than I what flames are smoldering beneath the surface. Furthermore, you know that intellectual currents do not stop at international boundaries.

As missionaries our interest in this European outburst of neo-paganism comes especially because we sense how the currents and trends of Europe affect our missions. There is great interest in Manchuria and Japan about developments in Germany. Everything that signals the victory of paganism over Christianity causes a great stir in the missions where we work.

How will this conflict end? It is clear that our enemies want to lay the ax with vigor and violence to the root of the tree of Christianity. Will the tree fall? Next to grace and Divine Providence, the answer depends in a preeminent way on our personal cooperation. Men like Pfliegler<sup>2</sup> who know our times, believe that we as clergy and priests are not nearly as capable as we ought to be of mastering the times we live in. If this is true, why is it true? Could it be that we do not understand how to analyze and solve the difficulties of our modern day and age? But the errors of today have been refuted countless times over the last decades and centuries!

At issue is not, in the first place, the intellectual grasp of the problems. The difference between yesterday and today is perhaps only that what was taught yesterday in the universities is now fermenting in the masses. In my

<sup>1</sup> Meant is the paganism of the Nazi movement in Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Pfliegler, Austrian pastoral theologian.

estimation the difficulty is, first of all, our inability to adapt to today's feeling of life; secondly, our ignorance in counteracting a vast and hostile movement of life with a vibrant, genuinely Catholic movement of life; and thirdly, our lack of initiative in offering ourselves as the heroic leaders of such a movement of life. And yet we sense that the destiny of Europe is being decided today as it has been in few times in history.

When we look back on history it nearly forces us to conclude that *just as the die of history was cast during the Reformation and remained essentially unchanged for centuries, we presently stand at the gates of the future—and the shape which the fronts take in the immediate future is, very probably, how they will remain for centuries to come.*

This must stir in us a strong and onerous sense of responsibility! Because of this we can no longer live a comfortable life in a comfortable time, but rather be strongly aware of the responsibility placed upon us: What we do today and tomorrow, how we heroically apply ourselves for a heroic Catholic movement of life will essentially codetermine the destiny of our times and of Europe for centuries to come! And what we do in Europe, we do indirectly for our mission territories. What we try to accomplish in Europe, we must also try, with the necessary adaptations, in our mission territories.

## The Goal of This Retreat

## I. IN GENERAL TERMS

Considering these few broad strokes as we gather for our annual retreat, I am almost forced to conclude that the most general aim of our retreat should be *to let ourselves be formed and shaped more than ever into heroic leaders of a heroic Catholic movement of life*, especially [in the Church] overseas.

## II. MORE SIMPLY STATED

Or, if you prefer, I could state the goal of our retreat still more simply: *We want to learn to glorify God—the Eternal, the Infinite, and the One who is so persecuted today—in a heroic manner by our being and action.*

Of course you will say to me that this is a very general goal. You are correct. But tonight we want to be satisfied with such a general formulation of our goal.

Even as I speak, I am reminded of two quotes from St. Bernard. One was shouted to him by his youngest brother as he, with about three or four of his brothers and an uncle, wanted to leave the world. "Bernard," called

his brother, "where are you going?" We know the answer. Bernard probably told him that he and the other relatives were leaving the family's whole wealth to him and were going to join the monastery to serve God in a special way and to merit heaven. But the brother soon realized that he was getting the short end of the deal and, as he later liked to tell it, he refused to agree to this arrangement; he did not want the plunder of this world. He, too, wanted to seek and serve God.

This is almost certainly the very same answer which we gave in younger years, either directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly at the time we decided to enter our community. "Where are you going?" Where did we go? We set out to find how we could glorify and serve God and devote to him all our strength by helping immortal souls.

Now we have been in the community for many years. Has not the time come to ask ourselves the second question which St. Bernard used to ask himself: "*Bernarde, ad quid venisti?*" "Bernard, why did you come here?" We can well imagine the effect of this thought on Bernard, exhausted by his work but quick to grasp its meaning. It was like a searchlight from eternity, a clarion call which banished all half-heartedness and moroseness. Bernard, like anyone else striving for spiritual perfection, experienced times of flagging spirit—times when the animal in us is perhaps stronger than in the years of our youth. At such times Bernard would ask himself: *Why did you come?* Why did you actually come here? Did you expect a comfortable life? Did you come to escape the vexations of the world? *Bernard, why did you come?*

I think this is a question which we should ask ourselves often at the beginning of a retreat. Why, really, did I become a priest? Why, really, did I devote my whole life's strength to building a new community? Once we know this answer we will quickly find the answer to why have we gathered for this retreat.

Let me repeat my previous answer. It is very general, yet we want to take it as a personal answer. We have come together to learn, during these days of solitude, to glorify God—the Eternal, the Infinite, and the One who is so persecuted today—in a heroic manner by our being and action.

I do not know which of these words I should especially stress tonight. Should I briefly review the reasons why, today, we must strive heroically for God's glory? One sentence must suffice: Anyone familiar with the face of our times knows that anything half-hearted will be more or less rejected. Anyone with even a passing knowledge of the currents sweeping through the neighboring countries knows that a heroic struggle is taking place there. Let me put it plainly: The devil goads his followers to make heroic efforts

in order to achieve his ends. It seems to me that the time might not be distant when the old paganism combines with the new to form a single united front<sup>3</sup>. Heroism is therefore the mandate on both sides!

What this means is that we must not be satisfied with half-measures. All or nothing! Do you not think that this must be especially true for a young community which must first prove to the public its right to exist—a young community in which there is so much vibrant, youthful energy?

But that is not where I want to place the accent tonight. Instead, I want to try to imprint the word GOD more deeply in our souls—God the Eternal, the Infinite, the One whom paganism wishes to dethrone. This God, who is so persecuted and cursed today, we want to try to glorify anew by our being and action.

Should we not try now to pronounce the word "God" more calmly and meditatively, more tenderly and with greater love? This is the God to whom we owe our being, who continually sustains our strength, who has constantly held the hand of his Divine Guidance over us. Indeed, we recall tonight how this God has carried us our whole life through, has embraced us and constantly tried to lead us heavenwards.

I cannot help but think of a passage from the Old Testament:

"Hear, you peoples, and pay heed, you islands from afar! The God who called me from my youth has said to me: You are mine and mine you shall always be! I want to glorify myself through you; in you I will glorify my name" (cf Is 49,1-3; 43,1.7).

It seems to me that this text contains everything that our souls should absorb tonight. I think it is appropriate if I interpret this passage in three ways. When I see my life in connection with God, I know that I am called by God, dedicated to God, sent by God.

### 1. Called by God

I keep in mind the dark background of our times and say to myself: The God who is so little appreciated by the modern world has called me.

In this context it may be worthwhile to recall the story of my personal priestly vocation. God called me. Thanks be to God! I want to tell myself this when my vocation means difficulties for me, when on occasion I must

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<sup>3</sup> Fr. Kentenich reminds these missionaries that the new paganism of modern atheistic materialism could appeal to the traditional paganism of non-Christian countries to form a closed front against the message of Christ.



endure bitter disappointments.

I did not call myself; God called me! It was not some random third party that called me; no, my vocation comes from God! Thanks be to God! Then burdensome difficulties can come my way—the God who called me will always be with me. Did not Our Lord, in the prime of his life, say something similar: "*The One who sent me never abandons me, for I always do what pleases him*" (Jn 8,29).

In short, I ask you to return to your own vocation story and let it sink in again. This should stir the interior life of your soul. In this way the soul should become more receptive to the seeds of God's grace.

As you look back on the story of your life, I think three claims can serve as a general outline. Even though each of our vocations may have gone through very different stages of development, these three features always apply: my call is extraordinary, easily recognizable, and effective.

#### *An extraordinary call*

What do I mean by that? The call which we heard—"Come, follow me!" (Mt 19,21)—was a call which elevated us from life's ordinary elevations. The word "extraordinary" is meant here in contrast to the call which ordinary Christians hear. They, too, are called by God to follow him. But relatively few are called by God to become his closest followers—to become priests! It is an extraordinary vocation. "It is not you who have chosen me, but I who have chosen you" (Jn 15,16).

For the moment we only want to savor more deeply the word "God" against the background of our life. How soothing its effect! How encouraging and victorious it resounds as it penetrates our souls! Our call was also

#### *Easily recognizable*

at least sooner or later. How quickly we could grasp: It was really God! Our souls may have been enfolded here and there by darkness and night, but when it really mattered, we knew it clearly.

#### *An effective calling.*

Our calling was effective. Here we can recall all the obstacles to our vocation which had to be overcome before we stood at the altar and were taken into the community as full members to do our share for God's Kingdom. I am therefore here as one called by God.

## **2. Dedicated to God**

God has called to me: "You are mine!" God wanted that I give myself

to Him. I answered God's "You are mine!" with "Here I am! I want to be yours for time and eternity!"

This would be another point where it would be worthwhile to review my life from the moment of my 'yes' to God. I gave myself to him—privately perhaps even since childhood. Recall the moment when you first said, "Yes, I want to belong to you; nothing else matters!" Even if no one else in my family had a religious vocation, I felt and was convinced: God's plan for me is special.

I think of my private consecration, my private surrender to God. Recall what you experienced when you received the tonsure, when you were ordained a subdeacon, when you were ordained a priest. In short, relive your whole life from the standpoint: Called by God, dedicated to God!

As you recall your life's story, pause for a moment again and ask yourself what you did at the time. Was it not  
something exceedingly rare,  
something exceedingly great,  
something that made you extremely happy  
and fruitful?

Ponder these *four words* in your meditation. My decision, my surrender to God and consecration to God as something

#### *Exceedingly rare.*

It is certainly relatively rare for someone to give himself to God, doubly and triply so to remain faithful to the act of consecration. But it is also something rare in a different sense: because my inner decision was something of rare greatness and quality. Then consider everything that this consecration included and includes. May I not say that with this act I reached out to claim a *threefold crown*: the crown of martyrs, the crown of virgins and the crown of doctors?

The *crown of martyrs*: Was it and is it not my the deepest statement of my being: I am ready to die in God's service, if it is his will? I do not know if God will one day honor me with the martyrdom of blood, but I know that I must have the attitude: I am ready to suffer an unbloody martyrdom, day by day. Therefore, when my personal life and community life have so much that is hard to bear, I have the right to say "*Deo gratias!*" [Thanks be to God!] This is the answer that flows from the deepest statement of my being! I want to win the crown of martyrs! Out of a great, tender, burning love for God I am ready to lay all things on the altar of sacrifice, especially my will.

Moreover, does not this consecration to God also include a desire to

win the *crown of virgins*? We not only want to master death, but also the flesh. This is self-understood for us, because by celibacy we make this attitude still more consciously our own.

Lastly, we wish to reach out for the *crown of doctors*. More and more, we want to make the sacred sciences our own and in that way overcome so many of the mental limitations of our poor mind.

Again I ask: Was not this "Here I am, Lord, do with me what you will" something profound?

Do you want me to put this differently? This "Here I am, Lord, do with me what you will, I am totally yours!" is really a vibrant realization of the eight beatitudes, a vibrant realization of the mystery of the cross. Do we not want to take some time tonight to quietly pray our way into the atmosphere of these truths again? These truths are familiar to us, but they take on a new ring as we mature and see these truths in a new light of grace.

This "Here I am, Lord, do with me what you will, I am yours!" is something

*Exceedingly great.*

It is great because the God, to whom we have given ourselves, is great. After all, great is he who dedicate his life to greatness. And to whom have we dedicated our life? To the Greatest. To the Lord of heaven and earth. Here you can recall everything which the Fathers of the Church say about the dignity of the priesthood, the dignity of surrender to God.

We can then go on to say:

This decision, this surrender must also be something that makes us

*Exceedingly happy.*

The reason is the same: because we have inscribed ourselves, body and soul, into the heart of the Eternal God, the God of infinite bliss. In this context we recall how Sacred Scripture again and again declares happy the man who serves God. For instance, we hear, "Blessed is he whom the Lord has accepted... Blessed is he who serves the Lord..."<sup>4</sup> "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for justice" (Mt 5,6; Lk 6,21). You can find any number of other similar passages. Again and again they should cultivate the awareness in us that to belong to the Lord our God, which the modern world does not know, and to surrender ourselves to Him is something exceedingly

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<sup>4</sup> See such Old Testament references as Ps 2,12; 33,12; 34,9; 40,5; 65,5; 84,13; 112,1; 128,1; Prv 16,20.

blissful and ultimately makes us

*Exceedingly fruitful*

Why has God called us? To bear fruit (cf Jn 15,16). As priests we should become fruitful for the Kingdom of God, for the community to which we belong. Is not the deepest meaning of celibacy a boundlessly deep, general fruitfulness? Think this over on your own. I cannot and do not want to dwell on it now. I want to brush on these points briefly to increase our receptivity for the seed to follow.

### 3. Sent by God

We are not only called by and dedicated to God, but also *sent by God*.

Why did God call me? Why did I dedicate myself to Him? In order to be sent by Him! I received this commission at ordination. I shall receive this commission again at the end of the retreat. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20,21). We did not enter the community in order to lead a quiet life on a quiet island. No, we have been drawn into the great *current of the mission* of the God-Man. How does that sound to someone familiar with the times around us, to those of you familiar with the pagan nations of the old variety, and who know how night and darkness are constantly engaged in battle there with the light. Yes, we have been drawn into the current of the mission of the God-man. Thanks be to God! God wants his name to be glorified through us wherever he sends us.

Can we hear whether the words which applied in his day to St. Paul, also apply to us: "I will show him what great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9,16)? To be drawn into the current of the mission of the God-Man means, of course, to also be drawn into the *current of his suffering*.

To be drawn into the current of his mission also means to be drawn into the great *current of his work*. Read in Sacred Scripture what an obligation this mission meant for the Apostles. They could not sit idly by. They had to work! The various expressions used to describe the office of the apostles expressly points this out: soldier of Christ (2 Tim 2,3), laborer in the Lord's vineyard (Mt 20,1-16), fisher of men (Mt 4,19; Mk 1,17). If we are sent out we must work in earnest for immortal souls, even when it may mean our ruin. We may not seek ourselves.

All in all, please understand well these words of introduction! We do not wish to say anything great or new tonight. Our sole desire is to plunge once more into the infinite ocean of God. The eternal and infinite God envelops my life, my personal life in this extraordinarily profound manner.

He has personally called me, called me by name. I could personally dedicate myself to him. He has personally sent me. I can now restudy in detail: What does my unique mission look like in the context of the work which God's providence has foreseen for me? The main thing tonight is that we draw nearer to God again—the eternal God, the infinite God, the God who is so persecuted today. To this God, who so intimately circles our life, who so envelops us with his love, we want to give all glory during these days, want to learn to glorify him anew in a heroic manner, both through our being and through our actions.

May I ask in conclusion how our souls respond to this general, almost too general, aim? Perhaps God has already taken hold of our souls. Thanks be to God! But if we are still too fatigued by everyday life, if we still experience the downward pull to which the spiritual life is subject, then tonight we should at least try to awaken a deep longing for God and lift up our hearts to Him. If we begin our retreat at least as *men of longing*, we can be satisfied. If we are men of enthusiasm and men of possession, then all the better! But we want to be satisfied to be gathered at least as men of longing; then we have the strong yearning to lay our whole being and life at the feet of the eternal, the infinite God. Today there are so many conflicting currents, currents which oppose and undermine each other. How many people today follow idols of their own making. If only we would follow God with a similar devotion! If only our souls felt that strong urge to shatter the illusory goods of this earth as idols and to throw ourselves with all our being into the arms of the one, eternal, infinite God!

"He has filled the hungry with good things!" (Lk 1,53). "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall have their fill" (Mt 5,6). To the extent that we long for God, this profound, chasm-deep, almost crying-out longing for the eternal, infinite God will be fulfilled.

So let us be one tonight in at least this deep desire for the great and eternal God whom we are privileged to serve, to whom our entire life belongs, who has called us and who would like to send us out anew at the end of these days, each one to his post, but ultimately to pursue the one great aim: that there may be light again in the darkness of our present-day pagan world.

## SECOND CONFERENCE

### III. TWO FURTHER THOUGHTS

Last night we discussed the general goal of our retreat. We want to learn to glorify God, the Eternal, the Infinite, the One who is so persecuted today, in a heroic manner by our being and action. I suppose you can all sense that this formulation is far too general. I must, therefore, amend it in two ways—by expanding it and by qualifying what is meant.

#### *The Expansion*

The only expansion I need to make is this: "after the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ." *Bernarde, ad quid venisti?* Why did we come? You must always interpret such questions in two ways. First of all: Why did I become a priest? Why did I join this community? And then: Why did I come on retreat? We have come in order to glorify the Eternal, Infinite, and persecuted God in a heroic manner by our being and action, *after the example of Christ, the God-Man.*

Take a moment to think about what this short and yet so important addition has to say. When we speak the word "Christ" into our world and times, what kind of echo do we get? Countless millions reject him, think of him as a figment of the imagination, a phantom, a great delusion. Others—and they, too, may number into the millions—acknowledge him as a great religious leader. But those who, like us, adore him as the God-Man Jesus Christ (his name be praised forever!) are desperately few.

Then again, it may be one of the great blessings of our times that they force us to see and recognize that in the end, while Christ is a great leader, a great man, this is not what impresses us the most or most urges us to follow him. The reason we believe in his person and teaching and build on him as on a rock is the great truth: *Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero.* [(Christ is) God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.]

We bow before him—especially we who so clearly see the opposing views of the world; we bow before the divinity of Jesus Christ. For us it is simply taken for granted that we recognize him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14,6). If we therefore want to glorify the Father, we know what we must do. The God-Man stands before us: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; I am the Way to the glorification of the Father.

*Bernarde, ad quid venisti?* We understand what was meant by the

addition. We have come to glorify the Infinite and persecuted God after the example of Christ through our being and action.

### *The Qualification*

The second is a qualification. Because Christ is the God-Man he radiates an infinite fullness of light. But where is the human being, the human society or religious community which is capable of taking in all this light, of embodying it and then making it shine forth! On the one hand we see the God-Man's infinite fullness of light and life and, on the other hand, we know how exceedingly limited is our personal consciousness. It obliges us in our imitation of Christ to focus on just the one or the other point of his life. Such a specific point must have certain characteristics: It must be *concrete*, so concrete that we can, as it were, reach out and touch it, but at the same time be so *universal and fruitful* that we can unroll the entire life of Christ from this one point. Finally, since we are a community with a *specific spirit*, this one point must correspond in an outstanding way to the soul and spirit of our community. Now all of you know a characteristic in the life of Our Lord which meets these three criteria to an outstanding degree. It is a point suggested to us by our constitutions. It is *Our Lord's childlike attitude towards his Father*.

### **IV. FINAL WORDING**

So then, why have we come? Ask yourselves two things:

- 1) Why did I join this community?
- 2) Why did I come on retreat?

Now I think I can give definitive shape to our guiding thought for this retreat, in fact, for the rest of our lives:

**We have come to glorify the Eternal and Infinite God, after the example of Jesus Christ, through heroic childlikeness in being and action.**

We shall return to this guiding thought again and again so that by the end of our retreat it will really have become our own.

### *The Response of the Modern Soul*

We first want to pause a little and ask: What is the response of the modern soul to such a goal, to such a guiding thought? Just try to shout the idea of "childlikeness" into the world of today! Then try "heroic

childlikeness"! You will immediately notice the clash of feelings and opinions it produces on all sides.

There may be no other word which causes opinions to diverge as strongly as does the word childlikeness. There are of course those who, to our great joy, believe as we do that childlikeness is the sum total of everything great in heaven and on earth, that childlikeness is the means to answer all the needs of our times. But those who think and speak like us are relatively few. The others, an overwhelming majority, shake their heads in horror and say, "What? Childlikeness? This is a total caricature of man and Christianity!"

We do not need to go far to hear this cry. It is raised in our own camp. And all the more in the opposing camp! Just try and shout the word "childlikeness" into the mass of modern pagans. Then you will not only see a shaking of heads, but fanatical *resistance*! To be a child? What poor taste; that is for women; how infantile! Just listen to these expressions and look into the other camp. Childlikeness, they contend, is the archenemy of true manliness, and only manliness will master life!

### *The Response of our Soul*

The second question is: What resonates in our soul when we hear the word childlikeness? Each of us knows that childlikeness is the soul of our institute, and that God has foreseen from all eternity that we should embody this idea. Furthermore, what is true of individuals

"Each one has an image  
of what he should become;  
until that image is attained  
his peace cannot be won<sup>1</sup>."

is also true of each community. For communities have a community soul. In fact, that is why God called our community into existence—to proclaim the idea of childlikeness in a particular way into our times.

Hence, it is self-understood that we cling to childlikeness, or at least want to cling to it, with every fiber of our being. We would like to increase the ranks of those who hold that childlikeness is the sum total of all that is great in heaven and on earth. Childlikeness is the great means by which the crises of our times will be overcome.

### *Difficulties Force us to Make Clear Distinctions*

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<sup>1</sup> Angelus Silesius (1624-1677), German poet and Catholic theologian.

We do not want to swell the ranks of those who merely cherish childlikeness. We believe that we are called to be leaders who promote childlikeness towards God. Therefore, I think, we are not at a loss when called to respond to the difficulties raised by our opponents. Because we are at home in the world of childlikeness, we can clearly tell the difference *between childishness and childlikeness*.

In order to refute and resolve the difficulties raised by our opponents, we must clearly distinguish between childishness and childlikeness. It is not childlikeness that many noble people, even in our own ranks, object to, but childishness.

A second distinction is also important: When speaking of childlikeness, one must distinguish between primitive and enlightened childlikeness.

What is *primitive* childlikeness? Think it over! We will discuss it in detail later.

What is *enlightened*, priestly, or radiant childlikeness? When we say that childlikeness is the sum total of all that is great in heaven and on earth, it is this enlightened, radiant, priestly childlikeness to which we refer.

But we do not wish to make it so easy for ourselves. Perhaps God wants, because of all the objections raised against childlikeness, that we reflect more than ever on the most basic God-willed patrimony of our community. Perhaps God wants us to make the effort to see our entire spirituality from the standpoint of childlikeness.

You understand all of these things better than or at least as well as I do: What gives a community its strength is not just its exterior task. It is not just its apostolate. That is the *causa finalis* [aim], but only *partialis* [partial aim]. The *causa finalis totalis* [total aim] is embodied in the name of our community<sup>2</sup>. We know that the *causa finalis* vitally affects the *causa formalis* [spirit or soul]. And it is this *causa formalis*, this specific spirit, which carries the community. Anyone who transmits this spirit with full fervor as a great and radiant beacon creates something great in the Church. If we belong to our community but only love our task without loving our spirit with all our heart, we will never do great things for the Church.

If you like, take a look at the Jesuits, since they are so numerous. How well they articulate their system! They have a *ratio studiorum* and a *ratio educandi*—a clearly defined educational system<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Bethlehem Mission Society.

<sup>3</sup> The Jesuit tradition has two clearly articulated "*rationes*" or foundations for education—the *ratio studiorum* ("rationale of studies") and the *ratio educandi*

Or study the Nazis. They harness the principles of psychology and know how to adapt. They are nearly unflappable when engaged in outward battle. Why? Because their first aim is to form a new man. They want to form the "Nazi man" who will in turn carry the "Nazi state." If our aim is to accomplish an apostolic task, we must form the "apostolic man."

Or, returning to the Jesuits... their *ratio educandi* is the 30-day retreat, is Ignatius' little book on the Spiritual Exercises. This gives a clear blueprint of who they are: This is how we are educated; this is how the Jesuit personality is formed. Do you not think that it would be one of the most essential tasks of a new community to ask itself: What features does the original personality typical of our new community have? I want to create the new man! Nietzsche would say: "Let me know your great idea!"<sup>4</sup>

## DEVELOPING A COHERENT SYSTEM OF HOLY LIVING AND STRIVING BASED ON CHILDLIKENESS

What does the distinctive personality of our community look like? Perhaps it will help you if I try to describe this personality as seen from the standpoint of childlikeness and if I try to develop from it a coherent system of living and striving for sanctity based on childlikeness.

If this meets your approval, you must allow me to omit many of the points usually covered in a retreat, for time will not allow for everything. Then some of you will have to study and expand on these thoughts. After that I think your community will be able to stand on its own two feet and engage our modern times in battle.

In order to come right to the heart of the matter, I want to set up *four fundamental pillars for this great edifice of childlikeness*. These four fundamental pillars are, at the same time, the four parts of our retreat. I want to distinguish:

1. the value of childlikeness,
2. its root,
3. its essence, and
4. its practical approaches.

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("rationale of education").

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), German philosopher. See *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Part I, *Vom Wege des Schaffenden*.

In the end we will have, at the very least, a grand overview, a unified image, a great vision which, of course, must be enlarged on and deepened through personal study and investigation.

## THE FIRST FUNDAMENTAL PILLAR: THE VALUE OF CHILDLIKENESS

Let us immediately begin with the first fundamental pillar, with the question: "Why is childlikeness valuable?"

You may wonder why I do not begin with the essence. As a psychologist and educator it seems to me that it is better if we first allow our souls to warm up to the idea of childlikeness. Then we will be each other's retreat masters, for when all are enthusiastic for the same idea, each become a retreat master to the others.

By the way, as we elaborate on the value of childlikeness we will naturally also give a rough sketch of its essence. It will not be metaphysically polished, but these two aspects constantly overlap.

Our answer will have two dimensions: timeless and timebound. At the outset I will put it in rough terms. You will have to understand that, in the need to make things exceedingly clear, I may sound like I am exaggerating here and there. In the end, however, we will make an effort to strike a healthy balance. That having been said, let me assert that *childlikeness has a threefold value*:

Firstly, childlikeness is *the* way to heaven. Here you have childlikeness' timeless value [p. 16ff].

Secondly, childlikeness is *the* way to overcoming the crises of our times [p. 119ff].

Thirdly, childlikeness is the way to understanding and living the holy constitutions of our community [p. 173 and throughout].

How much time we would need if we were to consider each point in all detail! What I say is not just to grab your attention. Please, take my words literally!

We have used the word "way" three times: the way to heaven, the way to overcoming the crises of our times, the way to understanding and fully living our holy constitutions. What does this mean? There is no other way! A person may choose another way, but he cannot wholly by-pass childlikeness. There is no other way to "skin the cat." There is no other way to heaven nor to solving the problems of today, nor to an understand-

ing and animated observance of our holy constitutions, than the much-maligned way of childlikeness. According to Sacred Scripture the way of childlikeness is the treasure in the field (Mt 13, 44), for some as the main ingredient, for others at least as a necessary part of the recipe. For us it applies to an extraordinary degree, because our holy constitutions make it clear that every other way must be secondary to us. For others it may be different, but for us it is the primary way.

Let me now go into the question in detail. Bit by bit, to the extent that time permits, we want to discuss the three points of my statement. I will do so without a great display of emotion, highlighting their features simply and dispassionately. Then, when your own heart has caught fire, you will see how strongly I feel that the ideal of childlikeness is simply *the* ideal.

## FIRST: Childlikeness—THE Way to Heaven

Is it true that childlikeness is simply *the* way to heaven? It will be simple to prove if the sources of revelation address this matter and speak clearly and unambiguously. If we must rely on human reasoning and philosophy, we may have to speak more cautiously, using many distinctions, subdistinctions and counterdistinctions. But if Sacred Scripture is clear and unambiguous, all speculation will end. Does Scripture make such a clear statement? Yes! Sacred Scripture takes a definitive stand, not only with regard to the facts of salvation but also with regard to the truths of salvation.

## The Proof of Sacred Scripture

Let us pause here for a moment. Those of you who are so inclined, or who will be given the task of working out the community's whole educational rationale, should bear in mind that God does not only speak through his word but also through created things. Why?

On this point, too, I must ask you not to expect that I go into every detail, even though such fundamental truths are of great importance for the doctrine and the scientific understanding of a system.

Viewed philosophically, created things are not just an incarnated idea of God, but also an incarnated wish of God. Hence God does not only speak through words, but also through created things. To give one example, consider the structure of woman. If God has made the woman as she is, her nature is an incarnated idea of God, furthermore an incarnated wish of God. How should I treat her? As God wishes. His wish is expressed in the structure of woman.

Likewise, there are facts of salvation which I must interpret correctly. God therefore speaks to me about childlikeness—to repeat my main point—not only in word but also in deed.

Now a word about the absolute necessity of childlikeness—first through the facts of salvation and secondly through the words of salvation.

## I. The Facts of Salvation

Before naming these facts of salvation I must insert a few philosophical considerations. We have called childlikeness a necessity. In the spirit of Sacred Scripture I must distinguish between an *ontological necessity* and a *decreed necessity*. Childlikeness—please note the difference, for it will weave through our retreat like a golden thread—can be understood as childlikeness in being and childlikeness in attitude.

Childlikeness as *childlikeness in being is an ontological necessity*: No one can enter heaven unless he is a child; more precisely, unless he is a child of God.

*Childlikeness in attitude is a decreed necessity*. What does this mean? Anyone who is responsible for his actions cannot enter heaven unless he also has the attitude of a child.

Please bear in mind that God speaks through the facts of salvation. Now a word about the necessity of genuine childlikeness in the spirit of what I just said.

There are *two extraordinarily immense salvific facts*. The first is *God's Fatherhood*, and the other—just to introduce the term—is *the childhood of the Only-begotten Son*.

These are the great facts of salvation which God uses to speak a serious word to us about the necessity of genuine childlikeness. We now expound on these two salvific facts, but to the extent it serves our purpose.

### First Fact: God's Fatherhood

There are three thoughts which I need to consider, some briefly and some in greater detail:

1. the fact of this great salvific reality,
2. its significance and
3. its value-saturation<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The pedagogical aspect, namely, how we can take it from being a mere idea to being a value which truly moves our heart and soul.

## 1. The Fact

Here your experts on dogmatic theology would have to work out for you the world of childlikeness, the world of being a child of God. What I say in just a few sentences is something with which you should really inoculate yourselves in every regard.

What does fatherliness mean? Just as childlikeness has two dimensions—childlikeness in being and childlikeness in attitude—so, too, does fatherliness:

### Fatherliness in Being and Fatherliness in Attitude.

And now I can quickly tell you that *God's essence is simply fatherliness, both in being and attitude*. This statement is crucial; you must not only have a clear understanding of it in your mind, but also an experience of it in your heart. Then you will have a better grasp of its whole meaning. God's essence is fatherliness. What does this mean? His quintessential quality is to beget: God the Father begets the Son and the Holy Spirit proceeds from them both. This fatherliness is so quintessential to God that it is his greatest desire to extend to all receptive spirit-filled creatures the Sonship of Christ and his Divine Fatherhood.

I am mentioning these thoughts very briefly. They will be given somewhat more attention at our table reading<sup>6</sup>. The thoughts may be a bit heavy for mealtime, but you will take something home with you.

### Love: The Fundamental Law of the World

The essence of God is his fatherhood. His fatherly attitude corresponds to this fatherly being. You see, this is the source from which the great reality flows, the fundamental law of the world:

**God does everything out of love, through love, and for love.**

*Everything out of love*

*The main motor behind everything God does is his fatherly love*. There are secondary motives as well, such as his justice and his creative will to shape and form life, but the main motive is his desire to communicate his love. This love is so creative that it is the motor of his justice and his creative will to shape and form life.

God's fatherliness is not grandfatherliness. What the Father-God does

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<sup>6</sup> Fr. Kentenich apparently chose passages from the newly published book *Everyday Sanctity* (by M.A.Nailis) to be read at table during the retreat.

can sometimes hurt. He is also the God of justice, but his justice is always motivated by mercy and fatherly love. God's driving motive for everything is love. What does this mean? The answer is extremely important.

### *Everything through love*

The good God wants to draw man to himself through tangible signs of his love. This is how we understand the incarnation and the crucifixion. This is how we understand the myriad acts of love lavished on us by God. The Heavenly Father wants to bind our love-drive to himself through tangible proofs of his love.

Here we find revealed to us the expert educational hand of the all-powerful God. *God placed into the human heart the drive to love as its noblest primordial drive.* You must be convinced of this if you want to recognize the essence of your institute. The most powerful primordial drive is not fear but love. Here is one trail of evidence: If you win people through love, they will follow you totally, but if you build on fear, they will follow you only as long as you are in power. The drive to love is the most essential primordial drive. Listen for instance to *St. Augustine!* He speaks of love as the gravitational force of the soul<sup>7</sup>. *Francis de Sales* stresses that as the body is made for the soul, the soul is made for love. The great Artist and Architect of the world, the infinitely merciful, kind and almighty God knows that man's drive to love is most strongly stirred when lavishly enveloped by love. The good God, this great Artist and Educator, wants to bind my drive to love to himself.

Everything out of love, through love, for love.

### *Everything for love*

What does "for love" mean? What does God want for his creatures? He wants to lead them into a deep union of love with himself. This is the purpose of creation and redemption: We are called to enter into a deep and tender union of love with God.

Do you know what this tells us in one bold stroke? That God is not only fatherly in his being, but also in his attitude. This fatherly attitude shows in the great fundamental law of the world: Everything out of love, through love, for love.

You might want to take the time to study *Sacred Scripture* in this light. You will then soon discover the joyful, good news of Our Lord shining

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<sup>7</sup> See St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), *Confessions*, XIII, 9, 10.

forth. Our Lord does not tire of inculcating his disciples with the great truth: God, out of profound fatherliness, not only cares for the world as a whole, not only for a particular nation, but also for every individual human being. This stands in sharp contrast to the view of the Old Testament. At the height of its blossoming, the Old Testament stated that Yahweh envelops the Israelite people with his fatherly love—but only the people as a whole and not as individuals. Our Lord, however, often stresses that God the Father shows a fatherly concern for each individual, right down to the last detail.

You must work out these truths in their full Biblical imagery since they are so basic. God's fatherly attitude is revealed by such sentences as these: "Every hair of your head is counted" (Mt 10, 30; Lk 12, 7) and "Consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field; see how they grow... If God shows such concern for them, how much more will he take care of you!" (Mt 6, 25-34; Lk 12, 22-28). Often Our Lord uses images that, at first glance, hardly seem to make sense. Think of the prodigal son, the lost silver piece, the lost sheep (Lk 15). What is Our Lord trying to tell us? He wants to fill the meaning of the word "father" with everything great and noble in heaven and on earth. God is so much a Father that he is even prepared to leave ninety-nine sheep in the desert in order to follow one that went astray, to leave so-and-so many silver pieces in order to find just one! To sum up: Which fact stands before us? God's fatherhood. It cannot be disputed or denied.

### **Consequences for our Work as Educators**

Think about this for a moment. We especially place before our mind's eye the creative power of God's fatherliness.

Is not all educational activity, regardless of what we call it or the shape it takes, a reflection of the creative power of divine fatherliness? You have taken this general truth and made it part of your community's originality. What must every superior be? A reflection of the creative power of divine fatherliness. This is what we must be, otherwise we will not reach the fullest possible form of our ultimate call—seen from the divine perspective—the deepest part of our being and essence. *Paternitas*—fatherliness—is a creative power. It is primarily by this power that we ought to govern and inspire the community.

There is probably no one in our modern times who understood this great truth as well as St. John Bosco. He also distinguished between fatherliness and grandfatherliness. John Bosco, who called his educational



approach a daughter of love, revealed the secret of his success when he said in his spiritual testament: "If you want your students to practice this or that moral virtue, see to it that they love you. How should you do this? To earn the love of your students, you must first love them." He then adds, "...and you must let them visibly know that you love them"<sup>8</sup>.

This is the *paternitas Dei*—God's fatherliness. Every superior must be a reflection of the fatherliness of God, a fatherliness, however, which can also be strict. I think this ought to be the charism of your whole community. When one of us becomes a superior he has no choice but to be a reflection, a likeness of God's fatherliness.

All in all, you see the great idea: God is, by his very essence, Father.

Now comes the second part:

## 2. Its Significance

My aim is to interpret the fatherliness of God. Let me remind you that fatherliness in its twofold aspect—being and attitude—is relational and correlative. What do I mean? There is no fatherliness without childlikeness. You can see the connection. Now comes the significance of this great fact: *If in his essence God has adopted the being and attitude of fatherliness, then in his essence man must adopt the being and attitude of childlikeness.* The necessity of childlikeness corresponds to essence of fatherliness. My fundamental attitude toward the great God must therefore be the attitude of childlikeness.

You will find that this gives you a firm anchor from which you can draw an exceedingly clear line through the storms of our times. Because of this we cannot just say that my attitude toward God is one of submission. What is at stake, if I may use the expression, is not so much being a servant or slave of God. No, our primary attitude toward God—if his essence is that of a father—is that of being a child.

What does this mean in practice? Childlikeness in being and attitude is simply *the* way to heaven. This is clearly expressed by the fact of our salvation. With that I have covered the second thought. Now comes something for the heart:

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. St. John Bosco, letter of May 10, 1884 to the Salesians of the Oratory, as cited in *Forty Dreams of St. John Bosco* (Rockford, 1996), p. 217, 219.

## 3. The Value-Saturation

of this concept—the attempt to write this great fact of our salvation with its great significance into our heart. Toward that end let me present *two quotes*. I will merely present them for now and explain them later. One profound thought is from Pestalozzi, the other is from a pagan. I have deliberately chosen a Christian and a pagan so that you see how both of them unite in singing the praises of true childlikeness.

Pestalozzi says: "The greatest misfortune of humanity today is the lost sense of childlikeness because it renders impossible God's fatherly activity, God's fatherly educator-activity"<sup>9</sup>. Whoever understands the meaning of your community will cling to such a word and will work for days to grasp it more clearly. I will amplify and explain it later.

The second word is by a pagan from India, Tagore: "God wills that in holy wisdom we reconquer our childlike ways"<sup>10</sup>.

Prayerfully reflect on these words. Once you have relished them and savored them in prayer, childlikeness may begin to penetrate somewhat more deeply into your heart. What matters is not only that we have a clear idea of childlikeness, but that it fills our whole being and essence.

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<sup>9</sup> Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Swiss educator. Quote from *Die Abendstunde eines Einsiedlers*. See his collected works *Werke in vier Bänden* (Zurich, 1972), p. 321: "Hence mankind's lost sense of childlikeness toward God is the greatest misfortune of the world, because it makes impossible all God's fatherly education, and the restoration of this lost sense of childlikeness is the redemption of the lost children of God here on earth."

<sup>10</sup> Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Indian poet and philosopher.

## THIRD CONFERENCE

## RECAPITULATION

Our attempt to develop a coherent ascetical and educational system based on childlikeness has brought us to the topic: What is its value? We gave three answers:

First, childlikeness is the way to heaven. So that the outline is clear, let me repeat that we are interested in two aspects of this value—the fact and its content.

The fact. Is it really true, as we have asserted, that childlikeness is simply *the* way to heaven? Sacred Scripture gave us the answer. There we found two great facts of salvation; later it will give us two words of salvation.

We said that there are two facts of salvation. The first great fact which we must interpret correctly to reach our goal is this: the fatherhood of God.

We then proceeded to three further thoughts of interest:

First, clarifying the fact that "God is in his essence truly Father." We must study and elaborate on this fact at a later date. It is the foundation or at least essential to the foundation of the entire edifice of our retreat.

Secondly, its significance. The thought as such is, I believe, crystal clear. If in his essence God is Father, i.e., is fatherly in being and attitude, then it is self-understood (because fatherliness is a relational term) that our essential attitude toward him must be childlikeness in being and attitude. To the degree that we are convinced of God's fatherhood, we must also be convinced that childlikeness is the way to heaven. This is where we stopped this morning.

It is now our task to let these plain and relatively clear dogmatic truths penetrate more deeply into our hearts and emotions. Because of this we turned to a third point, namely value-saturation. We chose quotes from two great men to help us. The first was from

PESTALOZZI: "THE GREATEST MISFORTUNE OF HUMANITY TODAY IS THE LOST SENSE OF CHILDLIKENESS, BECAUSE IT RENDERS IMPOSSIBLE THE EDUCATIONAL FATHER-ACTIVITY, THE FATHERLY EDUCATOR-ACTIVITY OF GOD."

We want to analyze this statement a little and let it sink into our soul bit by bit. In order to speak as clearly as possible, I want to give you the outline

points right away. We will explain this statement, give the reason for it, and finally give the application.

## a. Explanation

I think the statement speaks clearly enough for itself. Just take a moment to consider how vast it is! Who among us does not know the misfortunes and calamities which have befallen humanity in our day and age! Where do we start? Perhaps with war, perhaps with the revolutions shaking our world to its core. And now Pestalozzi dares to say: A far greater calamity is the loss of childlikeness. I am convinced that we may and must truly take this statement at its word.

Do the following: Think of a misfortune which has befallen or could befall your community, the Church, or the modern world. Let your imagination paint this disaster in its worst colors. And now see if Pestalozzi is right—greater than all these calamities, in fact the very worst disaster that could strike and has struck humanity today, is the lost sense of childlikeness.

If this is true, or if you can agree with it from within, you will perhaps have an inkling of the enormity of your community's mission.

And if it is true, we may also turn the statement around and say: No greater blessing could come to humanity today than to reconquer this lost sense of childlikeness before God; there is scarcely any greater task or mission in the world of today than for mankind to reconquer this lost sense. Do not think that this only applies to the mission territories (though it applies there, too); no, it applies to the civilized world, to your compatriots, and to the entire Church. "A hero is someone who dedicates his life to a great cause" (Friedrich Hebbel). What a great task and mission we have! The way I see it, there are communities in the Church which differ only in outward task, but not in any clearly defined spirit. It almost seems that God permitted them for the sake of a healthy competition. But you are not like that. You have a very definite original character, a definite ethos, and therefore a definite mission. Let me stress again: Take Pestalozzi's words literally.

That was the first point, a short explanation of the statement. Secondly:

## b. The Reason.

Pestalozzi's reason is absolutely clear. Why is the lost sense of childlikeness the greatest misfortune? Because it renders impossible God's

fatherly educational activity!

At this point we must peer into the deeper philosophical and psychological context. If it is not too much of a distraction for you, you must really examine the philosophy and psychology of love.

### The Philosophy and Psychology of Love

The quickest and most tangible way to explain love is through the image of a tree. The *tree of love* has five parts:

root,  
foot,  
trunk,  
leaves and blossoms, and, finally,  
the fruit<sup>1</sup>.

What happens if you interpret these five parts in the spirit of a good Catholic psychology and philosophy?

The first two parts are the prerequisites or pre-conditions for love. Can you sense why I am leading you in this direction? Our aim is to know: What is necessary so that God can unfold his fatherly love in our lives? It is therefore important to answer the general philosophical and psychological question: Which things must always be present for true love to unfold? The abstract answer is this: First, the tree of love must have a root; secondly, its trunk must have a foot. Let me briefly explain.

#### The Root

What is the root? It is similarity and dissimilarity in the sense of a capacity and need for mutual complementation.

#### Similarity

Ask yourselves if this is true: For two persons to really be in love, they must have something in common—either a true similarity or an analogous one. This includes a similarity of being and on the level of the spiritual faculties.

Applied to God and to us: If God the Father really wants to love us in a fatherly manner, there must be at least an analogous similarity. In this

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Kentenich adopted the image of the tree of love from St. Francis de Sales. See *Theotimus, Treatise on the Love of God*, Book I, Ch. 7.

context I remind you of the *analogia entis*<sup>2</sup>—[meaning] it is a dissimilar similarity or a similar dissimilarity. The distance from us to God is infinite, but [the similarity] is enough for real love to be possible.

Similarity of being and spiritual faculties! For instance, we heard in today's table reading that no true love is possible between man and animal. Why not? Because there is no similarity of being.

#### Dissimilarity

But that is not enough, at least not according to the theory of St. Francis de Sales. There must also be dissimilarity. But not every dissimilarity is a pre-condition for true love. After all, we are all different, in spite of all our similarities. A spontaneous love does not happen from one day to the next. This is why Francis de Sales speaks of *dissimilarity* in the sense of a *capacity and need for mutual complementation*.

We need to pause for a moment, especially those who will have the task of working out an ascetical rationale in this spirit, for we need the larger psychological context.

A few points: Suppose I know you and hear that you have a friend. By knowing you, I can probably tell a lot about your friend. How? Through the fact that friendship—or any kind of love—presupposes a dissimilarity, i.e., a capacity and need for mutual complementation. If I know that you are a choleric, I can say from the start that your friend is most probably either sanguine or melancholic. This is because true love always presupposes different natures that can complement each other. I must be complemented by someone who is different. For me to give my heart spontaneously to someone there must be a dissimilarity. At any rate, he will not be choleric in the same way that I am.

Think about it. Think of *a mother and her child, a father and his child!* For motherly and fatherly love for the child to be possible, the law of dissimilarity must hold. There must not only be a similarity of being and spiritual faculties, but also a capacity and need for complementation. And there is no question that a child in a cradle can and must be complemented. But can we also say that the father and mother are in need of complementation from the child? Of course! Just think of how much fatherly and motherly love the child evokes in the parents by his helplessness.

<sup>2</sup> The analogy of being. Because man is made in the image and likeness of God (cf Gen 1,26), there is a correspondence between man and God on the level of being, though on infinitely different levels.

ness! Observe life; observe how you yourself react; observe your brothers and sisters! How often do we hear it said: "This young man or that young woman won't amount to anything!" But the moment they become a father or mother, a new source of life is stirred. Why? Because the child's need has awakened fatherly strength, fatherly generosity and formative power. I think we can now agree. This is the point of departure for our next train of thought.

Again: What is the prerequisite of true love? Similarity, but also dissimilarity—the capacity and need for mutual complementation. But if you ask me whether this applies to God as well, my answer will be 'yes' with one small reservation. We cannot say that God *needs* to be complemented. He *wishes* to be complemented. This willingness to be complemented is analogous to our need to be complemented.

What does this mean? *If God is to show his formative strength, his educational formative power, his fatherly kindness, his fatherly riches, he must be moved to do so by human helplessness and the desire to be formed.* This is a big statement. I will repeat it so that you can grasp the underlying intuition of Pestalozzi's statement: For God to be able to open to us his infinite riches and to show his educational formative power, there must be a corresponding openness and receptivity on the part of man.

What does that mean in practical terms? On the part of man: profound childlikeness is a necessity, for without it God cannot unfold his fatherly concern.

We would do well to reflect a little on this thought, because it is very important that we understand it clearly.

You see, God is willing to be complemented. In other words: God unfolds his educational activity; God pours out the riches of his gifts and graces upon those creatures who are pliable, small and humble. God is willing to be complemented! A person who acknowledges his smallness before God, confessing and acknowledging his misery is, in this sense, "omnipotent," and the omnipotent God is, in this sense, "powerless." When we recognize and acknowledge our misery before God, it means God becomes "powerless" and we become "omnipotent." Even though I may be guilty of untold sins, there is something worse—I can close in on myself and become hardened to God—in other words, I can fail to be small and childlike before God. As saints and Scripture tell us, the person who is humble and childlike obtains from God whatever he wishes. *Et exaltavis humiles*—he exalts the lowly (Lk 1,52). Why? Because the little ones are little; and God can only use *little* children, he cannot use big children. This

is how we must naively think these things.

To sum this up: Why is the lost sense of childlikeness the greatest misfortune of mankind today? Because our lost childlikeness does not give God an opportunity to unfold his quintessential attribute—being a Father. Because God is our Father, he must work on us (to use a human turn of speech) until we are pliable again, until we have become small again, until we can feel again that we are children. A humanity, a human society, an individual which cannot be small is either lost—forever!—or God must work in his goodness to gradually lead man back to the realization of his smallness.

If you are interested—I cannot do it now, for it would take us too far afield—I would recommend that you privately study the whole tree of love. I have only shown you the root. This is what was important for our topic.

### *The Foot and Trunk ...*

Whenever this similarity and dissimilarity (in the sense of a capacity and need for mutual complementation) are present, there will also be an *attraction*. This is the foot. And the ensuing *movement of love* is the trunk. If the conditions are there, the movement toward the You, toward the other, will begin of its own accord. Everything will be propelled in that direction. And this movement of love will give rise to *acts of love*. The soul wants to be spiritually close to the beloved and, whenever possible, be outwardly close, too. The acts of love in turn quicken the soul toward the *union of love*. The soul finds no rest until it rests in the inmost being of the beloved. It is in this sense that we understand that beautiful statement of St. Augustine: "You have made us for yourself; restless is our heart until it rests in you<sup>3</sup>." We desire to rest in God. This is the whole psychology of love as applied to our relationship with God. Now comes the third point:

### **c. Application**

To whom should we apply Pestalozzi's statement? [To the paganism around us and to ourselves.]

### **To the Neo-Pagans.**

If you do not mind, let me begin with the neo-pagans. What is the root-cause of modern neo-paganism? I think you can guess the answer. It is the lack of childlikeness.

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<sup>3</sup> *Confessions*, I, 1.

Would you like to know why? It is related to the underlying reasons why neo-paganism is growing and developing in the countries around us.

*Lack of Emphasis on Immanence —*

*One-sided Emphasis of God's Transcendence*

As a philosopher, let me begin by saying that we Catholics probably also share some blame for the rise of neo-paganism. It is my impression that our religious life has stressed God's immanence too little, and his transcendence too much. Great movements in the cultural and spiritual life tend to swing from one extreme to the other like a pendulum. We know this from the history of philosophy. A time that is characterized by one extreme is followed by a period dominated by the other extreme. Because we have concentrated too little on God's immanence, on God's life in the lives of men and in created reality, and concentrated too much on God's presence in heaven, it may be understandable to us why we now see a countertrend overemphasizing the immanence of God, even going so far as to make created things equal to God. A second reason is:

*The Experience of the War and Postwar Periods*

Have you thought about things like why neo-paganism has had its greatest successes in nations which suffered from the war [World War I and its aftermath]? This is easy to understand.

Anyone who has experienced the war or perhaps read some of the drastic descriptions of it will not be surprised that millions are bewildered and doubt the existence of a personal Father-God. The God who permitted such things to happen is supposed to be a Father?! Even those hearts which were taught to love God from childhood on have had a hard time upholding their belief in daily life after seeing God permit such frightful atrocities.

You can understand how this has *caused the belief in God the Father and his Divine Providence to be more and more shaken*. Or, look at the experiences of the postwar era. We must admit that our Christianity has become bourgeois-comfortable and self-satisfied. At least outwardly, it proved a failure in solving the great postwar problems. Is it not natural that this Christianity, comfortable and self-satisfied as it is, publicly preached and presented a comfortable and self-satisfied God? Hence, the image of God which got through to the devastated nations after the war was one for which people had little use. Because of this, Christians (including Catholics) are partially at fault for the enemy developing an image of God contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

In addition, there was another postwar experience. It was quite strong,

and you experience it here in your country as well: the changing of the guard from an extreme intellectualism to an *extreme vitalism*. I will return to this later when I speak about the crisis of our times. We will then see how a time when people wanted to solve everything rationally finally ended in a train wreck caused by precisely this rationalism and intellectualism. Here again we see the law of the pendulum.

An extreme vitalism is at work on both sides. In the end, extreme vitalism is a form of *irrationalism*. If we would approach someone today who is strongly affected by vitalism and ask what the essence of man is, he would take our declaration of man as a "rational animal" and say: No! Man in an irrational animal! And that is how man acts today too.

If man is irrational, God is made into an *ens irrationale* [an irrational being] too. See the connections! We must understand the development in order to understand what is sprouting up in the enemy camp.

*Boundless Arrogance*

To be totally honest, we must admit: "While things may be interpreted this way, the deepest reason for modern man's rejection of a personal God is his hubris, his boundless arrogance." Working with ordinary pagans you have probably never encountered such hubris. But modern man wants to shake off the yoke of God. "You shall be like gods" (Gen 3,5). He refuses to recognize a personal God who is also a personal judge.

However you try to convince modern man that such a God exists, your words will be in vain. Mere argumentation never convinces someone who is totally captivated by an idea. This is the tragedy of modern man. A man with aspirations to be God cannot be converted unless he is made to feel his limitations in every sphere. He must run aground. His vitalism must be broken by a vital experience [of helplessness]. Heavy blows of fate can, to some extent, return modern man to his senses. Our times are like a thunderstorm. We may lie safely under a tree. But, you understand what I am trying to say. The wounds of our time cannot be healed overnight. Nations are afflicted by a psychosis and we must learn from it.

All in all, you can see what the deepest reason is for the new paganism in our midst—an appalling lack of childlikeness.

But now we want to apply the term

**To Ourselves**

and to our Catholic circles. I must admit that we as men, also as religious men—and I do not exclude myself—on the deepest level

instinctively bow before God—how shall I put it?—as a kind of law within our breast. As Catholic men and Catholic priests we often *see and experience God too onesidedly as law, as Lawgiver, as an idea*. Please ask yourselves if this is really true. At least this is my experience. I have been trying for a long time to also see and experience God as a Father, as a person, and not merely as an idea. If someone tells me: I am never with God, but I have religious thoughts, I understand this very well. One can have many religious thoughts.

Take prayer. If *our prayer* is reduced to *religious thinking*, it is no longer prayer. I can have a great number of religious thoughts day after day and still not be interiorly transformed. *Prayer means loving*. What is sanctity? It is the love of the child for the Father!

I ask you to conduct a certain self-examination and ask: Is the God I know really a personal Father-God to whom I give my simple, childlike love? It may be that you can say "I do." Your schooling may not have been so overtly intellectualistic. But if your schooling was, I am afraid the normal expectation is that you will have difficulties experiencing yourself as a child before the Father. We lack a *sensitivity* toward God. In general, our attitude toward God is as a law or an idea, allowing us to respond to him but without the delicate touch of a child towards his father; we lack the strong instincts of a child. A child cries out for the Father and cannot live without a personal Father-God.

Where does this lack come from? We not only lack sensitivity, but often *magnanimity*. What did Our Lord, our model in everything, say so beautifully? "The One who sent me never leaves me alone. He is always with me." Why? "Because I always do what pleases him" (Jn 8, 29). You see, the child is not just trying to get by with the minimum. The child does not ask, "What *must* I do?" Francis de Sales gives us the following orientation: "On the royal barge of God's love..."—God's love meaning childlike love—"...there are no galley slaves, but only free rowers"<sup>4</sup>. The galley slave only works when the driver cracks his whip. The child works because it is his privilege. A child makes the Father happy. If the child knows that something is the Father's wish, he obeys gladly. This attitude is generous and magnanimous; it is the attitude of the saints, of the genuine children of God.

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<sup>4</sup> See Jean Pierre Camus, *The Spirit of St. François de Sales* (New York, 1952), p. 63.

What causes our lack of magnanimity? It is our lack of a deep childlikeness. Why is it that we are frequently so short of vigor, drive, and initiative, especially when faced with difficulties? Because we lack a true, genuine, simple and profound sense of childlikeness.

If you want to hear a wonderful example of how a true child reacts to cross and suffering, turn to St. Francis de Sales. As a matter of fact, *Francis de Sales* has a great deal to offer. You really should consult him often, for his whole spirituality is built on these fundamental pillars.

Francis de Sales once used the following illustration. A child, a girl, becomes ill. Her father is a doctor. It is a wonderful image, although it seems so simple. The father says: "You need surgery." The child responds, "You must be right." This is the total naivety of children. She does not rail against it or try to reason it out. She says, "If you think I need it, you must be right." As she lies on the operation table she whimpers, but in the midst of all the pain she cries out again and again: "Father, how much you must love me!" This is the triumph of childlikeness.

The Father prunes the vine so that it can bear more fruit (cf Jn 15,2). What must the vine do? It is God's fatherly goodness that guides the knife. Why is it that in my life this attitude comes so little to the fore, is so weak a part of my spontaneous reaction? Answer: Not because our sense of childlikeness is lost but because it is anemic. The sense of childlikeness has not become a pronounced feature of who I am.

In this connection I remember something that must come from *St. Jerome*. "Greatness is not having lived in Bethlehem, but having lived there in the *spirit* of Bethlehem!" Might you not apply this to your own community? Our unique originality is not to have gone to our Bethlehem seminary, but to have been educated in the spirit of Bethlehem. This is what matters! It means, in a down-to-earth and outstanding manner, becoming completely childlike toward God. This is the main thing!

With that I believe we have a grasp of the profound statement: The loss of childlikeness is the greatest misfortune befalling humanity today. Why? Because it simply renders impossible God's educational activity!

Look at the mission of your community once more in this light.

*The opposite can also be said:*

*To reconquer the sense of childlikeness is the greatest blessing we can present to humanity today!*

Whenever you go out and preach, your sermons ought to be a call for genuine childlikeness. The same applies to the retreats you give. Wherever you are, you ought to radiate the atmosphere of childlikeness. This is

the mission that forges you together as a community, which gives you energy and fervor! What will happen if you are not enthusiastic about your community, if you only carry the burden in God's name because it has been allotted to you by his Providence for better or for worse? You will never reach true greatness or radiate greatness to others—be it inside or outside the community. And if things seem so human? To err is human!

We come to the second saying, that of

TAGORE: "GOD WILLS THAT IN HOLY WISDOM WE RECONQUER OUR CHILDLIKE WAYS."

Please ponder these words! This is not supposed to represent a new idea, but to cause our hearts and emotions to tremble and quake in the face of the great task: It is God's will! If he wills it, all else must yield. Afterwards you will see much more clearly that this is truly the will of God. It is not just rhetoric. We know the call "It is God's will!" from the history of the crusades. "It is God's will!" should also give direction to our new crusade. Today we must launch a crusade to reconquer the holy land of childlikeness. We must be the advance guard of this crusade.

(....)

#### FOURTH CONFERENCE

Two facts of salvation and two words of salvation should bring us closer to the meaning of childlikeness. They should convince us that childlikeness is the way to heaven. We have already tried to interpret the first fact of salvation. (....) [and now we] consider the second fact:

#### **Second Fact: God's Only-Begotten Son Became a Child.**

For the sake of simplicity let me reuse the same three outline points.

##### **1. The Fact**

You know the fact, though from this perspective we can look at it in a deeper way. What fact do I mean? That the only-begotten Son became a child through the Incarnation.

It was a mystery of incredible import, a first-rate turning point in all of world history when the angels sang and the world became more and more aware that "The Word became flesh" (Jn 1,14). Yes, the Incarnation! God became man—by becoming a child! What does this mean? As the liturgy says: "For unto us a Child is born!" (Is 9,6).

This is an indisputable, immutable fact; it is part of world history.

Which brings us to the most important point, the second point, namely

##### **2. The Significance**

of this mystery. For our purposes here we are not asking "Why is God man?" but "Why is God a child?" What is the deeper reason? What is the meaning of this great mystery?

To begin with, let me remind you of an axiom dogmatic scholars like to use in Mariology. It goes like this: The way the Divine Word came to us is the way we must go to the Father. Again, you may interpret "becoming a child" in the two ways we did before: as childlikeness in being and in attitude. Becoming a child is simply *the* way to the Father.

Observe how the Divine Word, as he grew older, "advanced in age and wisdom and favor before God and man" (Lk 2,52) and how he revealed his childlike attitude in more and more heroic ways. The older the God-man became, the more clearly he revealed his childlikeness until he reached the climax of his complete self-surrender on the cross. What message does this hold for us? Our perfection will increase to the degree that we choose as our model (for our lives and actions) the God-man's childlikeness of being and living. *The greatest saint must be the greatest child.*

That will suffice for these two points, which should be plain to any priest with an understanding of dogma.

### 3. Value-Saturation

What I want to stress most of all is the value-saturation. In other words, I want to try to impress this thought more deeply into your hearts and emotions.

I feel obliged to give you a deeper exposure to the philosophical and psychological side of the question. The much easier approach, and the more common one, would be to explain Christ's childlikeness by expanding on this or that virtue. We should do that too, of course. But I do not want to take the easy road. I am not saying that you should not use the other approach in your everyday spiritual life, but my aim here is to help you as much as possible to build up a complete system of sanctity on the basis of childlikeness. Tomorrow we will understand each other much better.

Allow me to consider *three points*. Only at the end of the talk will you correctly understand the main point. We will move slowly, explaining just one word: "becoming a child," our own becoming a child.

Let me briefly mention the outline points:

- 1) childlikeness is both a natural and a supernatural drive,
- 2) becoming a child is the meaning of human existence,
- 3) the meaning of becoming a child is that we are formed into the image of the God-man.

Here you can see how philosophy and theology come together in a single grand view seen from the vantage point of childlikeness. What at first sounds strange and speculative will immediately become clear to you.

#### A. Childlikeness: a Natural and a Supernatural Drive

First: How is childlikeness to be understood? In this context we speak primarily of it as an attitude. This presupposes, of course, that one is a child. But for now, the attitude, or if you will, the disposition of childlikeness. Now you must play with the words a bit.

*The disposition of childlikeness is a natural drive.* You could replace the term "disposition of childlikeness" with "childlike love." In place of "a natural drive" you could talk about "a gift of nature," "a cry of nature," "a natural need." Philosophers like to play with words in order to better grasp the life process. Even if the words all say the same thing, each shows a different side of the life process. When we examine childlikeness as our family ideal, it tells us that it is incredibly anchored in human nature. But not only in human nature. Otherwise we might say, "For heaven's sake!

Childlikeness? I want to become a saint!" To which I respond:

*It is also a supernatural drive.* Childlikeness is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is not only a possession of nature, but also of the Spirit. I will gladly explain this to you in more detail.

And thirdly, it is not only a natural drive, not only a supernatural drive and a gift of the Spirit, but *it is both*. Here you will find in childlikeness a connector, a concentrated connection between nature and grace. I think I really ought to explain this to you a little so that the educators—especially those working for the community—can take home many insights to help them grasp the nature of youth.

#### a. Childlikeness as a Natural Drive

We want to consider 1) why childlikeness is a natural drive and 2) the history of childlikeness as a natural drive. This latter is not just any history, but the history of the development of our own childlikeness.

#### Reasons

The reasons have already been introduced. I first want to unfold them philosophically and then deepen them through examples from the lives of some great men.

#### The Philosophical Proof

Where is the philosophical proof for the undeniable fact that childlikeness is a natural drive, i.e., that childlikeness is a disposition which is inextricably bound up with the essence of our human nature? I only need to use a single word: *creaturehood*! Childlikeness as a cry of nature, as a natural disposition is founded in our nature as created beings. I am an *ens ab alio* [a being created by an Other], that is to say *limited* and therefore not self-sufficient. If I were an *ens a se* [a being created by Self] I could be sufficient unto myself like God.

The reality of creaturehood is therefore ultimately the same as the reality of childlikeness. You must weigh this expression well. The word childlikeness can be taken to mean different things. In this connection it means the cry for shelter, for complementation. Verify for yourselves: is not the disposition to be a child part of the essence of our creaturehood?

#### The Witness of Great Men

This would be the time to review everything *St. Ignatius* said about creaturehood and place it in a new light. You have said, however, that you only want me to allude to many things in passing so that I can unfold for



you the whole system. Anyone who would want to make a complete retreat would have to insert at this point the many insights of Ignatius about being a creature of God. He said a great deal on the topic; it would only have to be interpreted from the vantage point of childlikeness.

This gives us the metaphysical philosophical foundation of childlikeness.

At this point I would like to insert another famous axiom: If Dependence is what I embody in the order of being, then Devotion is what I embody in the order of action. This is true childlikeness.

If you would like to deepen this thought a bit more, then make a tour of world history. Allow me to point out just one insight, namely that of *Schopenhauer*<sup>1</sup>. He once spoke of the child in man. What did he mean? In every man there is a child; the child cries out in man. And we want to be honest: Can we not confirm this from our own experience? That we are children is metaphysically true, because we are creatures. But its truth is also something each of us can confirm from his own observations in life.

But I want to supplement Schopenhauer by saying that there is not only a child in every man, but also in every woman, in every girl. To be sure, when you observe life, you will find that the child in man cries more loudly than the child in woman. Just observe life: Men have such a down-to-earth childlikeness! It is the best way to win them over.

#### *Childlikeness and Men*

Would you like me to elaborate on this a bit? I do not know how well acquainted you are with modern literature and education. If you are, you will have noticed how much is written about the feminine ethos. The nature of woman has been studied from every possible angle, including from the metaphysical side. One hears again and again about how woman's essence is *virgo et mater* [virgin and mother]. But very little thought has been given to the nature of man. We must do much more on this in the future.

Just to mention it, I think I may say that the essence of the man is *puer et pater* [boy and father], though this may sound a bit novel. *Virgo et mater* is the essence of woman; *virgo* meaning both *infans* [child] and *puella* [girl]. If you examine this psychologically you will rediscover all the natural roots of childlikeness.

You may have heard of the term "the eternal woman." It means "that

which is eternal in woman." Let me coin a different word: "*the eternal child*." In every person there is something that transcends time. The quality of being a child, in the "eternal" child, the eternal creature, this "eternal" in the human breast, in man and in woman, is childlikeness.

#### *False "Masculine Piety"*

We are aware that our high ideal is inextricably bound up with human nature; such an awareness should make us breathe a little easier. We do not need to be ashamed. Someone who does not clearly understand the term childlikeness might be embarrassed and say, "Childlike? Never! I want to be a man, a knight!" We must not deceive ourselves. I can speak from long experience. In Germany one talks a great deal about "masculine piety." The way it is used is very dangerous, for the "masculinity" referred to is often violent and unenlightened. Let me be blunt: Whoever fails to educate the child in the man, leaves him vulnerable to unhealthy sexual tendencies. The many sexual deviations in our circles—do not take this lightly, for I speak here as a scholar who wants to be taken literally—the terrible sexual sins and failings which have afflicted members of religious orders are, in my opinion, to be attributed to a lack of education in genuine childlikeness.

I would strongly recommend that you verify the truth of such massive assertions, because they are so important for your community. When you are able to interiorly accept them, you will see that they contain a great mission. If, on the other hand, you cannot be enthused about such a task, it is mere coincidence that you joined this community.

To summarize: Childlikeness is a natural drive and a cry of nature!

We now come to the second point. It points the way to practical everyday life. It invites us to investigate

#### **The History of My Own Childlikeness**

Ask yourselves: How has childlikeness developed in the course of my life? You must answer this for yourselves. I only wish to help you a little by illustrating the various kinds of childlikeness from a psychological point of view. As I analyze them you should look back and consider the development of your own childlikeness from earliest childhood on until your present stage in life.

I will distinguish between *three kinds of childlikeness* related to the development of the soul. Childlikeness can be undeveloped, pathological [or untouched].

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer (1786-1860), German philosopher.

## Undeveloped Childlikeness

We begin with undeveloped childlikeness. It demands a more thorough study, if for no other reason than to give us a clearer picture of what it is. It can also be an incentive to be more attentive to this aspect of life. To give you a clear outline, I will consider:

1. The meaning of undeveloped childlikeness,
2. its cause,
3. its effect,
4. its remedy.

### 1. Meaning

What is undeveloped childlikeness? It is when the natural drive of childlikeness is insufficiently developed. In fact, from what I know of our modern world, I must say that those who suffer from this lack of childlikeness are beyond count. We all have parents, of course, and yet how few of us have had real fathers and mothers! You understand what I am trying to say.

### 2. Cause

What causes this lack, this undeveloped childlikeness? Philosophers and the psychologists remind us that childlikeness is relational. Its development hinges on the relationship with a You, a fatherly or motherly You. That is the great longing of humanity today, because there are so desperately few fathers and mothers.

In this context let me remind you of something Nietzsche said. He lamented the loss of "father and mother lands." To paraphrase him: "The fathers and mothers of our time have disappointed me and I therefore long for a land of children; I want to steer my ship toward the yet undiscovered children's land<sup>2</sup>." What does he mean? *Children are so few because there are so few fathers and mothers.* The 'children's land' of childlikeness has yet to be discovered. Why? Because the land of motherhood and fatherhood must be discovered first!

You will say: That's an exaggeration! Well, that depends. Just take a look at our whole culture! Why is it in such terrible decline? Is this not an indication that a decline of the family has already set in? If we must admit the terrible religious and moral decline of Christian and Catholic culture,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. F.W. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Part 2, *Vom Lande der Bildung*.

we must also admit the decline of the family. And the decline of the family means the decline of fatherliness and motherliness.

When all is said and done, what causes childlikeness to remain undeveloped? It is the devastating lack of dedicated fatherliness and motherliness. With this we touch on a festering wound. It gives you a much better idea of how important your community ideal is for our culture!

### 3. Effect

Allow me to ask: What effect does undeveloped childlikeness have? Anyone with a deficit in childlikeness *lacks an essential part of what it means to be human*. Please verify this for yourself. If you would like to hear it stated more strongly, you can say it yourselves in different and more drastic ways: One cannot be truly human if one has never been a child; such a one lacks something essentially human. He leads a twilight existence, however great he may appear in public office or private life. He is only half a man, even on the merely natural plane.

Another great disadvantage is that he *lacks the normal bridge to the supernatural reality of the Heavenly Father*. What is the normal path to a childlike relationship with God the Father? The normal path is the childlike relationship with an earthly, physical father. Is this not obvious? Here you immediately have the answer to why so many Catholics do not develop a childlike attitude toward the Heavenly Father: Because untold millions have never had the experience of childlikeness with an earthly father. They have traveled the world over and lived the Catholic faith, be it in retreat or other activities. You would be amazed at how difficult it is to lead many Catholics to a childlike relationship with their Heavenly Father, although some can talk splendidly about it. The normal bridge is missing.

### 4. Remedy

Which brings us to the fourth point: What is the remedy? I could present a whole philosophy about this. I'm sure you can tell that I have thought a lot about these matters. Let me begin with a theoretical answer. It is perhaps only for those who are well-versed in philosophy and psychology, but I will then apply it to practical everyday life.

The great philosophical and psychological question facing every true educator today is: *How can knowledge become love?* The true educator is not just interested in transmitting knowledge, but also love. Here are *four ways*.

A concrete example: Let's say I have read something about the heaven-

ly Father's love for me. What can I do to transform this knowledge into love? You can see that this question is the same as the first: How can I educate myself and others in childlike love?

*First answer: Reflection.* I give clear and independent thought to these truths until I understand the entire complex of what they mean. This truth can then lead me to love. Now to be quite honest, I must make clear to you that love, including natural love, is a mystery. Do not forget that! There are not only supernatural but also natural mysteries. As a result, this method can only bring me close to love. Those of you with a speculative mind like mine will often have to go this route—thinking over these realities as clearly as possible, down to the last detail—just to keep the process of love nourished in their souls.

Applied to us, this would mean that we must reflect on what it means that God is our Father and we are his children. By a clear insight into this truth our love might be stirred.

*Second answer: Association.* What do I mean by this? Let's say (it might not be the case for each of us, but I will assume it here) that I have already had some kind of a pre-experience of a truth, in this case that I have truly experienced love. What do I mean? Let's say I have a personal ideal, a core experience, a core religious experience. All of us must have one of these, or else our choice of vocation would not make sense! Now my assumption is that at some point we have experienced true love, like that of a father or substitute father, or of a mother or substitute mother. It might also have been the love of a friend, etc. What now? Now I read something on the topic. For instance, what does Sacred Scripture say about God's fatherly love? Then to enkindle my love for God, I start from my experience of love and tell myself: Human beings love me like that; they are very much attached to me. Now Scripture tells me of the wonderful things God does for me. His love for me must therefore be infinitely greater! *I associate a new insight with a past experience relevant to it.* In this way the new knowledge gradually takes on something of the experiential character found in what I have already experienced.

*Third answer: Comparison.* Here I suppose that my experience [of childlikeness] did not penetrate the core of my being. I compare what I read with what I have experienced [and try to discern the next step for me].

*Fourth answer: Contrast.* This point will be quite important later. The fourth way of translating knowledge into life is to *bluntly and even painful-*

*ly contrast individual characteristics of what childlikeness is—in theory and practice—with what I lack.* I start with this theoretical expression for the benefit of those who like to pursue such thoughts abstractly. But let me be more down-to-earth. Suppose that I must admit that *my childlikeness is undeveloped*, that it never got beyond the most rudimentary stages. Again: This means untold suffering. No matter how manly someone may appear on the outside, deep on the inside something is amiss, even if it be just the powerful, unsatiated desire for an unknown land.

What can I do? First of all (I speak of childlikeness as a natural drive) *I can make a serious effort to make up for my missing experience of childlikeness through a complementary experience.* The lack should be overcome with a new experience. This is not, of course, something dependant on me, but on my educators.

If you know the situation of our culture today, it really ought to be the highest ideal of your priestly service to be as fatherly as possible with your whole being. But not grandfatherly! Do not confuse the two! Fatherliness is not about being weak. Today the true concept of fatherhood has been lost. We would really have to devote a dedicated study to the metaphysics of fatherliness and fatherhood, for without a clear concept of fatherliness you cannot have a clear concept of childlikeness. The word "God the Father" connotes not only kindness, but also strength. The love of a father may also cause us pain.

The ideal must be: to educate myself in my personal essence through the means offered me by the community. *I educate myself so that the likeness of God the Father in me becomes as perfect as possible.* What does that mean? You cannot imagine how many opportunities this gives us to help others make up for a lack of childlikeness!

Do not misunderstand me. I certainly do not mean that those entrusted to you should constantly call you father and that you should call them children. This is not what does it. On the contrary: It is often those who do not open themselves up to you and who are the most reserved who have the deepest experience of childlikeness in the inmost depths of their soul. This is such a delicate life process! If we reflect on these things too much in public, they often lose their effect.

If childlikeness is as important as we say it is, and if it is true that countless people lack the experience of being a child, then *the main task in education* must be to *provide an opportunity to make up for this lack.* Consider what this means. This morning I said that every superior should be a reflection of the fatherliness of God; but I also think that this should

be a trait which we *all* live. If I see childlikeness as my mission, if I stand before others as an original image of genuine fatherliness, then I will be able, merely humanly speaking, to mediate the most childlikeness to others.

These things have already been on my mind for twenty to thirty years because I really think we must better observe what is going on in the world around us. You will not find these things in books. If you observe yourselves or people of some standing in the world outside, you will find many who have never experienced a childlike relationship with anyone and yet are still childlike. How is this possible? *I can also experience the childlikeness I lack through an intense experience of fatherhood.*

Let's say that I have never deeply interiorly experienced with another person what it means to be a child. Now, as a priest, I have the opportunity to experience how all my fatherly love is awakened. To be sure, this presupposes that someone is a child to you. As I explained to you this morning—fatherliness and motherliness are realities that need someone to awaken them.

Let me suppose that I am a spiritual director or otherwise deal with people. What do I suddenly experience? Childlikeness. Not in me, but in the others. This childlikeness awakens in me all the latent fatherliness slumbering within. I am convinced that an intense experience of fatherliness can substitute for the missing experience of childlikeness. Why? Because, as I mentioned before, it makes me bluntly aware, in theory and practice, of what childlikeness really is. I experience it—in someone else. It awakens my fatherliness and I see what I was missing. It suddenly comes to life in me how someone can behave as a child to a father. That is how I should be in my relationship with the Heavenly Father.

*There are other ways to make up for deficient experiences of childlikeness, e.g., through contact with children or people who are childlike.* You must not overlook this, for it is of great importance! On the merely natural level, it is a great blessing if some of you can work with the youth. This is something which Langbehn<sup>3</sup> stresses. He rebuffs the ridicule heaped on those who are childlike. Even when such feelings are acknowledged in theory they are often scorned in practice. He adds that the foolish people of today need to become children again.

So what should we do to make up for our lack of childlikeness? Foster

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<sup>3</sup> Julius Langbehn (1851-1907), German author and educator also known as the "Rembrandt German."

contact with children or childlike persons! If you succeed in educating your family to become true children, you will fulfill a great mission indeed. Without preaching much, you will accomplish a great task. Whatever you do, you will radiate to all sides a true childlikeness. This is how I think the world will be renewed. You must not expect that the masses will be converted. Perhaps this will happen at a later stage; at present we are satisfied with winning back lost ground an inch at a time.

### **b. Childlikeness as a Supernatural Drive**

So far I have shown how one can recognize the lack of childlikeness on the natural level. We now proceed to give a second group of answers. They presuppose the interaction and interrelationship of nature and grace and result in that supernatural childlikeness being another way to awaken natural childlikeness.

### **Preliminary Consideration**

Suppose that in educating your youngest seminarians you suddenly realize: I must lead them to a childlike devotion to Mary. This would, of course, be quite easy if all the boys came with a deep love for their natural mothers. But you can not always presuppose this. In fact, I think you must expect the mother-child relationship of many will be significantly strained. What can I do pedagogically to help my boys develop a love for the Blessed Mother? I really ought to promote an image of Mary to them as the ideal of the great and nearly omnipotent woman. This allows them to feel their helplessness. It has a powerful effect on youth if you go about it the right way<sup>4</sup>. Of course, it takes five or six years to achieve this; it cannot be done in a year. The true educator is like this; he does not say one thing today and another thing the next. The true educator is a man of a single idea. Our nervous generation can no longer stay with one idea. One thought drives out the other. Because of it, no solid work gets done. If you succeed in leading your boys to a deep love for Our Lady, you will see how

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<sup>4</sup> This was Fr. Kentenich's experience as spiritual director in the founding years of Schoenstatt (1912-1919). As subsequently described by one of the boys, later Fr. Alex Menningen, his method consisted of showing high *ideals* which also forced the boys to confront their *limitations* and discover the deep relationship of being *entrusted to Mary*, all the while supported by the healthy atmosphere of a spiritual family. See J. Niehaus, *New Vision and Life* (Waukesha, 1986), especially pp. 53-116.

the image of the natural mother is transfigured in the light of Mary, and how *childlike love carries over from the love of Mary to the image of the natural mother*. In other words, one can also try to reconquer childlikeness from the experience of the supernatural world, because both worlds need and support one another.

Let me mention Langbehn again. It is his opinion that whoever wants to overcome the folly of modern man can and must see to it that he has much *contact with the Child Jesus*. This is truly your world. We must lead modern man to the Child Jesus and his Mother. The Blessed Mother awakens childlikeness wherever she can. You must therefore be grateful that Marian devotion is such a strong feature of your institute.

Perhaps you can no longer see the forest for the trees. What have I explained thus far? The first part of the insight that childlikeness is both a natural and a supernatural drive. We now come to the second part: *Childlikeness is also a supernatural drive*.

### Reasons

Childlikeness is a supernatural drive. What does this mean? *Childlikeness is a singular gift of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of childhood. St. Paul says it in his own forceful way: It is the Holy Spirit who comes and says, almost like a mother using baby talk: Now say "*Abba*, dearest Father!" (Rom 8, 15). It is the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us with unspeakable groans (Rom 8, 26). It is the spirit of sonship. The Holy Spirit would like to give us the being and the attitude of a child. And this is a supernatural gift. It is childlikeness as a supernatural gift and therefore, indirectly, also a natural gift.

Here again you have a starting point for a system: *The supernatural awakens and perfects the natural*.

The Holy Spirit gives us the gift of wisdom, and the gift of wisdom is the true source of mysticism. *The source of genuine childlikeness is the gift of wisdom*. (....)

### The History of our Supernatural Childlikeness

As before, I would like to inquire into the history of our supernatural childlikeness. What is it like? We can take the same outline points and speak of

#### Undeveloped childlikeness.

Yes, supernatural childlikeness can also be undeveloped. What does this mean? It has not been developed. In practical terms: I have not

experienced supernatural childlike love. At this point I want to go back to something I omitted before.

### Pathological Childlikeness

*Natural childlikeness* can not only be found in an undeveloped but also a *pathological* form. When is natural childlikeness pathological? When *mind and thinking* become too onesidedly fixated on endless chains of speculation. When *the will and emotions* develop an irreverence which is out of control. Please ask yourselves: How is it with my childlikeness? Does it show signs of illness?

Now apply this to *supernatural childlikeness*. We can or must speak of a supernatural childlikeness which has turned pathological when we think of *mortal sin* or, in certain situations, of venial sin. Here we come face to face with the great *mysterium iniquitatis* [mystery of iniquity]. Still, if one's sins become an occasion to joyfully acknowledge one's wretchedness before God, that person will rise to a higher degree of supernatural childlikeness.

### Untouched Childlikeness

Thirdly, there is also such a thing as *untouched childlikeness*, both in the natural and in the supernatural order.

*In the natural order* it can be of *two kinds*. (1) It can be untouched because life has not yet tested it. Such childlikeness is not on the level of a virtue but is merely a natural drive. But there is also (2) a mature untouched childlikeness. You can study it in the life of St. Therese of Lisieux. She is often very misunderstood. Her childlikeness had great strength. If you know the feminine soul you will understand this. A woman, when strongly attached to someone, is engaged with her whole being. We are told that St. Therese felt a strong drive to visit her superior. This was normal. But she wanted to be strict with herself. What did she do? She held tight to the railing and told herself, "I do not want to go into that room!" *Untouched childlikeness is the summit of self-surrender and selflessness*. It is childlikeness that has been tested and purified in the hard struggles of life. Tested and selfless childlikeness is the epitome of self-surrender.

If you apply this to *purely supernatural childlikeness* you will see that *childlikeness equals heroic sanctity*. (....)

## FIFTH CONFERENCE

At the end of today's thoughts, prayers and plans we want to pause and rest at an intermediate point in our reflection. We would do well to bring our train of thought to a certain resting point. At the center of our last conference was our reflection and prayer on how the God-man became a child and how we must become children, too. We wanted to more deeply grasp this "becoming a child" and see it in the larger picture. We therefore began an examination of three points.

The first was: Childlikeness is both a natural and supernatural drive; a gift of nature and a gift of God and grace.

### B. Becoming a Child is the Meaning of Human Existence

The second point is: Becoming a child is the meaning of human existence. At this point I would like to draw your attention again to modern lines of thought. It has undoubtedly occurred to you that the heresies of our times are anthropological, that is to say, that they center around the essence and existence of man, around the image of man. Modern heresies, of course, also have secondary features and may be, for instance, christological or trinitarian as well, but *all of today's heresies circle primarily around the image of man*. As preachers we must know this. It is our task to assist modern man in finding the true, Catholic idea of man.

### The Christian Image of Man

Towards this end let me briefly summarize the Christian anthropology. Here we distinguish between its static and dynamic elements. Its static element inquires into the original being of man, while its dynamic side is interested in the unique features of man's development and action.

### Static Side of the Image of Man

First of all, a few words about the static side of Christian anthropology. Here we want to give an answer to the serious question: *What*, in reality, *is man*? What is a Christian?

Let me give you *four answers*. It will sound new, so you will need to reflect on this a great deal. When we reach the climax of our retreat, we will come back to it as the foundation of our whole edifice. Things will then make much more sense

### A boundary being

To start with, man—and therefore the Christian—is a "boundary" being. With this I do not want to express so much his limitations, but rather the fact that man is a "citizen of three worlds," to put it in popular terms. He is a citizen of the world of drives and passions, of the world of intellect and spirit, and of the world of God.

In our Catholic view, man has animal drives; there is an animal in him. We therefore call him an "*animal rationale*" [a rational *animal*]. But man is also a rational, spiritual being; there is something of an angel in him. Hence an "*animal rationale*" [a *rational animal*]. And beyond that, if we understand the term correctly, man is also a divinized being, a child of God.

Therefore, man by his very essence is someone on the boundary of three worlds. Do you know the consequences of this?

### A pendulum being

Secondly, man is a pendulum being or a being "in the air." You will later understand what I mean by this. For now you must see if my concept really corresponds to reality.

The terms state that man is a pendulum being or a being in suspense. I will add *two terms* which should get you thinking—both on the level of being as well as on the level of attitude and life. Observe your own life to verify it. Why do we so often find ourselves in uncertainty and suspense? Because it goes with our existence on the [three-fold] boundary.

We make the experience again and again that the animal in us tries to dominate one day, while the spirit and intellect rage the next, and perhaps on the day after it is the child of God who seeks to triumph. Even on the level of being we are constantly going back and forth! To be a human and a Christian means to be constantly "in the air" and moving like a pendulum. By the way, this is an expression which is well-suited to expressing the modern feeling of life. It is an expression which will powerfully guide our discussion tomorrow and the day after.

Where is the anchor and resting point for such a pendulum existence? Only above; in the place where it is attached! And where can modern man, especially modern man who experiences his human condition so deeply, find his rest and anchor? When we live in the comfort of a bourgeois life, we are inclined to think that our inner security must be like a table, with its legs firmly on the ground. This is not true. If man is a pendulum being, a creature in suspense, then the form of security most befitting his nature is to be anchored above in the hand of the Father. There alone will our souls

find rest; there alone is the rest toward which we should aspire. You must bear this in mind! I will later explain it in more detail when I analyze the crisis of our modern times and how childlikeness is the only effective remedy. Why? Because the security proper to human nature can only be found above, in the security of his primal nest, and not here below.

#### *A searching being*

The third answer flows from the first and second: By his very nature man is a searching being, or—if you want to understand this expression correctly—a *being at a loss*. Man is always at a loss, even on the level of who he is. You must listen inside yourselves and see to what extent this is true. Man is always seeking something, always on the way somewhere. If we find that these few roughly sketched lines remind us of ourselves, we need not become uneasy, for we must tell ourselves that we then embody human nature in a preeminent way.

Anyone who goes through life in the security and self-satisfaction of bourgeois living should not pretend he is better than the rest. He cannot expect that he, as a child, will run spontaneously back into the hand of God. Someone else, however, who is most perfectly imprinted with the nature of man, has in his breast a primal drive hastening him into the heart of God. He desires the security of a pendulum. No other rest seems right to him.

Allow me to give a final answer, completing the survey of significant static elements proper to a Christian anthropology.

#### *A sublime being*

Finally, man is a sublime being. What does this mean? First of all, on the level of being, within man lies a most remarkable and contradictory potential. Man can become a saint, embodying the mystery of love, but he can also become a criminal, a demon—both possibilities lie in every human being. Those of us who have become most mature are most keenly aware of this potential for evil within them. Cannot someone who embodies all that is noble in man today become a rogue tomorrow?

This most incredible potential in man is found not only on the level of being, but also on the level of living. This is true. Not only can I become a saint or a criminal, but I can also make an angel or a criminal of someone else. Just listen to the different ways we can say "*Ecce homo*" [Behold the man] (Jn 19, 5). "That is a *man*?" What an inhuman and subhuman creature, the refuse of humanity! Or on the other hand: "*That is a man!*" What a holy and noble creature! If you meet older confreres who are held in high esteem, you look up to them because they have more or less mas-

tered life. What a great human accomplishment! Those of us who are still young do not know the potential slumbering deep within; we do not know what will become of us.

#### **Dynamic Side of the Image of Man**

These are the four answers of the static side of the Christian image of man. This brings us to the dynamic side. As you can see, the fourth answer builds a bridge for us. The great law of human dynamics is: *Become what you are!* Everything in you which is great and noble should be perfected. You should develop all the seeds of nobility found within you. Become what you are!

I can now tell you: This nobility and greatness is the same as childlikeness. For us, childlikeness is the great aim of human growth. Becoming a child is the meaning of our lives, for it is our ideal of human existence.

#### **C. Becoming a Child Means Being Formed Into The Image of the God-Man.**

And the meaning of becoming a child—I now close the circle of thought—is that the God-man should be formed in us. St. Paul calls out to us: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ living in me" (Gal 2, 20).

This is truly the total meaning of Christian education: that we be formed in the image of the God-man, the only-begotten Son. The God-man in his sonship should take shape and form and come to life in us. Here would be the place to insert the entire teaching on the Mystical Body of Christ. The table reading will remind us of this teaching.

I now close, so that you do not become too tired. What did we discuss today? It was much. Or should I say, it was little? We only described and provided a value-saturation for two simple thoughts, two well-known facts of salvation. We examined them from the standpoint of childlikeness. What are these truths? God's fatherhood and the Incarnation of his Son. Have these thoughts gripped our hearts? If all we accomplished today was to gain a deep reverence for the great aim of our community, to begin to stammer in awe before the greatness of this ideal which is ours, we will have accomplished a great deal.

Let me remind you that when I speak this way it is not some rhetorical game. You will sense that what I am sharing with you comes from my most heartfelt conviction. Furthermore, these things are well-founded, and you should check their accuracy. It is so essential that we think clearly,

that we see what our community's aim is. Its aim is to create a new type of man, and this new type is the real answer to the desire of the human heart and the answer to the greatest needs of our time.

Reflect for yourselves on the second train of thought. The dogmatic structure is simple. "As the Divine Word came to us from the Father, so we should go to the Father." This is the way of becoming a child. What does this process look like? We have seen it in the context of childlikeness as both a natural and a supernatural drive. The meaning of human existence is growth toward childlikeness. The meaning of growth toward childlikeness is that we become more like the God-man. Here we stand once more at the beginning. The God-man, the only-begotten Son of God must take form and shape in us, both in our being and in our attitude.

Those of us who are liturgically minded will find it easy to connect these thoughts tomorrow morning with Holy Mass. Is not Holy Mass a renewal of our formation into Christ? As a result, must not every Holy Mass be the great means for fostering childlikeness in us? When I later speak about the ways of attaining childlikeness, I will expressly mention the liturgical way. I mention it to you now so that you can already take advantage of the insight. It will be considered systematically in the fourth part of our retreat when we speak of the ways that lead us to the source and root of childlikeness. There are three ways: the liturgical, the ecclesial and the Marian way.

## SIXTH CONFERENCE

In the investigation of our family ideal—childlikeness—we have not yet completed the first point. Childlikeness, in the spirit of our community, has two sides. First, it has a biblical side which is well anchored in the spirit of our community. Secondly, in our community it has a unique apostolic flavor. Both sides should be seen: its apostolic dimension and its biblical foundation.

We are presently considering the value of childlikeness, and here too we have not gotten beyond the first point—childlikeness as the way to heaven. We were considering the proofs of this statement. There are two kinds of proofs which we want to bear in mind.

First come the facts of salvation—God's fatherhood and the childhood of his only-begotten Son. Might we have misinterpreted these great truths of salvation? We must admit that it is possible, but we know enough dogmatic theology and have had ample opportunity to examine the correctness of this train of thought.

## II. The Words of Salvation

However, to exclude every doubt and error, we want to consider a second source of proof. Next to the facts of salvation we want to place the words of salvation or, more precisely, the words of Our Lord. Christ's words should be the true test of validity. If they confirm our findings from yesterday, there can be no more room for error.

In the interests of a clear outline, I would like to distinguish between two *kinds of words of Our Lord*. I make this distinction, of course, only with regard to their relevance for our family ideal, for childlikeness. I will distinguish between a core statement and auxiliary statements.

### A. Core Statement

I will limit myself to a single saying of Our Lord, for it is truly so central that we have no need for any further core statements. It is:

"Unless you become like children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of God" (Mt 18, 3).

We must hear this word and interpret it as if for the first time. It will be our faithful companion for the remainder of the retreat.

We begin by calling to mind the occasion on which Our Lord spoke these words. In Bible scholarship a great deal depends on the situation in



which a word was spoken.

It was probably at the end of Our Lord's activity in Galilee. He had already spoken of his impending passion twice, but, strangely enough, the apostles had not understood him (Mt 16, 21-23; 17, 22f).

If you can imagine the mentality of the countries around us, you will understand the mind-set of the apostles. They were convinced that Our Lord was the great political Messiah. They were also firmly convinced that they would be appointed his ministers in the new kingdom. And just as in our neighboring countries these positions were all decided before the revolution—this one will take over foreign affairs, that one finance, etc.—the apostles must have expected the same thing. So now Our Lord speaks of his suffering and death for a second time and the apostles do not understand him. In fact, they misunderstand him so totally that they begin to discuss who will take over what positions of power.

They may have acted this way because of their general misconception, but it was probably reenforced by two great facts. Christ had taken some of his apostles to the mountain where he was transfigured (Mt 17, 1-9). What the apostles could now say about the radiance and glory of the God-man was naturally very alluring and intensified their expectations. Moreover, it was not long before this that Christ had solemnly appointed Simon Peter the leader of the Twelve (Mt 16, 13-20). He was to be the head of the new kingdom and the successor of Christ. Of course that must have caused the other apostles to ask, "What about us? What will my position be?" So they argued, discussing how the different posts would be distributed among them.

They now come to Our Lord. Christ knew at once that they were talking about their ambitions. He took them to task: "What were you discussing along the way?" (Mk 9, 33). And now Christ begins to reveal to the apostles, his future leaders, a most unusual ideal. In education it is frequent practice to explain an ideal by using the example of some outstanding person. Typically, one takes the great men of world history and says: You must become like them! But what does Our Lord do? He takes a child and says: You who are so ambitious, who want to be first in the "political" kingdom which I will never found, what should be your ideal? Unless you become like this child I will have no use for you in my kingdom, to say nothing of you becoming its leaders.

Do you understand the situation? The ambitions of the apostles are immediately crushed! What does Christ demand? Unless you become like children! Unless we do this, we cannot even enter his kingdom, much less

be its strongest members!

I hardly think that I need to say more about this core statement, at least for now. Becoming a child is simply *the* way to heaven. It is just so clear! I think any further explanation would only muddy the waters. Therefore let me add to the core statement some

## B. Auxiliary Statements.

As you ponder this you can look up for yourselves what the apostles have to say about becoming children<sup>1</sup>. I think that this would be the right moment to properly take personal possession of everything which Christ tells us about the "rights of children" in his kingdom. They are especially applicable to us.

### 1. "Children's Rights" in Christ's Kingdom

Please listen to how he proclaims this law and the positive and negative sanctions he gives!

#### The Proclamation

The proclamation took place when Christ, exhausted from his apostolic activity, wanted to rest. The apostles, who had observed him during the day and who were working with him, thought he deserved this rest. But now some others wanted to come. We can easily imagine the situation! They are mothers of Israel and want the great prophet to see and bless their children. It is a very down-to-earth request. The apostles try to stop them: The Master must rest! Now comes the great proclamation:

"Allow the children to come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Mt 19, 14).  
What a marvelously profound word! You must really reflect on it! *To whom do the children belong? The children belong to the Child!* Observe the intimate relationship between the only-begotten Son of God and ourselves, the late-born children of God. This word applies to us in its full meaning. The Child belongs to the children; God's afterborn children belong to the God's only-begotten Child!

If you want to truly grasp and analyze this solemn promulgation, you must grasp its positive and negative sanction.

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<sup>1</sup> See especially 1 Peter 2,1-3 and 1 John 2,28 — 3,3.

## The Sanctions

*The negative sanction* is the terrible and crushing word:

"It would be better for anyone who leads astray one of these little ones ... to be cast into the depths of the sea with a millstone around his neck" (Mt 18, 6).

"Who leads astray one of these little ones." What does Our Lord mean? Whoever leads them into an occasion for doing evil. What does Our Lord demand of such a one? "It would be better for him to be cast into the sea with a millstone around his neck." Here you are listening to a man of the people who means what he says. The stone should be bound around his neck and not around his foot so that he cannot keep his balance. If it were tied to his feet or hands, he would have a better chance to save himself. What kind of a stone should be used? A millstone, an extraordinarily heavy stone. The guilty one must go completely under! And where should he be cast? Not only in a river, but into the sea, in fact, "into the depths of the sea"! You notice how important it is to Christ that true and genuine childlikeness be properly protected!

This is the negative sanction. We may well ask ourselves whether and to what extent such hard words apply to ourselves, whether and to what extent we might have led each other astray? As children of God we must not be an occasion for the loss of childlikeness!

And *the positive sanction*? How inviting and inspiring it sounds:

"Whoever welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me!" (Lk 9, 48).

On another occasion Our Lord fervently declares:

"I tell you their angels in heaven"—the angels of these children—"constantly behold the face of my heavenly Father" (Mt 18, 10).

These angels behold the face of the Father *in* the children.

To be sure, I know that the auxiliary statements we have thus far examined were primarily and directly meant for those who are physically small. But we are justified in also applying them to the spiritually small, to spiritual. What are we told in dogmatics and exegesis about the expression "whoever welcomes... in my name?" It means to welcome someone because I believe in the reality of the Mystical Body of Christ. When I accept and welcome someone as a member of Christ, I welcome Our Lord himself. The union that exists between Christ and ourselves is a *unio quasi physica*—it is not merely moral, though it is not purely physi-

cal either<sup>2</sup>.

"Whoever welcomes such a child as this in my name welcomes me." Our Lord is not satisfied with this; he goes still further: "Whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but him who sent me." How warm and joyful this sounds! This is how totally and completely he rejoices with the children, how he lives in and out of the world of being a child, he the only-begotten Child of God!

## 2. Other Auxiliary Words

On another occasion he emphasized: *Their angels*, the angels of these children, *continually see in them the face of the Father* (cf Mt 18, 10). He speaks as if he were saying: "These children look like their Father! Even the angels rejoice when they see the heavenly Father in these children!"

This and similar expressions ought to find a place in our daily meditation; we ought to constantly nourish our piety, our thinking, living and loving from such a world of values!

Listen to yet another saying of Our Lord, "*I thank you, Father, for what you have hidden from the learned and the clever you have revealed to the merest children!*" (cf Mt 11, 25; Lk 10, 21). Here again we find an extremely strong and joyful accent on how Our Lord pays homage to the greatness of childlikeness.

There are still more passages from Sacred Scripture which you might want to examine. "We should be as simple as doves" (Mt 10, 16). What does this mean? Again, we want to become children! Or again, what we pray so often, especially on Low Sunday: *sine dolo lac concupiscite*—we want to be as eager as newborns for the pure milk of the spirit! (cf 1 Pet 2, 2). As children of God we want to longingly take in this pure milk again and again.

I think we have proved our point. What we have discussed so far cannot be disputed. We only want to secure the argument beyond all doubt: that childlikeness, that becoming a child is *the* way to heaven. Should we not also—to the extent these truths have gripped us—rejoice once more that God has given us such a beautiful, radiant ideal whose anchors are

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<sup>2</sup> The theological expression *unio quasi physica* (quasi-physical union) attempts to grasp the mystery of the closeness to Christ that we have as members of his mystical body. It goes beyond a moral union (like the bonds of friendship and loyalty), but falls just short of actual physical union (like the members of the human body).

found both in the natural and supernatural? You see, the vitality of a community depends on the fervor with which it embraces a great idea. Should we not strive to love the ideal of childlikeness, to personify it and to radiate it into our modern world?

I think I should somewhat adapt the words of a poet and call out to you:

"Our mission in the human race

is that the world—constantly, daily—becomes a brighter place!"

Yes, the sun of childlikeness should shine more and more brightly and send its rays through us into the world! In fact, may I add another variation?

"Our mission in the human race

is that the world—daily—becomes a warmer place!"

Not only the radiance, but also the warmth of childlikeness must penetrate the world more and more. What warmth is expressed in the word—childlike love for our heavenly Father! And a third variation:

"Our mission in the human race

is that the world—daily—becomes a godlier, heavenlier place!"

Childlikeness, as we understand it, is something divine. We shall consider this later in some detail.

This concludes our discussion on childlikeness as the way to heaven. If you have really tried to follow along, you should be able to see that it is *the* way. Thanks be to God that we have more or less completed this train of thought.

## THE CONTENT OF CHILDLIKENESS

We immediately proceed to a new train of thought. Our intent was to examine two things. The first was: Childlikeness is *the* way to heaven. The second is: What does childlikeness involve? At this point let me ask more pointedly: *What, more precisely, is the content of childlikeness?*

We have already given a general answer. When we said last night that the meaning of childlikeness is the formation in us of the God-man, this already gives us a relatively clear answer to the question of the content of childlikeness. But we want to go a little more deeply.

There are naturally two ways to answer this. We have already said that we will leave one for later; I will not give a polished metaphysical definition now, but only after we have discussed the essence of childlikeness. If at this point we are seeking to describe more precisely the content of childlikeness, then we would do well—keeping solid bedrock under our

feet—to make our own the central statement of Our Lord: "Unless you become like little children you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven" and to study it in detail. You will notice that this statement will accompany us until the end of the retreat; everything still to come about childlikeness emanates from these words.

We want to begin a new train of thought and prepare to listen patiently to Christ's words.

If you take Our Lord's words and quietly reflect on them, you will soon discover that his teaching on childlikeness is *twofold*. It includes a negative and a positive side. According to Christ, childlikeness means reforming something old and being transformed into something new.

You may not have noticed, but so far I have only been giving you a partial quote [of Mt 18,3]. I have deliberately omitted something that I must now include. Our Lord's full statement is, "Unless you *change*"—convert—"and become like little children..." Here you have the negative and the positive; childlikeness involves being *reformed* and *transformed*. This opens a vast field before us.

We will begin by considering the positive side of childlikeness—transformation. Tomorrow, God willing, we will move on to consider the inner reform or conversion.

## I. Being Transformed into Something New

What does this involve? In accordance with the principles of sound exegesis, let me remind you that we have a right to interpret the text not only in its immediate context, but also in the context of the broader and broadest biblical truths. I must state this ahead of time so that we understand one another.

What "transformation" does childlikeness involve? Christ wants to tell us *two things*: Unless you possess (1) a new, divine, Godlike being of a child and (2) a new, noble, Godlike attitude of a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven—either not at all or not in an adequate way.

## A New God-Like Childlike Being

If I compare the parallel passages I must say that that Our Lord clearly demands of us a new God-like childlike being. This gives our dogmatic experts another chance to sum up what they know about divine life and being a child of God. You will have to excuse me if I do not do this for you. It would be worthwhile to have a four-week retreat to pick up on this point—but from the standpoint of your community ideal! This is some-

thing you should tend and protect and cultivate with special care.

I will mention only a few points so that you see what is involved. It will not cover everything. For that the topic is much too broad.

Let me remind you of *Nicodemus' conversations with Christ* (Jn 3,1ff). Recall what Our Lord said to him about becoming a child. What demand does Christ make of us?

You remember the situation. Nicodemus was eager to know the way of salvation. Like other truth-seekers of his day, he was absorbed by the question, "What must I do to obtain salvation?" He could tell that Christ was a religious master, a prophet, perhaps even something greater. However, he did not dare to address the Master by day. So he came to him at night. "Master," he said, "what must we do to reach heaven?" Now listen to the unheard-of answer which Our Lord gives him. He does not say anything at all about what one must *do*—at least he does not speak about it directly. Rather, he says what one must *become*: "Unless you are born again by water and the Holy Spirit, you cannot enter heaven" (Jn 3, 5). I must receive a new *being*. And the biblical scholars explain what Our Lord means—he means becoming a child of God. We must receive a new divine life, we must become, above all else, children of God.

At table you have heard, even though it is hard to digest such thoughts at table, how this spiritual is to be understood. There are

## Two Kinds of and Fatherhood

Someone can be my father *in the strictest sense of the word* by physically begetting me. This does not apply here.

Someone can also be my father *in the broadest sense of the word*: he is "like a father" to me. This applies here, but does not capture the essence; in this sense God is also father of dogs and cats.

A third interpretation is possible. Someone can be my father and I can be his *adopted child*. What does this mean? I become an heir of my father, I am given his name.

Does this capture the essence of the life-process we are discussing? Yes and no! Yes, because it is true that we share in the inheritance of the only-begotten Son and are given the name of the Only-Begotten. But *being a child of God means incomparably more than being merely adopted in the usual understanding of the word*. An adoptive father cannot transmit anything of his own life to his adopted child. It is a unique characteristic of God's fatherhood that he mysteriously shares his own life with us. To be sure, it is a mysterious sharing of life, for what Christ possesses by virtue

of generation, we receive by a mysterious inner communication. The Blessed Trinity is in me and continually imparts to me something of his divine life.

This is the world to which we must return again and again.

As we meditate briefly on these great mysteries, we understand *St. John*. He made being a child of God his favorite thought. He stood before his congregation like a teacher before his class. He admonished: Children, pay attention now, this is important, you must learn it! He raps on his desk and says: "Now see what love the Father has shown us; for we are not only called children of God, but that is what we are" (1 Jn 3,1). We are truly children of God! We really ought to explore this great, mysterious world in all its ramifications. We must be at home there and live and love totally immersed in the reality of childlikeness.

Of course, this is also the way we understand *St. Paul* when he tells us in many different ways: "We have not received the spirit of slaves but of sons, making us cry out '*Abba*, dearest Father!'" It is God's Spirit which bears witness in our spirit that we are children of God" (cf Rom 8,15f; Gal 4,6).

We must let such passages sink in deeply so that we grasp with our whole being what it means that we cannot enter heaven unless we take on a new Godlike childlike being, i.e., unless we become God's children *entirely* and *ontologically*.<sup>3</sup> *In this sense nothing can take the place of becoming a child*. The sacraments can be replaced but becoming a child cannot. The sacrament of baptism, for instance, can be replaced by the baptism of desire, but one must become a child of God. Anyone without a claim to being a child simply cannot enter heaven.

Now you can reflect on what nobility this implies! *Noblesse oblige!* [Nobility obliges!] How much must my soul be penetrated by a *totally Godlike feeling of life*<sup>4</sup> by virtue of this new birth, of this "divine birth," as John (cf 1 Jn 3,9; 5,18) tells us. In the story of my family, in the life of my parents and grandparents, there may be many dark secrets of which I am ashamed. But I have another birth, a new birth in God! You see, this is the real divine, Godlike feeling of life I would cultivate in myself if I were

<sup>3</sup> Both words mean: in the order of being, the order of who we really are.

<sup>4</sup> In his work as an educator, Fr. Kentenich stressed that the ontological elevation of man by grace must lead to a corresponding feeling of or attitude toward life which penetrates the deepest levels of our being.

truly interiorly penetrated by this new being. Today's world needs this. We must not make the world too tired by demanding only ethical norms. Today we must reach much more deeply into the ontological reality, into the level of being, also in our lives. How noble that makes me feel if I am deeply convinced that I am not just another "man in the street" but rather a child of God! I am a child of God in the fullest and truest sense of the word, just as I am taught by Sacred Scripture and dogmatic theology!

### **A New, Noble, God-Like Childlike Attitude**

I do not wish to elaborate on this now. What I wish to emphasize in this context is the *ethical effect* of our spiritual childhood. What do I mean? Unless you possess a new Godlike childlike being and a new, noble, Godlike childlike attitude you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. We want to consider this Godlike noble attitude of a child in some detail, for it is to this attitude that our Bible text directly refers. Let me speak in axioms again to make my point. This will open to us a great circle of thought which will concern us for the rest of the retreat.

Taking the whole situation into account, what does Our Lord want to say when he stresses the attitude of a child? Please listen: *All that is innately noble and good in the child, though (I admit) only imperfectly and in passing, must be what we acquire perfectly and permanently through serious striving and effort and prayer.*

I must repeat this thesis, because everything to follow depends on it. Our Lord says, "Unless you become like little children"—namely, unless you acquire that which is innately noble and good in the child (imperfectly and in passing) and gain it through serious striving and effort and prayer (perfectly and permanently)—"you cannot enter heaven," either not at all or not in an adequate manner.

Let me give you specific examples.

We observe the child. Our Lord said we should do so. We note *two things*—that the child possesses by nature *much that is noble and good*. Thanks be to God! Whoever has observed children will have many beautiful things to tell. What is the deepest dogmatic reason for this? Though the child is touched by original sin, he is not totally corrupted. This nobility breaks through in the child. Of course, we must immediately add that there is *also much* in the child *which is not noble*. The reason for this is original sin. Even though original sin has not totally infected human nature, it has left a strong mark. We must therefore say: what is noble in the child is not present in a pure and perfect way. It is mingled with ig-

noble traits. It is only there for a time, because the ignoble side of human nature tries to get the upper hand over that which is good.

If I, in your place, had to work out an ascetical system and a pastoral and educational method based on childlikeness, I would make it my habit to observe children more often. I repeat: we observe much that is very fine and noble, but also much which is dangerous. The child can be wildly jealous. The child can manipulate, and even a babe in arms can torment his parents if his mother gives in to his every whim. How a child can deceive! Indeed, there the child's nature has many negative features.

We begin to examine more precisely: What is noble and good in the child? Naturally, I must try to capture life's lesson in some kind of a general term. May I propose one to you?

### **The Child as a Revelation of God**

The child is a *totally unique revelation of God*. Here we have a term which cannot be so quickly exhausted. We want to distinguish: Every creature is a unique revelation of God, and each one of us is a unique revelation of God. If we call the child a unique revelation of God in this context, it is because we want to underscore a certain value. Please listen: Become what the child is! This imperative must get through to you. What am I called to become? What the child is by nature, imperfectly and in passing, you must acquire perfectly and permanently!

This is the main outline point which you must keep in mind the whole day. It implies two tasks—to study the unique revelation of God which the child presents to us, and then to say: this is what we must become!

*What does this unique revelation of God look like which the child presents?* I must generalize, for the time is unfortunately too short for me to depict all the many delicate and delightful features of the child. I ask you to do that for yourselves. If what I now give are a few metaphysical expressions, you can be certain that a great number of observations stand behind them. So, what does this unique revelation of God look like? I will give *three answers*. The child is, first of all, a unique prophet of God; secondly, the child is a unique reflection of God; thirdly, the child is in unique union with God.

Unless you become like little children! Do you understand what this means? Unless you become like children—in a perfect manner—and acquire as your permanent condition the state of being a unique prophet and reflection of God, and being in unique union with God, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

When we think of being a unique reflection of God, then two great truths rise before us: the child is a unique reflection of the simplicity of the Father and the child is a unique reflection of the self-surrender of the Son. You will notice that all of dogmatic teaching, all of psychology and philosophy stands before us.

We must now make a hard choice. Which of all these numerous and great truths should we discuss and make more deeply our own? Perhaps you will be satisfied if I merely indicate which truths are associated with our subject and explain in more detail just the one or the other point.

### 1. A Unique Prophet of God

The child is a unique prophet of God. Just think of what this means! The child points to God. Anyone with a keen eye for life and a down-to-earth sense of reality, [or for that matter] anyone who likes to be around children—which should really be all of us, for the child belongs to the child!—knows what I mean. Let me summarize the main points in metaphysical terms. The child points to God, in part directly, in part indirectly. I allow myself to observe the child. What does this awaken in me? Yes, a child spontaneously reminds us of two things: first of mankind's paradise and secondly of the paradise of our own life.

#### *Direct*

The child reminds us directly of the twofold paradise. Is this really true? Alban Stolz<sup>5</sup> wrote that there are three things which remind us of paradise again and again: the stars, the flowers, and a child's eyes. The child's eyes point emphatically to *the paradise of mankind*:

"Child's eyes, diamonds  
in earth's desert sands,  
Worlds of long-lost happiness  
radiate from your loveliness."

Is the poet right? Does a child remind us of paradise? Let me ask the philosophical and dogmatic question: What is the distinguishing feature of paradise? It is walking and conversing with God. Hence the child points directly to God. The child is a prophet of God.

A similar symbolism rings true when you realize that a child's eyes—and the child himself—quickly and easily transport us to *the paradise of our own childhood*. Is it not true? When we are tired, when life has tossed

<sup>5</sup> Fr. Alban Stolz (1808-1883), German theologian and author.

us to and fro and then stand before a child in the cradle... if we allow ourselves to be absorbed by the child's charm, does not everything quicken again in the soul? How many memories are stirred—memories of a time when our passions were still in check, memories of our life's paradise! What is it that makes the life of a child, at least of a Catholic child, akin to paradise? It was this simple carefree conversing with the divine, with the angels. This is part of the essence of the child. The child expressly urges us back to God and to his realness in our lives.

#### *Indirect*

The child is therefore a direct prophet of God, but also an indirect one. Here I must inquire into my own experience. Is it not true that when I stand before a child and look into his wondering eyes—and a child's eyes can really express wonder!—I am fascinated and filled with joy? Do we not come away feeling how small the separation is between God and us? Yes, let me appeal again to your own experiences and observations. When our retreat is over, stand in front of a baby carriage and begin to study—to find out what we should be! We are called to become what the child is: a prophet of God!

It is true: in the pure eyes of a child we see reflected all the greatness the child sees in creation. This is what shines out to me when I look into the child's eyes. But it is not only that, or even the mirroring of things divine, that we see. *We spontaneously sense that there is only a thin veil, a thin partition—and behind it is God!* We therefore feel compelled to stand in awe before the eyes of a child. One writer describes how unruly boys, who tear and smash up everything, can be suddenly captivated by the simple being and clear eyes of a baby. It is mysterious. We can therefore say again: the child is a unique prophet of God.

This is not to tell you something learned and clever, but I think it interprets for you the words of Our Lord, and Christ told the apostles to observe children.

#### *I Must Be a Prophet of God*

Now we must, of course, draw very serious conclusions from all this. What should I become? I, too, should become a unique prophet of God. I should become a unique, perpetual *sursum corda*<sup>6</sup>. What the child possesses

<sup>6</sup> Latin for "lift up your hearts" (from the opening dialogue of the Preface at Mass), *sursum corda* is used here to indicate that each of us must be a reminder

ses in an imperfect and passing manner, I should acquire in a perfect and lasting manner. I must become a unique prophet of God *per eminentiam* [preeminently]. Whoever sees me must be drawn to God!

This brings us face to face with a great truth. Perhaps I may remind you that God has willed and ordained for you to be a community without vows. This becomes interesting when we look back on the history of the consecrated life from the uniqueness of who we are and the kind of persons we strive to be. There you will find a progressively stronger prompting of the Holy Spirit: communities *relaxing exterior regulative bonds in order to promote stronger interior bonds*.

Do you understand the point I am making? *St. Francis de Sales*, because of his unique perspective on life and strong faith in man's goodness, had a fundamental idea which he, because of his modesty, did not carry out. He said there are religious communities of men that break away from the old established forms. They relax the regulative bonds so that they can work more for God. He asked himself whether this would not be possible for women. He therefore wanted to found a new sisters community without the traditional form of enclosure—a new community with a certain freedom from the old bonds so that there might be greater freedom to work for God. Out of respect [for the hesitation of the Church's authorities], however, he did not carry this out. His community became a community in the old style. But *St. Vincent de Paul* picked up on this idea and had the courage and skill to break out of the old mold.

Note how God's Spirit again and again prompts members of the Church to relax the regulative bonds but, at the same time, to strengthen the bond with God. You must study *St. Vincent de Paul's* vision of his sisters' community. The sisters were not to take solemn vows and therefore not to live in canonical enclosure. This was a bold move at the time, made possible by the holiness and influence of *St. Vincent*. You know the Church's generally conservative attitude. She prefers to make the regulative bond as strict as possible. *Vincent de Paul*, however, stressed to his sisters again and again: If anyone among you becomes confused and wants to become a nun, you must not follow her, for as soon as you begin to become a community in the old mold, we can toll the death knell of our community. If the Church would try to make you take vows, then beg the authorities not to do so. It is your mission to go into the world with greater freedom and

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to all of those around us to lift up our hearts to God.

fewer restrictions. Your enclosure must be your love of God.

We belong to those God-blessed communities which have few exterior regulative bonds. But let me tell you, if we wish to fulfill a mission in the Church, we must stress in the place of these weaker exterior bonds more intense interior bonds to God. What does that mean? Our cloister wall must be a constant, intimate walking in the presence of God! The lower our exterior walls, the higher our interior walls must be—the stronger must be our constant dialogue of love with God. Whoever is an educator in our community must relentlessly work on these realities [in forming our vocations] until they become second nature.

How did I get on this topic? "Unless you become like children...." In my essence and being I must be a unique prophet of God. I must constantly stand in awe before God, just as a child would. Our community expresses this with the words "constant walking in the presence of God." If I learn to cultivate this in a heroic manner, our institute will be secure and unified.

Like a child I must become a totally unique prophet of God. I will become so by constantly standing in awe of God, by maintaining a constant loving dialogue with him. I think this point is so important! I will therefore devote a whole talk to it and try to show you ways to shore up your "cloister walls." I will try to give you a method of how to practice and foster walking in the presence of God in the spirit of our community so that Our Lord's words may be realized, "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of God."

## SEVENTH CONFERENCE

"Unless you become like children you shall not enter the kingdom of God." This morning we let our thoughts rest in the profound and universal interpretation of these words: Unless you become—as little children do—a unique revelation of God, you shall not enter the kingdom of God—either not at all, or inadequately.

As we heard, the child is first a revelation of God as a unique prophet of God. What the child possesses imperfectly and in passing, we must gain perfectly and permanently through the help of grace and earnest cooperation with God.

### The Way: Living Constantly Close to God

What must be the focus of our striving? To live constantly close to God. If and to the extent that we accomplish this, we will be an uplifting influence on all those around us.

We were already reminded of that this morning when we discussed how our unique community structure causes us (perhaps more than others, like the orders or congregations) to rely on replacing exterior convent walls with the interior walls of a constant nearness to God. If you will allow me to reduce the structure of your family to a *principle*, I may say—but please understand me correctly—it is: *Restriction as much as necessary, freedom as much as possible, but especially cultivation of the spirit as much as possible*. You must test this principle in life, but without suppressing or ignoring any part of this threefold principle!

The first part sounds pleasant enough:

*Restriction as much as necessary.*

This part of the principle has *two meanings*: Restriction *only* as much as necessary, but also restriction *as much* as necessary!

Please keep in mind that because of the effects of original sin, man—also as an individual—needs regulative bonds. Please remember as well that community, which we described yesterday as "concentrated original sin," is in special need of regulative bonds. Just take a look at normal everyday life! Do you know a single community, even a simple study club, without rules? Hence, we must have restrictions to exist as a community. That is simply taken for granted.

But neither do we want to forget the lesson which we stressed yesterday: if community is "concentrated original sin" it is also "concentrated

grace." You must also see the positive effect that living in community has on us! It is difficult to find the right balance in these things. But let us start with the insight: we need restrictions as much as necessary because our nature is burdened by original sin, as much as necessary because our collective nature is burdened by original sin (if we can put it that way), as much as necessary because of the great works and tasks we share as a community. There you have three reasons which make rules necessary.

At the same time, however, restrictions *only* as much as necessary! We do not have the strict rules of the orders. What is the difference between their restrictions and our restrictions? This brings us to the second part of our principle:

*Freedom as Much as Possible.*

We want to have a greater freedom. This morning we said that the trend toward greater freedom in the Church is obviously inspired by the Holy Spirit, or there would not be so many communities moving in this direction.

*Cultivation of the Spirit as Much as Possible*

But you must never forget that the fewer the rules and the greater the freedom, both for the individual and for the community, the greater the cultivation of the spirit must be. It is clear: if you love your community you must uphold the freedom it gives. This comes from God. But you must also safeguard and uphold your institute by educating yourselves and your youth all the more intently in making the "inner convent walls" impenetrable and insurmountable. What does this mean? Something we call "cultivating the spirit." It is very important, therefore, that we are completely faithful to the things asked of us by the community and do not dispense ourselves from them too lightly; we must also see to it that these means are appreciated more and more in the heart of the family<sup>1</sup>.

### The Meaning of Spiritual Practices: Constant Living in and With God

But this alone is not enough. We must also acquire a deeper understanding of the meaning of our family's spiritual practices. *What is the*

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Kentenich's word "cultivation of the spirit" (*Geistpflege*) means the cultivation of both the spiritual life and the "right spirit" of community. Means toward this end can be formation and study, common reflection on God's action in our lives (as in a group meeting), spiritual striving, devotional acts, cultivation of lifestreams and currents, times of grace (such as jubilees), and prayer.



*meaning of each spiritual exercise? To help us live constantly in and with God, to help us abide constantly and reverently in God's presence.* What I will be able to tell you about this is of great significance to you and should be especially stressed. To be sure, what I say also applies to cloistered religious and lay Christians striving for holiness. But on account of your original structure you must embrace these things, obvious in and of themselves, with greater fervor. In your education you should place greater emphasis on the application of these thoughts than would be necessary for, for instance, members of religious orders.

Let me give you *a whole system* in brief outline.

First: let us look for the foundation of our life in and with God.

Second: let us see how we build on this foundation.

#### **a. Foundation of Life in and with God**

What is the foundation called? It is a triad of mighty dogmatic truths. I must convince myself and my followers: first, that God is a reality; second, that he is a personal reality; third, that he is an inescapable reality.

These things sound plausible enough, but it is not enough to know them. These truths—to use some modern phraseology—must not just remain a complex of ideas or truths but must become a complex of values. It is therefore our task to make sure that these unswervingly steadfast truths also form and shape our lives.

#### **First: God is a Reality!**

It is essential that this comes home to us. God is not just a phantom, a product of thought. I say, for instance, this desk is a reality, but what is this reality compared to the reality of God? How few of us are truly penetrated by the idea of God's reality! If this object were the living God, our wonder would not cease. But God is not alive to me; he is dead, not real, an imaginary God—at least judging by the impact the idea of God has on my life.

This implies a task, especially for our spiritual directors and dogmatic professors. We must portray God as the *living God*. If God were more the great reality of our lives, how different our lives would be! How much more coherent and interiorly purified! How many stupid things would have been left undone in our lives! Even the children's prayer:

"Where'er you are, whate'er you do,

God, your Father, watches you,"

would change and renew my whole life!

#### **Second: God is a Personal Reality!**

It is an idea which we, as intellectuals, don't hesitate to talk about. We can speak brilliantly on this topic, but it is only knowledge. How do we *experience* God? Mostly as an idea—then again as a general, vaguely obliging law. We are attracted by something but can't put our finger on it. How few of us are truly seeped in personal, yes the tri-personal reality of God! Our person seeks the complementation of another person. In this context we are told: God is a personal, a tri-personal, a triune God.

Let us return for a moment to the topic of *celibacy*. I mention this to illustrate our point. *What is the positive meaning of celibacy? The undivided giving of our power of love to the personal God.* If I do not experience God as a person, either as a father or friend, do you think I can lead the life of virginity? I think that would be impossible. I can do it as a constant act of mortification, but I will be tilting at windmills. We must see and feel the inner connection. I must live the idea of surrender to the personal God.

#### **Third: God is an Inescapable Reality!**

Here, too, there would be much work to be done before the dogmatic truths would take on flesh and blood in our lives. Think of the *different ways God can be present*. Dogmatic theology sums them up as three ways: The first way of God's presence is

*omnipraesentia divina (divine omnipresence).*

God is everywhere *per essentiam, scientiam et potentiam* [through his being, knowledge, and power]. Just think of what this means: God is not only everywhere by virtue of his essence, but also through his knowledge and power! Wherever I go, God is always there. Whatever I do, he supports the doing—I cannot even move my hand or speak unless his action is also there. God's goodness and love are also wherever I go. This is already a tenet of Christian philosophy, and is therefore all the more a part of any sound Catholic theology. I must therefore become more and more aware of the inescapable personal reality of God.

A second way of God's presence is what we call the

*praesentia supernaturalis (supernatural presence).*

What does this mean? God is supernaturally active in the soul in the state of grace. This is where we insert what we know about God's indwelling presence. God is active in us as the God of revelation, mysteriously drawing the soul into his inner-trinitarian life. This is a way God

is present. It is obvious that God wants to place his omnipotence in the service of his love. Love urges him to be continually present.

There is a third way of God's presence, the

*praesentia sacramentalis (sacramental presence)*

This is the presence of the God-Man in the tabernacle.

This gives you a brief overview of three fundamental truths. It is on this foundation that we build our constant, reverent walking in the presence of God, our loving and reverent living in and with God. Whoever wishes to base his religious life on central truths must meditate on these three ways of God's presence again and again. In your work with youth you should also stress such central truths repeatedly. We cannot get stuck on the periphery. *Quantum potes, tantum aude* [do it as often as you can], that is, as often as our students are able to absorb these great, central truths. Our times do not allow for beating around the bush. They demand—more than when we were young—that we arrive quickly at that which is central, at God.

#### **b. The Next Step: Constant, Unaffected, Loving Dialogue with God**

We now come to the practical question: Given this foundation, how can we develop the simple art of living in and with God? I would like to give you a popular answer which you can pass on to your students. I may stress that there is hardly anything so natural as the simple, continual dialogue with God, since God is so concerned about us and lovingly works in us and on us. It is actually a matter of courtesy for us to turn our attention to God. He is continually turned toward us in his essence, his love, his kind activity. Therefore our souls ought to turn toward God as the sunflower turns toward the sun. Perhaps our parents and grandparents practiced this simple way of living with God, oblivious to the theory behind it. It is not so much something we learn from ascetical books as from life. It is quite a simple life-process, only the analysis tends to make it look complicated. Therefore what I have now analyzed you must see in practical living as a single, great process of life.

This life-process can be seen from three angles. If I observe how simple, good-hearted people speak and live with God I will find: first, they look at him often with the eyes of faith; secondly, they converse with him often and lovingly, and thirdly, they make frequent and significant sacrifices for him.

Remember, this is a single life-process! In a given moment one aspect

may be stressed more, in another moment another aspect. How naturally this threefold act arises from what we have discussed so far! Let us learn this lesson and apply it to our lives!

#### **First: We must look often on God in faith.**

We are doing desperately little if we are only *thinking* of God often. Psychologically spoken, we must not deceive ourselves. A complex of ideas, even if it is God, has little impact unless it is likewise a complex of values. To give this proper weight and to prevent a certain mechanization, I prefer to say that we must frequently look on God in faith. The life-process of faith is not only a function of the intellect, but also of the will.

*What is faith?* You may view faith as a *sharing in the self-knowledge of the Triune God*. This is a simple paraphrase of dogmatic truth.

A group of German scholars once had an audience with the late Pope Pius X. In his simple way, Pius X gave these scholars a talk about "the divine worldview," namely the Catholic faith. The Catholic faith is "the divine worldview"—think about that! What is our faith? A *sharing in God's worldview*. I want to and may and must view the world as God views it; to which I might immediately add—not the God of nature but the God of revelation, the triune God of revelation. (....)

Apply this to your lives. We have said that we must look on God in faith. How and where? We should look on him in his person and in the places where he meets us. Where is he? In the hearts of those in the state of grace. We should see him there in the bright light of faith. Here we encounter the high *law by which we make all created things transparent to God*. The light of faith enables me to look through man as through a glass and discern the Triune God in his heart. By the light of faith we can grasp that Christ is present in the tabernacle and see how he is present. Only the light of faith can give us warmth and brightness. If we only think in mechanical categories, we fail to do creation justice.

If I would now ask our parents and grandparents or other serious Christians how they live this frequent, unaffected looking on God, what would they tell us? They would say they meet God in his activity. This is the simple faith in Divine Providence of our Christian faithful. The simple believer in Divine Providence perceives whatever comes his way as a gift of love and an invitation to love from the eternal, gracious, and infinite God. Perhaps that is the correct expression: *In the light of faith every event that takes place within and around us wants to be viewed as a gift of love and an invitation to love sent by the heavenly Father*. Is this not how

simple Catholics lives their faith?

If you observe how the simple faithful take the blows of fate, you will find that they use this faith as the preferred way to apply the spirit of faith. *Simple people look upon the blows life deals them as greetings from God which challenge us to greet God in return.* Faith in Divine Providence views nothing as coincidence, for everything comes from God's providence. Faith in Divine Providence tells us:

God is Father,

God is good,

Everything He does is good,

even that which causes our nature to rebel. Great *calamities* are seen by such simple people as *the switching of the tracks* along which we travel like a fast train. At the last moment the switch is thrown. Who was responsible? God! The train shudders—passengers are injured, have broken bones—but their lives are saved. This is how we may look upon the calamities we have suffered in our lives—both in our personal lives and in the lives of our community and family. A simple child sees God the Father behind everything. God is Father, God is good, everything He does is good!

It might be worth our while to take a moment to *review our past* from this standpoint. Did not major blows of fate turn into periods of blessing? If I look back and let it sink in, I will be much calmer in the future. Then I can even think of the future of the family without worry. I know that at the bottom of all world events is a steady and loving Father-hand. Think of the great turmoil of our times. Or think of your apostolate. The ground is quaking under our feet. In such a situation only a child can remain calm. God is Father, God is good, everything he does is good; the most effective way is to always measure things by God, to always see a kind and loving Father-hand behind all blows of fate, behind everything that happens. Continue this line of thought on your own in this or a similar fashion. For what I need to accomplish right now, it is enough to have pointed you in the right direction.

Look on God often in faith! Perhaps you will ask me: *How often?* Let me first give you a general answer and then state it more precisely: *Quantum potes, tantum aude* [as often as you can]—*as often as your faith and love allows*. Here all of you who work with youth must see to it that their life with God does not become too mechanical. I don't think it would be wise to start with a directive like: every hour, every half hour, every quarter hour. I would advise against it, even though you find something like this in almost every ascetical manual. From practical

experience I know that these things are usually discarded later if they are too mechanical. If the forms are not carried by love, are not made fruitful by love, then it will only be a mechanical action and will not last very long. We tend to discard anything which does not become our own, from the inside. [Therefore the directive:] As much as you can.

### **Second: We should try to speak often with God.**

I must confess: for us men this may well be the most important thing. For, given the way we are formed, it is relatively easy for us to see how events connect to God, to theoretically grasp the divine greatness of a certain action. And we can speak eloquently about all these things. But we sense how religious thinking [alone] fails to make us devout. God wants religious *love*! For us men, religious love must show itself in a simple speaking with God. God speaks to me and therefore I respond to him. It's that simple.

*What does this speaking look like?* Think of ejaculatory prayer. It doesn't have to be a "patented" ejaculatory prayer with so-and-so many indulgences. We must *dialogue with the heavenly Father in a simple and down-to-earth manner*. That is one of the essential qualities of genuine childlikeness. What counts is therefore not this or that ejaculatory prayer, but the loving dialogue with God. Because we are so superficial, so mechanical in our dialogue with God nowadays, we cannot do enough to remind ourselves that what matters is speaking with God in a simple and down-to-earth manner, just "as it comes naturally." I can even scold him in a reverent way. If we could only learn this again! This is childlikeness. Then our religious lives could perhaps gradually awaken and grow, perhaps even grow rapidly—but in any case more steadily. Instead we make the sad experience of so many serious Christians who once were great prayer people as teenagers, trying everything under the sun! But it was not organic, not healthy. When we came more down to earth, we discarded it. The burnt child avoids the fire. We tried what was in the books, so we don't even want to try again. We must therefore learn to talk with God more simply and unaffectedly, just as our parents and grandparents did. They did not know a lot of theory, but the Spirit of God was with them. Speak frequently with God! But not with the lips—we must keep our freedom in the matter—I must speak with my heart!

If you ask *how often one should speak to God*, I am now in a position to tell you. The answer can also be applied *mutatis mutandis* [with the necessary changes] to the first point of how often we should look on God.

It seems to me personally that, psychologically speaking, it is extremely important that we give the answer from the right starting point. Where must we begin when it comes to speaking with God? Let me begin with *two answers*.

*First, we should try to see and use our spiritual exercises as a school of love.*

What does "school of love" mean? It is the time when our hearts warm up to God. Hence, we should not too easily dispense ourselves from our spiritual exercises. If we would succeed in using them as a school of love, something of this ardor of love would radiate back into our everyday lives. Was this not the case with Moses, even to an extraordinary degree? On a lower level we probably experience something similar. Moses was allowed to speak to God. Afterwards his face was radiant (cf Ex 34, 29-35). Our souls, too, become radiant through the bright and ardent dialogue with God during our normal prayer times and spiritual exercises. It is therefore worthwhile to work on improving our lives in this area and ask: What can I do in order to make Holy Mass a school of love, or the breviary, or my spiritual reading, etc.? You must make an effort here, especially since the ideal of childlikeness is so crucial to our spirituality and it demands that we grow in love as quickly as possible.

The most important thing? No short cuts! Learn from the saints. They will tell you that they did not begin to become heroic until the moment they experienced how specially God loved them. I must therefore stress in my spiritual life the meditation of God's benefits, must swim in the mercies of God. Again and again I must immerse myself in the ocean of God's gifts. My favorite occupation should be to say over and over again: Dear God, how much you love me! How much you really love me as the apple of your eye! In the liturgy we should not just repeat the texts but vibrantly grasp them as an expression of what we ourselves experience. The point: to let our spiritual exercises become more and more a school of love.

You may then find it useful to devote, for instance, your meditation to reliving and resavoring all the good things God did for you yesterday and the day before. Or, when your community history is written and you want to be a more complete child of your community, review and observe how God's Fatherly hand hovered over your community, how, when all seemed lost, victory was suddenly snatched from defeat! In fact, reliving the ways of God's love in our lives should really become our daily bread; that is what keeps the average Catholic going.

This is one starting point: I learn to speak with God during my regular

spiritual exercises. If I do this, it will radiate something into everyday life without my even making a particularly great effort.

*Secondly, it seems to me that we should really discover—each one in his own unique way—when our soul is more naturally inclined to God.*

For the one or the other, the evening hours may be the time when the soul catches fire for God. This is often the case. Many a novice will tell you: What a pity that I have to be in bed so punctually! Just then I feel the strong urge to kneel down for a quarter of an hour. I would advise you, apart from the novitiate, to make use of such times when God apparently wants to reserve the soul for himself (why else would he prompt the soul this way?). For others the attraction is stronger in the morning. Those who have hard jobs, however, are usually tired in the morning. We must be very down-to-earth in this regard and let experience tell us when we feel most inclined to speak with God.

*Experience also tells us that a religious soul feels the strongest urge to seek refuge in God when faced with cross and suffering. Think about it. There are two reasons which make this so important:*

First, it helps you better understand why the Divine Gardener trims us, his vine, so much (cf Jn 15,1f).

Secondly, because we usually have a hard time finding our way to God and he gets our attention by knocking on the door of our souls through cross and suffering.

Once I have this clear, what will my first reaction be to cross and suffering? It will not take long before I pray, "Dear God, what good do you want to do for me now?" The usual answer is, "What did I do wrong again?" This is not the child's answer. A true child, even if cross and suffering are a punishment, always sees the love behind it. The first reaction must therefore always be: "Dear God, what good do you want to do for me now?" I say a heartfelt thank you, even when I do not know the reason for the cross and suffering, for I know that it has been sent to me because he loves me! We cannot always live on "cloud nine," especially given the many struggles we must deal with in everyday life. But we can live in the presence of God. That means we should hear God speak to us through the events of our life. After all, we must live the life God gives us! We cannot always pull back from our activities and make an hour of adoration or the like.

*We should examine our everyday lives for God's knock, because daily life is where God knocks. I believe that there are many Christians, also*

among yourselves, for whom practical everyday life is the faster road to holiness than cloistered adoration. In cloistered adoration you might lose your motivation. The adoration we keep is before the will of God in everyday life. In that sense we, too, keep a perpetual adoration. In fact, apostolic vocations typically find that life is what challenges them to come closer to God. (....)

May I indicate to you a few ways that God knocks more strongly at the door of the soul, drawing us more quickly to himself? One way is when *we experience a special joy in our souls*. Noble souls are especially aware of how joy lifts them more strongly to God. The way I see it, we moderns are terribly proletarian toward God, not even noticing the many ways God makes us happy. What a shame! A noble soul always has a "Thank you, God" on his lips. I would like to suggest the motto: *Don't take anything for granted!* It is not, for instance, just a routine fact that you and your community can live so undisturbed while other communities in neighboring countries are immersed in crisis. It is not just a matter of course that you have such a wonderful house. Think about it: have I already personally thanked for God having given me the very best? In that regard we are such mass-men. Here, too, the principle should apply: Let each one view the community as if he himself founded it. Each detail sent by God affecting the community, including everything noble and good, should be an occasion for our personal gratitude. That is the means used by the simplest Christians to remain close to God. They may not know much, but they *live* it! (....)

As I have said, if we want to speak often with God, we must find sound starting points. This brings us to the second question: *How should we use these starting points?* Let me give you the simplest possible answer: We should make our dialogue with God

deeper,  
simpler,  
more varied.

With that I have given you a whole system for acquiring a deeper interior life. What does this mean in practice?

*First, our dialogue should be deeper.* We should educate ourselves to especially value individual prayer. You can do this very well because you have very few prayers said in common! Even when you are all together in the chapel you can pray what you like. Community prayers are truly kept to a minimum. I would advise you—and I tell myself the same—we must make fuller use of the times when we feel more strongly drawn to God.

Other things can wait! If the soul is ready, savor prayer to full advantage! Turn inward and let this time last longer.

*Secondly, simpler in the movement of the heart.* This is something we should stress much more. Many of us make a good meditation, but continually tell ourselves, "I can't meditate." Why? We worry too much about following certain rules. Don't let this drag you down! The best meditation is the interior prayer of the heart. It is worth much more than formal, methodical meditation. You must not confuse the method with the aim. It is only a means to an end. If the means is not helpful, let it go. All that matters is that we are with God! Be simple in your dialogue with God! Happy are those who work a lot with children. In teaching them how to do things one learns to be simple. The simpler the better! You will find that the more mature the soul, the more it rests in God with a simple affect of love. The saints could do this—and do not think that it was extraordinary. We often turn God out because we think this simple prayer is not what prayer should be. The saints could rest for months in a single affect. Think of St. Francis, whose soul rested in the affect "My God and my All!" It was his interior nest; he lived from this one sentiment. He did not say afterwards: I did not meditate because this is all I did! We drive out the Spirit of God because we cling too much to formalities. Forms are crutches which we need in the beginning. Later they can often become dangerous. Your own way is unique, but you can orient yourselves on the principle: The more down-to-earth, the better! I must speak with God like a child speaks with his father, just "as it comes naturally," even if it is not written that way in any book. Books can be written for others!

*Thirdly, we must add to the number of our starting points.* This is obvious. How many more? I do not dare fix a number. *Quantum potes, tantum aude!* [As often as you can]. I think that if you use the starting points I mentioned, you will not have to worry that your dialogue with God is becoming mechanical or forced.

With that I think I have spelled out the two elements clearly enough: We must first look often on God in faith, both in his being and in his actions, and secondly speak often with God using simple, unaffected prayers of ejaculation.

### Third: We Must Make Sacrifices for God

I may come back to this later. For now I want to give a brief overview so that we can come to a certain conclusion.

*Reasons*

Why do we have to make little sacrifices for God? Let me give you *two answers*.

Our dialogue with God is a dialogue of love. For a *true dialogue of love with God, I must become more and more detached from self*. It should not be a dialogue of love with self, but with God! The dialogue of love with God, however, demands a corresponding detachment of the soul from self and from all that is not God and is opposed to God. We must therefore make little sacrifices so that our entire life becomes one great act of love; that is what it must become—it is the reason we are here! The freedom which our community allows us is all the more reason to take the initiative and find the means to reach this end. In this context let me remind you of the beautiful words of St. Ignatius: *Deum quaerere et diligere in omnibus tum in rebus cum in hominibus* [(Our goal is) to seek and love God in all things and persons]. I seek God in all things and behind all things and love him in all things. But to love God I must detach myself from my morbid self-will, from my morbid love of created things.

We want to be children of the Father, because we are brothers of Christ, i.e., children of the Father who follow the example of the only-begotten Son of God. Then you will recall how St. Paul viewed the Mystical Body of Christ: I complete in my own sufferings what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1,24). *If Our Lord as the only-begotten Son of God had to suffer so much, then I must suffer too* and, like him, let the power of my love flow back to the heavenly Father.

#### *Characteristics*

What do these sacrifices look like? I will only touch on this now to keep on schedule. My acts of sacrifice must be: first of all, enlightened, secondly, positive, thirdly, powerful and serious.

In closing, I must remind you once again that what I have just analyzed for you is really much simpler in everyday life. Perhaps we should all think back on our childhood days. What we did as children is often better than what we have tried to do as learned adults. We must find our down-to-earth roots again. (....)

#### *EIGHTH CONFERENCE*

To round out the last conference, I should probably still add a major point: I have given you the reasons for making sacrifices to God, but I still need to provide you with the application. There are different ways of making sacrifices: offering up something, mortification, self-denial. There are different words to describe it, but the reality is the same.

I don't know if I should, in passing, be so bold as to give you the one or the other bit of advice.

#### *Enlightened, Organic*

We have already said that our mortification should be enlightened. In ascetical literature one often finds the same thing described as "organic," in contrast to "mechanistic." This is the trend of modern spiritual discipline which tries to be more attuned to the psychological reality, making a strong case for a self-denial that is organic and enlightened. When one chooses acts of self-denial, *this trend stresses the importance of ennobling our nature*.

Some people consider this a weak, superficial approach. I do not think so! Since I do not want to go into this in detail, let me mention just one example.

Suppose I am a person who is by nature strongly melancholic and therefore tend—at least in certain melancholy moods—to withdraw into myself. In other words, my community-orientation is too weak; I love solitude too much, but this solitude is not a God-filled solitude; it is rather an I-filled one. This is what this example presupposes. By the way, who among us has not been tempted to react this way at one time or another! I now ask myself: Which is the sacrifice I should make? Let me repeat: Which is the enlightened or organic sacrifice I should choose; i.e. which sacrifice will help me ennoble my nature? It seems to me that getting along with people is characteristic of a genuine, down-to-earth member of our community. I must also be able to enjoy the company of others. I therefore try to make a sacrifice in this regard. If the things I have presupposed are true, then this is a real sacrifice! After all, a melancholic personality will more naturally tend to say, "Vanity of vanities; all things are vanity!" (Eccl 1,2), and retreat into his shell, becoming still more useless to himself, to his community, and to God—but all under the pretense of "making sacrifices."

All other things being equal, we must really try to keep this type of self-denial in mind at all times. In other words: I want only to say that this is the method we prefer to some degree over the other.

You might do well to ask yourself, "In which areas does my nature need to be ennobled?"

It can also be the other way around. Imagine a sanguine personality whose nature is always ready to start something new and have a good time. When he thinks of a joke he has to tell it right away! Blessed is the community with many contrasts! But the true sanguine should say to himself now and then, "I will not tell my joke for a few minutes!" He should not say, "I won't tell any more jokes." After all, he is the sunshine of the house and should be grateful that he can be the sun.

We understand the importance of making an effort to shape and perfect our nature through sacrifices. *In our way of thinking, the most supernatural person should really be the most natural person.* And I can use the supernatural reality to become more noble in every way. Part of this is high-minded mortification. Let me stress, however, that this should not be one-sided. We want to especially underscore the positive side of mortification and self-denial.

### Positive

*There is a positive and a negative way.* Of course we must be universal enough to work with both kinds, while placing a somewhat greater emphasis on the positive. Let me give an example.

Take the *negative way*. A girl, or anyone else for that matter, sweeps me off my feet. I feel tempted; I feel very mortal. What can I do? I can now begin—allow me to use the technical term for this—to *obscure* the object. What does this mean practically? I tell myself, "What girl, what boy? All things of earth are straw! This, too, will pass! Here today, gone tomorrow!" That is one way which can help me: To obscure the object which has inwardly and outwardly captured my attention.

But there is *another approach*, namely *superillumination*. What does this mean? Stay with the same example. Instead of tormenting myself and crying out "Vanity of vanities! Begone! All things of earth are straw!", I can go in the other direction. "What is the beauty of man compared with the beauty of God!" I let God's beauty and glory shine over me and try to let my heart cling to God instead of to the earthly creature.

We want to be honest: When we examine Our Lord or the lives of resolute, positive-minded people, including the saints, we find that they

used both methods. We should not only use one method. Still, all other things being equal, *we prefer the positive method*. Why? Because our attitude to life nowadays is already so negative. Because of the times in which we live, we must stress this method somewhat more than the other. It is justified, effective, and taught to us by Our Lord.

Just think of how positively Our Lord appeals to our drive for happiness and bliss. Why should we be pure? "Blessed are the pure!" (Mt 5,8). This is superillumination! "All things of earth are straw"—Our Lord says nothing like this.

Allow me to mention some cases for your personal spiritual life in which *you must, by all means, apply the positive method*. I think I have mentioned two principles already:

*First*, recognize the value of both methods;

*Second*, in general opt for the positive method.

Now comes *third*, there are cases in which the positive method must absolutely be applied. There are *three* such cases. Allow me to speak on the psychological level.

The first case deals with *temptations and difficulties associated with changes of the body*. Do I need to give examples? I think you know what I mean. An indifferent example: By nature I often fly into fits of rage. Rage is connected with changes of the body—my face turns color, my heart begins to pound... Here is the other classical case: I have temptations against holy purity. I am visited by impure impulses and feelings. The result of this temptation are some very definite physiological changes. Now think for yourselves what happens when you try to fight such temptations too much from the negative side. We want to be clear. Is it not true that the more one says 'no' and tries to block out the alluring image, the more our emotions fixate on it, the more our feelings cling to it—not sinfully, but poised to jump at the next best opportunity to act on the heightened interest? But if I take the approach of just letting things go and positively trying to superilluminate the object, to think about God and so forth, do you not notice how everything calms down much more quickly? Of course the calm does not come all at once.

Here we must also remember that such temptations are simply part and parcel of life. We must keep the old theological principle in mind: the more calmly we face such things, the more quickly they are overcome. We must have the courage to teach our followers these same things. I think a charism of your community ought to be a sexually healthy living and striving. There is too much in the sexuality of priests today which is unhealthy.

If time allows I will later discuss the characteristic features of childlike purity. Childlike purity is an instinctive purity. Do you understand what I mean when I speak psychologically about an "instinctive purity"? It is not a purity based on human compulsion or willing, but on something instinctive. We want to remember this for later. In any case, I think that the more down-to-earth we are, the healthier we will be sexually. Persons who are by nature morbidly fixated on sexual matters or who have too many anxieties will not last with us. Our atmosphere must be so healthy that it gradually overcomes everything unhealthy in this regard, causing any member or vocation whose life is too seriously damaged or psychologically encumbered to be eliminated from the start.

A second case. *When we reach a certain age*—I don't know if many of you have already reached this blessed age—we feel as if confronted with an impassible barrier. It is a *certain ascetical tiredness*. My view is this: If I can succeed in seizing a positive attitude, in seeing great goals to strive for magnanimously, then I can always prod my nature on a little bit more. In such cases the negative approach would make me too tired, because I am already tired.

Let me consider the same condition in the *specific way it affects us in younger years*. We all experience it; we *periodically lose our focus* and simply go limp. Our wings feel clipped. I have no more interest in striving for the heights. If someone would only come and take me away! But Rome wasn't built in a day. In such cases you can say to yourselves: a strongly positive approach will always get us going again.

If you interiorly grasp these three cases, you will understand how I can say: all other things being equal, we should prefer the positive method whenever possible since it taps into vast reservoirs of strength within the soul.

### Serious

Our self-denial, for the most part, should be given a positive thrust. Moreover, it must be serious. It goes without saying that a vigorous religious life requires serious mortification. The older we get, the more we are convinced that all that glitters is not gold unless it is backed up by a serious striving for mortification. Every way to sanctity, moral living, and a divinized human nature takes sacrifice. There is no way around it. (...) To be sure, we must never separate self-denial from love. If we do, self-denial becomes compulsive.

We must work seriously on self-denial. Here one must not lose sight

of the old basic principle of the spiritual life: *agere contra!* Go against the stream! What does that mean? Let me put it in modern terms.

There are *three degrees of mortification*. When God sends suffering, I can say, "*Fiat voluntas tua!*" [Your will be done! Mt 6,10]. That is the first level. I can also say, "*Deo gratias*" [Thanks be to God! cf 1 Cor 15,57; 2 Cor 9,15] That is the second level. And I can say, "*Sitio!*" [I thirst (for it)! Jn 19,28]. This is the third level.

Which level do I have the courage to reach out for? I think generally we should not be satisfied with only the level of the Fiat; that is too weak. When crosses and suffering come, we should gradually learn how to pray at least "Thanks be to God!" I am not sure if you will dare to reach out for the third level so quickly. We have probably already heard it said: the loving God rarely answers any prayer so quickly as the request for suffering; [hence] it is probably better to wait with that a bit. It is already a great deal to be able to say "Thanks be to God!" That is what is called *passive mortification*.

Now a word about *active mortification*. Here we must say that St. Ignatius' view is generally valid: *agere contra!* Go the extra mile!

Take Aristotle's well-known example. If I want to straighten a rod which is warped to the left, I must bend it well past the midpoint—even far to the right. Suppose that I am very dependent on sensual things or am very self-willed or am interiorly filled with aversion. In such cases I should not be satisfied to say, for instance: I will be very kind to my fellow monks in the coming weeks. Or: When I pray "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners..." I will not exclude so-and-so. I should also not be satisfied with just saying: I don't mean him any harm, but keep him far away from me; he can come as close as my teeth, but not my heart! What *agere contra* demands is to be *especially* kind to this person. Our human nature is infected in so many ways: If we do not practice *agere contra*, we will never attain a healthy middle.

Of course we must have enough sense and not be so artificial that my brother notices that I have something against him—otherwise I wouldn't be so nice! Nor should we practice *agere contra* "no matter what"—only to the extent that our love can bear it. An act of self-denial separated from love will break us. And vice versa: A love which is not nourished by self-denial is lip service. What good does it do to have certain emotions but not be interiorly changed!

You can now insert this into the last talk's train of thought: we want to



reverently stand before God, i.e., we want to cultivate a constant loving dialogue with God. That entails the frequent looking at God, the frequent speaking with him in love and making serious sacrifices for him. I think this now gives you in a few words a whole ascetical system which can fit in your "pocket."

We come to a certain conclusion here. "Unless you become like little children..." If we do not become unique revelations of God in the sense of an original hint of God, we cannot—either inadequately or not at all—enter into heaven.

## 2. A Unique Reflection of God

"The child as a unique revelation of God" has a second meaning, namely: the child is a unique reflection of God. What does the child reflect? The simplicity of the Father and the self-surrender of the Son!

Let me make a few *preliminary remarks*. It might not be necessary, but let me remind you of the *analogia entis* [analogy of being]<sup>1</sup>. What does this mean? When we speak of a child mirroring divine attributes, we must remember that the similarity is only analogous—it is a dissimilar similarity! This is even true of Mary. When we call her the Mirror of Justice, reflecting all God's perfections, we must bear in mind that, compared to God, the Blessed among Women is always similar only in a dissimilar way. How much more when we venture to call the child a mirror of God! We know that the distance is even vaster.

We know all this. But now please consider more detailed thoughts about *simplicity*. Later, if we have the time to consider the essence of childlikeness in clear metaphysical terms, we will come back to this. If we do not have the time, I want to at least brush on the topic so that you can work it out for yourselves.

## Simplicity

For now we consider simplicity strictly from the standpoint of how a child reflects God. Perhaps I can begin by reminding you of our definition: What the child is by nature, imperfectly and in passing, we must acquire perfectly and permanently through serious striving and the help of grace. Therefore we do well first to look at Original Simplicity and its likeness in order to learn how to imitate it.

<sup>1</sup> See footnote \*\*15\*\* on page \*\*31\*\*.

## The Heavenly Father as the Original Image

Who is the original image of simplicity? It is the heavenly Father. Now the words of philosophers and theologians speak to us again: *Deus est ens simplicissimum* [God is simplest being]. What does this mean? *Deus est actus purrissimus* [God is purest act]. But we must leave speculation aside, for it a digression which would take us too far afield.

## The Child as Likeness

By nature the child is a reflection of the simplicity of God the Father. If I say "by nature" I mean a reflection which is relatively perfect in comparison with absolute divine simplicity but also relatively perfect when compared to the division and discord within the adult soul. Observe the child! In many ways the child is not simple, of course. The child is affected by original sin, is manipulative, and so on. But even so, in comparison with an adult, the child is remarkable for his simplicity.

*What does the simple child look like?* Perhaps you would do best to start with the term "simple"—in Latin, *simplex* or "one-fold." The child's person is truly "one-fold," that is, relatively uncomplicated. Think of it as Our Lord would, observing children. What is this simplicity like?

My first point is: the child is always simple and faithful in his *thinking and loving*. This is said with a grain of salt, of course, but compared to adults this is an extraordinary feature of children.

What about his words? In *speech* the child is always truthful and trusting in his speech (again said with a certain grain of salt). It is not "diplomatic." Imagine a mother and child waiting for an aunt to come. The child blurts out everything the mother has told him. The mother says to the aunt, "I am so glad you came!" But the child exclaims, "That's not true!" The child is indeed simple and hides nothing.

How is the child in his *actions*? Always simple, always truthful, taken of course with a grain of salt.

If you want to more clearly understand the relative simplicity of the child, then we can *substitute another term for simplicity*. As usual, we gain a better understanding when we play with the words.

Childlike simplicity is often described with the word *naivete*. Of course, for adults, this word (like the word "simple") often has a negative connotation. Nowadays no one wants to be called simple or naive; that is the worst thing you could say of someone! But for us to be called naive would be the highest praise.

Where does this word come from and what life-process is it describing?

What does it mean to be "a naive person"? The word "naive" comes from the Latin *nativum*, namely "natural, close to nature." Of course, it can only be referring to nature inasmuch as it is untainted by original sin, i.e., a noble nature. Hence, a naive person is someone who has grown naturally and in a down-to-earth way, unfolding in himself all that is noble. People who grow up in the country have this naturalness. They are not easily swayed. They can make community life rough at times and yet they are a great blessing for the community. They are often called stubborn. But they are simply less swayed by suggestive influences. They have sound common sense and are not easily misled.

In general, I believe, we should rejoice if a community today has many such down-to-earth personalities. They get things done! The others take one little step and then need to be coaxed again. It is as if they needed a nursemaid! But a community in need of nursemaids is a pitiable community indeed! Therefore we must remember that a community like yours, which places so much emphasis on freedom, must see to it that it retains many natural personalities. (....)

### Our Imitation of this Ideal

We have considered the original image [God] reflected in the likeness [the child]. We must now give some consideration to our imitation of this ideal. Become what you are! What should I become? Not a simpleton, not just "simple as a dove" (cf Mt 10,16), but simple as God is simple! This is what Our Lord wants to tell us when he says, "Unless you become like little children..." Away with all "diplomacy," with all the duplicitousness of my nature!

Imagine how much the community would be strengthened, how refreshing and family-like the atmosphere would be if we always told the unvarnished truth, openly and without beating around the bush. I don't think anyone will die from being told the hard truth about himself. After all, we know one another! But to have the feeling that things are always being said "diplomatically" and to live in distrust are the worst things to endure. To get something off one's chest is not so bad; that happens in the best of families! In fact, it can be very healthy. You surely agree that this is not tragic at all. But how turned off we can become by these "yes"-men, always maneuvering with "diplomacy" to reach some goal. Give me some honest thunder and lightning instead, and then it can be over! When everything stays so tense, it is unbearable.

### a. Reflecting the Father's Simplicity

Our simplicity should be measured by the simplicity of God the Father. "Unless you become like little children..." But that simplicity should not only take its standard from the children—that would be too little! What the child is by nature, imperfectly and in passing, we should acquire perfectly and permanently as our perfect and permanent possession.

Our Lord is evidently very much concerned that we set our standards by the Father, for he stresses clearly on one occasion, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5,48). A most lofty ideal! We should not only be as perfect as some great man in history, not only as perfect as Our Lady is perfect, but as perfect as our Father in heaven. This is an infinitely lofty goal, an infinitely high ideal! After we have said that God is simplicity, we may conclude that we must become like him in this simplicity, in this being "one-fold" in our nature.

But if I may inquire: *How can we become like the Father*, we who are on such a vastly lower plane than he? Here we must recall the powerful effect of true, healthy love. What true, healthy love can accomplish! "He who loves the Lord is one with him in spirit" (1 Cor 6,17). Or in philosophical terms: Love is a unifying and assimilating power. If I love the Father in heaven, I am not only united with him in a mysterious way, but I also become more like him who is simplicity itself. (....)

What is simplicity? It has *two dimensions*: the concentration of all our faculties in God, and the freeing of all our faculties from all things ungodly and antiodly.

What a simple definition! Give it some serious thought and you will notice that simplicity is a high degree of sanctity. You only have to add one word to transform it into a definition of sanctity: "out of love." Formally speaking, simplicity does not include love. In practice, however, simplicity cannot exist without love.

Let us look at *other expressions*. If I analyze the definition I can say: Simplicity entails a *twofold harmony of the soul*—first, the harmony of our faculties among themselves, and secondly, a harmony of the soul's faculties with God. This may give you an inkling of the true greatness of a simple soul. It is clear, calm and enlightened, like the waters of a deep lake.

### Concentration of All Faculties in God

If you want another expression for simplicity, read the offertory prayer for the dedication of a church. "O Lord God, in the simplicity of my heart I have joyfully brought you all these things in sacrifice" (cf 1 Chr 29,17).

Here you have the concentration, the recollection of all the faculties in the One God.

Or take another expression: a little *Indivisa Dei*. What does this mean? The soul which belongs undividedly (indivisibly) to God. It is totally, unreservedly given to God! This is simplicity. Another word for this is total surrender—though this has love as its prime connotation more than simplicity.

Or perhaps you have already read how Hettinger<sup>2</sup> had something akin to a personal ideal. He had it inscribed in his seal and talked about it in his letters. His life's program was: *Omnia uni!* All things for the One God! Or should I put it in more popular terms? Then you might say: One gaze on the one God, or, one heart for the one Father! These are all phrases which capture the meaning of simpleness and simplicity in the genuinely religious sense of the word.

(....)

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<sup>2</sup> Fr. Franz Seraph Hettinger (1819-1890), German theologian and author.

#### NINTH CONFERENCE

As we proceed, Our Lord's call to "become like little children" gains in meaning. Unless we, like children, become a reflection of the Father's simplicity, we cannot enter into heaven!

We considered what this simplicity toward God involves. The answer has two parts: the concentration of all our faculties in God and the detachment, the freeing of all our faculties from all that is not God and is opposed to God. You will surely agree that this is the attainable pinnacle of simplicity.

In order to urge ourselves on a little during this retreat so we can successfully reach out for this summit, we considered a number of motivations. Perhaps the thoughts at the end of the last talk helped make us want to reach out for the constant recollection of our faculties in God.

Let me add, though: What I said was not really the core; *the most central thing is love*. If we experience profound growth in love, the constant recollection of our faculties in God will become second nature to us.

#### Detachment from All That is Not God and is Opposed to God

We now want to pursue the same train of thought, namely detachment.

Here, too, I may mention secondary motives. I do so deliberately. I could simplify my work by just saying: If we really had a deep love of God, detachment would follow as a matter of course. But it cannot do us any harm to examine the secondary motives.

It goes without saying that attachment is not possible without detachment. It is also clear that our degree of attachment depends on our degree of detachment. This detachment from things that are not of God or opposed to God can be both active and passive.

#### Active Detachment

Active detachment entails self-denial and mortification by conscious exertion. By my own activity, and supported by grace, I must detach myself from all that is not good. However, in our context I do not want to stress this so much, especially since we have already discussed it. Today I want to stress *passive detachment* instead.

#### Passive Detachment

I begin by pointing out to you that God himself, our heavenly Father, takes the pruning knife to cut and trim us. The Father prunes the vine so

that it may bring forth more fruit (cf Jn 15,2). What must *I* do? I must lie down on the "operating table" and let him cut. I have to keep silent and merely say again and again, "Yes, Father. Do to your child whatever pleases you!"

Let me give you *two motivations* to support your interest in pursuing this attitude.

#### *Negative Motivation*

First of all, let me state that *whoever is incapable of saying this simple, profound, unaffected, childlike Ita Pater [Yes, Father] hinders God in his educational activity*. That reminds us of the thought we already heard from Pestalozzi. This thought is too profound to grasp in one hearing.

Again: If I do not say a courageous and childlike *Ita Pater* in the face of all crosses and suffering, I hinder God in his profound pruning, in his educational activity and work. I don't think that I must prove this to you again. The thought was clearly explained the first time. I would rather reverse the perspective and state positively the

#### *Positive Motivation*

*Whoever is capable of saying this childlike and humble Ita Pater in the face of every blow of fate and prays and acts accordingly, can be certain of two great advantages:* First, in some practical way the mysteries of my personal life will become clear. Second, I give God the chance as my heavenly Father to treat and form me in some way as the apple of his eye.

I believe that these two thoughts are capable of filling our souls with joy and gratitude.

While I speak in abstractions, you must think concretely, think about your own suffering and that which is so difficult for you in community life or in your personal troubles. I shall speak on this subject in much more detail the day after tomorrow. I think I am obliged to do this so that we gradually learn to transform our inmost lives.

But for tonight I just want to give you the one or the other insight.

*First, in a practical way the Ita Pater resolves all of life's personal riddles.* One often talks about the insoluble tangle of world events! This is decidedly true. It is not so simple to untangle the confused jumble of world history. It is an insoluble riddle. Why this? Why that? But if I have a *simple faith in Divine Providence* which says again and again this simple, childlike *Ita Pater*, then I can likely say: for me each mysterious riddle is solved. I know that what God sends me is always for the best. For a simple child that is enough. After all, it comes from the Father. As a simple

child I do not need to know all the whys and wherefores. I only know that whatever each moment brings, God my Father has foreseen it—either directly ordained it or permitted it. In the *Ita Pater* the simple child always has the answer to all of life's riddles. I only need to speak it in each second. The next second will demand a new *Ita Pater*. At any rate, I do not torment myself by constantly trying to figure out: What will happen next?

What a pinnacle of sanctity is available to us through simplicity! And we all know it, especially those of us who are given to brooding or who are embittered. The moment of light when the clouds are driven away will come! For now I only need to know: *Ita Pater!* Sculptor God, strike with hammer and chisel! I am your stone! Sculptor God, strike with force, I am your child! You know what you are doing. You see the masterpiece that I could be and you wish to form it; this part and that must be chipped away from the stone. Sculptor God, go to work, I am your stone. When I resist, when I say "no"; when I begin to take my fate into my own hands, that is the worst thing that can happen. *My very greatest care must be—I think that this is a slogan which we must take to heart, for it transmits so much profound wisdom—to be, each second, endlessly carefree.* This is no frivolity. Why? Because the Father is at the helm!

Though storm may rage and wind may howl,  
and lightning strike again,

I think as does the mariner's child:

My father is at the helm.

You must imagine this scene: A heavy sea. Storm upon storm. A ship tossed by the waves. A child sitting near the helm, calmly looking into the churning sea and amazed by its fury. That is the way of a child; the father is in command. As long as the father is at the helm, nothing bad can happen! There is, of course, much ignorance in this childlikeness, but that is not the point here.

Should I not apply this saying to my personal difficulties, even when I must admit that my difficulties previously made me turn away from God? I never understood. Why not? Because my simple, childlike faith in Divine Providence, my simple *Ita Pater* was still too weak!

My only care must be:

to be, each second, endlessly carefree!

Ask yourselves: Does it not concretely solve all the riddles of my life when I have the simple faith of a child, when I let myself be formed by the heavenly Father, knowing that he is making me into a work of art?

Let me briefly outline the *second advantage*: *By simple willingness—*

for instance, letting God 'work' on me even when I do not understand his final purpose—I give God the chance to educate and form me as his beloved child, as the apple of his eye. This is such a simple thought, but such an insightful truth! What is God's purpose in fashioning me this way? What intention does he have for our family when he sends such tremendous cross and suffering? First, he must detach us from our inordinate self-will. Secondly, he must detach us from our inordinate self-sufficiency and pride. Thirdly, he must free us from all disordered attachment to creatures. You immediately see the ulterior motive! If God wishes to possess every fiber of my heart he must perform this threefold operation on me.

1) *He must break my inordinate self-will.* As a consequence of original sin, do we not hinder the hand of the Divine Master from forming us again and again by asserting our inordinate self-will against his Divine Will? Our self-will is so laced with this disease and perversion that the poison cannot be removed unless God himself applies the knife.

Have the courage to apply such simple thoughts to your community's crosses and sufferings! If we have done everything in our power to prevent the suffering, we can rest assured that God has permitted it for my best and the best of the family. Even if we cannot say with certainty that it is the will of God, we still know that whatever he has in mind is something good!

As I have said, I will revisit this when I speak about obedience. I will do so because I think we need a healthy *understanding of obedience*. Obedience must, of course, be allied with frankness, but it must also be capable of submission of the will when God clearly shows that he wants to lead the community in a different direction from what I feel is good. This is what it means to go God's ways in simple faith in Divine Providence!

To wit: What does God want? To break my sick self-will so that every fiber of my will ultimately belongs to him.

2) *He wants to break my inordinate pride and drive to succeed.* It might be good for us to briefly recall how filled with pride we priests are without our really knowing it. Think of how much we can lecture others and work on their faults and sins! Therein lies the great danger of smugness. The more one fights sin in others, the more one can become complacent with self. Or think of the successes we have in our profession. In short: stand back and see how much opportunity we have to feed and nourish our pride.

Recall, on the other hand, how almost every suffering sent or permitted by God involves *humiliation*. Consider, for instance, your disappointments in your situation in life, in your superiors, in your fellow-workers. Do they

not all include a certain humiliation? Or, works of mine which took great effort to build up are destroyed. The very ones for whom I sacrificed so much cast stones at me. Are not such humiliations almost part of daily life? Why? Original sin has caused pride, in one form or another, to become almost second nature to us. This is why God must wield the hammer and chisel. Conversely, if God does not send us suffering or humiliation, we should almost fear that he is forgetting us, that he is no longer treating us as the apple of his eye. Of course, everything he does is out of love, not to torment us. His motive is to free us from this poison so that our souls can fly to him with greater simplicity.

3) And finally, let me remind you *that God must free us more and more from our disordered attachments*. If you ask what purpose and meaning *created things and persons have in God's plan*, you will find that they have a *threefold purpose*. First of all, they must *attract* us. Think of a created thing or person. What should it stir in me? Now, if it is a person, he or she should awaken in me (for instance, through certain attractive features) my drive to love. The same applies to created things. Secondly, they must *transmit, i.e., refer us on to God*. Every creature should point beyond itself to God. But because we are, as a rule, enslaved to things or people, they have a third function—to *disappoint* us.

### **The Function of Disappointment in Created Things and Persons**

We must hear this as mature persons. I ask myself: How many disappointments have I had—professionally and in family life! Now be sensible enough to say to yourself: It is *normal* that creatures disappoint us. The most you could object is: Why this form of disappointment? You are quite right. But we are not in a position to choose our disappointments. In simplicity, we leave that to God. We try our best to prevent trouble and to change what can be changed. If that is not possible, then both the mature man and the simple child (and here the two are the same) must accept the disappointment.

Why do creatures have this function? Why must they hurt us so much? *Not to make us bitter, but to awaken our inner strength*. It is the way which most surely awakens our deepest, most vibrant power to love. You will find confirmation of this in the lives of the saints. They had to suffer great disappointments. Who should I mention first? Think of so many religious founders. What happened to them? Take Alphonsus Ligouri—thrown out of his own community after he had devoted his whole life's strength to its foundation! We should not cling too much to human institutions and

human things. Since there is the danger of becoming enslaved, God's fatherly hand is always at work, cutting and pruning, especially through disappointments of every kind. (....)

We should teach our youth to expect disappointment. If you fail to do this, you fail to prepare them for life. The proof of true character is that disappointment does not make one bitter! Of course my first reaction can be bitter; this is only human. But I must not let it turn me into a bitter person! Let me use an image: We should make the mighty boulders of our disappointments and all of life's difficulties into a staircase. We then use this *staircase* to calmly and surely ascend *to the heart of God*.

I know that this is more easily said than done. But can you name one man who has achieved greatness without using this bridge? Name me any community and there will be human failings. That's life! Difficulties have one name here and another name there. What determines the greatness of a community is how quickly its members see the difficulties [as a staircase to God] and begin to ascend. If we had no difficulties something would be wrong. Things could certainly be different, but since they are what they are, my task as a man and a child is to persevere. I know my duty. I want to remain firm, make no concessions to my weakness, but as a holy priest use every trial in order *to grow beyond myself*.

Don't you sense that this is the right way? How something comes over us like the Holy Spirit or a living power which lays hold of us and never lets go? In such situations there is not much point in sulking in the corner. That does no good for the community, nor for God nor ourselves. This is when the true man stands out. Where is the enemy? What can I achieve in spite of the circumstances? We have our community and in it we stand on firm ground. What I can do, I do in a manly and childlike way. God will bless us.

Meditate on these thoughts again. It is perhaps a little confused but the main idea should be clear. "Unless you become like little children..." The height of simplicity consists in the concentration of all our powers on God, in the detachment from all that is not God or is opposed to God. Unless we become like children, God cannot use us.

In conclusion, a few well-known *prayers* might warm up our hearts for this simplicity. I recently took part in a pilgrimage to Sachseln<sup>1</sup>. The prayer of St. Nicholas of Flüe was explained to us in a talk. It is a

<sup>1</sup> To the shrine of St. Nicholas of Flüe in Switzerland.

marvelous illustration of what we call the pinnacle of simplicity:

"My Lord and my God,  
grant me all that leads me to you!"

Do I have the courage to ask for everything—including crosses and suffering—if this leads me to God?

"My Lord and my God,  
take me from all that keeps me from you!"

Take everything, including the love of those who lead me and the respect of those I lead, if this comes between you and me! Listen to this great simplicity! St. Nicholas continues:

"My Lord and my God,  
take me from myself and give me completely to you!"

This is the height of simplicity. If we dared to pray like this, we would be ready to strive earnestly for sanctity. We must be true in prayer, even when our poor hearts tremble.

Or would you like to meditate on other prayers of this type? You could refer to the well-known prayer of St. Ignatius, "*Suscipe Domine...*"<sup>2</sup> This prayer, too, is an example of simplicity: You may take all things; you gave it to me; let me be yours. "Only give me your grace and love, and I am rich enough..."

Or another prayer: "Lord, when I seek you, bless me; when I seek myself, punish me!"

You can find many more prayers of this kind, but we must be serious when we say them. If we only had the courage to reach for this pinnacle of genuine holiness! Half-hearted men are broken by certain trials; only those who are wholehearted can rise above them. We should be wholehearted because we want to become entirely childlike. Childlikeness implies the mastery of all these serious difficulties. You may equate childlikeness with manliness. In the end, they are the same. We prefer to say that we should be children because this word expresses our supernatural attitude toward God and also corresponds to our ideal as family.

<sup>2</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, Fourth Week (No. 234): "Take, Lord, all my liberty. Receive my memory, my understanding, and my whole will. Whatever I have and possess, you have given me; to you I restore it wholly, and to your will I utterly surrender it for my direction. Give me the love of you only, with your grace, and I am rich enough; nor do I ask anything besides." Fr. Kentenich unfolded this prayer in his own way while a prisoner of the Nazis (1941-45); see *Heavenwards* (Waukesha, 1993), p. 109-110 and 174.

## TENTH CONFERENCE

The more we discover the rich meaning of childlikeness and find joy in the ideal of our family, the greater our self-esteem and conviction that we have something great to offer our modern time and world. You have probably guessed that, starting tonight, we will go into more detail about the deep longing for childlikeness in the world of today. They go together like question and answer—our times pose the question and as a community we propose an answer. Nor should we just feel the idea of childlikeness; we should also radiate it into our times with our whole being. (....)

### b. Our Reflection of Christ's Self-Surrender to the Father

We should reflect in the most perfect possible way the self-surrender of God's only-begotten Son. You will not be disappointed if I state only the most basic facts here. If I am informed correctly, this topic is already quite familiar to you, allowing you to assimilate the ideas more quickly. This prepares the way for many other truths which will not be so easily grasped.

Let us consider childlikeness as a reflection of the self-surrender of the only-begotten Son of God or, in the case [of our community's ideals], as the most perfect possible reflection.

Pause for a moment and think of all the images of childlikeness we have examined. We said that the child is a unique prophet of God. Psychologically speaking, this means that childlikeness is the same as a kind of shyness—reverent and filled with wonder. In a next step we equated childlikeness with simplicity.

### Self-Surrender, Crowning Achievement of Childlikeness

We now impart to the word childlikeness a new and deeper meaning. This new meaning is a strong protest against views which remain too much on the surface. There are so many people today whose hearts cry out for the shelter of a heart that loves them. I will later demonstrate how this is a justified need. You may notice yourself some day—for instance, in working with other religious communities—how incredibly strong this cry for emotional shelter is. But we must be on our guard not to say childlikeness is *primarily shelteredness*. Childlikeness has much more to do with *self-surrender*! Self-surrender is the secondary meaning or, if you will, the effect. I may come back to this later when I speak about the metaphysical essence of childlikeness. (....)

Such words give childlikeness a flavor of austerity. This goes together, of course, with the charm that comes from the fact that the child is primarily motivated by love. When my love sparks such a love of sacrifice and helps make the family table a table of sacrifice, then the austerity loses its harsh overtone; then we sense that it has struck the right chord.

### The Self-Surrender of Christ to the Will of the Father

Let us return, however, from this more pedagogical view to the questions of spirituality. As we have heard again and again, the child is a mirror of the self-surrender of the only-begotten Son of God. Hence: Become what you are! Or rather: Become what the child is! Try to think this idea through for yourselves. The characteristic trait of the only-begotten Son of God is indeed this singular self-surrender.

We must now pursue two thoughts: First, the self-surrender of Christ *in his physical childhood*.

This is a thought which is very familiar to us. It is stressed in your community again and again. How unpretentious Christ was as a child, how malleable, obedient and willing! It is your custom to reflect on the virtues of the Christ Child and then say: *atqui, ergo*! [So it is, therefore I do it!]

It strikes me as more important for us as adults that we not only take as our norm the self-sacrifice of Christ as a Child, but also the self-sacrifice of Our Lord

*during his whole life.*

That is my translation and interpretation of the fact that Christ's spirit of simplicity and surrender was not only lived in Bethlehem but also throughout his whole life. We would therefore do well to especially think about how Our Lord lived this childlike self-surrender more and more completely with each passing year throughout his whole lifetime. And perhaps you will also notice and examine more closely what this undivided self-surrender of Christ to the will of the Father looks like.

A second point follows from the first—Christ's self-surrender to those in his care, to immortal souls. I will not go into this second part. If you want a more detailed presentation of this, then you must study the third part of the book *Everyday Sanctity* when you have the chance. This discusses the point in quite a modern, but also perennial way. I will limit myself to the self-surrender of Christ to the will of the Father.

If we are looking quickly for a starting point, then we must say that *Christ had to strive for something extraordinarily great in his life because*

*it was his desire and mission to be an example for all times and places, for all persons, including the most gifted; because of this he had to choose the very greatest object in heaven and on earth as his goal in life.* What was this great goal? Being constantly sheltered in God in each and every action of his life. In Christ there was nothing which was merely humanly great; his greatness consisted in the fact that everything which happened in his life was directly sheltered in God. This was because in all things he did nothing else than say 'yes' to what the Father willed. *Ita Pater! [Yes, Father!] This is the greatest measure of his life.*

We too—especially those young men who come to join our community—often have an indomitable urge to greatness. Where should we focus this urge? On the wish and will of the heavenly Father. This is why it stands written as the "morning prayer" over the life of Christ: "Offering and oblation you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me... See, I come to do your will!" (Heb 10,5,7-9). Here we have the ideal of Christ's life, his personal ideal. He later gave it the form: Yes, Father! *Ita Pater!* (cf Lk 10,22).

Check to see how true this is! What was Christ's guiding idea throughout his life? I say what the Father has told me; I do the works my Father wishes me to do (cf Jn 14,10). I go to my suffering and death so that the world sees that I fulfill the will of the Father (cf Jn 14,31). That should be the specific uniqueness of your spirituality!

Check and see how Our Lord reveals this childlike surrender to the wish and will of the Father in his prayer, work, and suffering. That is the common thread of his view of life. We all know that every Christian view of life has three parts: prayer, work, suffering. The "*ora et labora*" left out suffering, and the fact that suffering is an essential task of the Christian life is often forgotten. Observe Our Lord

*in his childlike surrender and work!*

We should look through the words of Sacred Scripture as through a peephole to see the deepest reaches of the heart of the God-man. You will discover that the sentiment which constantly accompanied Our Lord through his work was *Ita Pater!* We have already heard his "morning prayer." But the first word that came from his mouth was this: "Did you not know I must be about my Father's business?" (Lk 2,49). We ought to meditate on such words again and again. When you later write your own meditation handbook, such words ought to inspire individual times of meditation again and again.

On a later occasion Our Lord made a circle, as it were, around the

central thought of his life: I rejoice in that which pleases my Father! (cf Jn 4,34; 5,19-30; 8,29). This is our attitude. This is no spirit of slavery! I do not only do what is commanded under pain of serious sin. To the statement "The One who sent me never abandons me," Christ adds, "because I always do what pleases him" (Jn 8,29). Think of your own heavy tasks and then add in the spirit of Our Lord: "I have nothing to fear, for the One who sent me will never abandon me!" Or think of your difficulties finding enough to live on or finding vocations. "The One who sent me will never abandon me." You see, if God the Father is with me, I need have no fear. The party with God on its side is always strongest.

But how can I win God's blessing? Our Lord gives the answer when he says, "I do what pleases the Father." We win his blessing by trying to follow not only God's commands, but also his wishes. Along this line, Our Lord could say, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" (Jn 4,34). What does he mean? It is my favorite occupation! My only concern is to do what pleases the Father. What a powerful statement! What heights of self-surrender! It is not pleasure which motivates him but self-surrender! The child devotes himself undividedly to the wishes of the Father.

We therefore observe how Christ truly related everything in his life, both great and small, to the Father.

What a happy and encouraging moment it must have been in the life of Our Lord when his work as educator had finally brought Peter to the point when he, speaking on behalf of the others, made the first profession of faith in his divinity! Just think of what a joy this must have been, purely humanly speaking, for the heart of the God-man! And he connects this act at once to the Father: "No mere man has revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (Mt 16,17). The entire life of Our Lord is centered on the Father. What great psychological principle is at work here? *Who is the measure of all things? The Father! The child centers his life entirely around the wish and will of the Father! Surrender of self, not surrender to self!* When we pray, "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,*" our life still says, "*My will be done.*" We try too hard to make God's will conform to ours. For the child the measure of all things is the will of the Father. You know the old saying: "The measure of all things is God, not man!" I should not live as if I were the measure of all things for God!

On one occasion (Mt 12,46-50) Christ was told, "Your mother and your brothers are here!" He responded: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Here too his one guiding thought was clear: "Who are my mother, my brother, my sister? Whoever does the will of my Father who sent me."



You must pay close attention to such details. They are more than just sayings from a book. They give us a glimpse into the golden depths of the heart of the God-man.

We see the one great affect, the one great passion in the life of Christ—his love for the Father! Just listen to the marvelous crowning of his work through words such as these from the end of his life: "I have given you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (Jn 17,4). If only I could say the same thing in the twilight of my life!

Apply this to yourselves. Which is the work the Father has given to you? Suppose I am a professor. Embrace it! Or a teacher or spiritual director. I see everything, even though it includes many sacrifices, as the work of my heavenly Father. I have finished this work with all my might. I did not settle for second-best. I did not just kid around!

Don't you think it would be a great blessing for the community if each of us could say this, if each in his place would try to do quality work in the same simple childlike spirit of Christ? If the superior of the whole community can say at the end of each day, "I have finished the work you gave me to do," it will be a great and lucid work, for it will follow the outline given in your constitutions and cannot be second-guessed. And what heights of accomplishment if a community can truly say that it has finished the work God gave it to do! It then becomes a blessing for the whole Church! But if every community is dabbling in every pot and each community does everything, then afterwards it will have done nothing! We must therefore want to be true to our call, to that which God has assigned to us in our constitutions.

This work is the keystone of my life. Who is the one who can put the keystone in place? "I have finished the work you gave me to do." You hear, at the very least, the unbounded nature of the God-man's surrender of his will to the will of the Father. In fact, you should also examine this same attitude

*in the prayer life of Our Lord.*

When speaking about the importance of the little ones in the kingdom of God, Christ turns *to the Father*: "I thank you, Father, for you have revealed this... to the merest children!" (Mt 11,25).

If you would like to hear how deep and full the word "Father" sounds in the mouth of Our Lord, just read his high priestly prayer (Jn 17). Do it today! The word "Father" has such a beautiful ring when he says it! When Our Lord says, among other things, "I have made your name known to those you entrusted to my care" (6), which name does he mean? The name

of his Father! And we hear him repeat it again and again: "O Father most holy..." (11), "Just Father..." (25). It would seem that Our Lord knows no other prayer than to the Father. Consider his final prayer in this light, too: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23,46). Have you ever noticed this... that both Our Lord's "morning" and "evening prayer" form a single act of surrender to the Father?

It would almost be worth the trouble to ask yourselves: How often do I address my personal prayer to the Father? Why is this important? Because I am convinced that the dwindling faith in Divine Providence found in the Catholic world is causing the image of the heavenly Father to fade more and more.

I do not know, of course, which prayers you say in community, but in my mind they would have to be an outstanding reflection of the prayer of the God-man. For your prayer to be coherent with your spirituality, you should turn to the Father. He will not be the only one you address in prayer, but he should be high on the list! Your private prayer should also reflect liturgical prayer in an outstanding way, for the prayer of the liturgy is always *ad Patrem*—directed to the Father. After all, the clear liturgical style is *per Christum ad Patrem*—through Christ to the Father. The prayer of the liturgy—his self-surrender in prayer—is the prayer of the God-man. Note that all the prayers of Holy Mass, apart from the three said just before Holy Communion, are addressed in Christ to the Father.

It would be worthwhile—but beyond the scope of our retreat—to examine why modern man so rarely prays to the heavenly Father and then consider each cause-and-effect contributing to the calamity.

To continue, let us consider how the self-surrender of Our Lord is preeminently documented

*in his suffering.*

Because [as a community] we are still relatively young, I need to stress this more. We do not want to forget *that suffering is an indispensable part of the Christian life*. We would be well advised to teach the young men who enter our community—almost from day one—that there is no Christian or priestly life without suffering. We will otherwise be too disappointed and wonder why we had to face so much suffering in our lives. In my view you should be more amazed when *no* suffering touches your life. I will not go into the reasons for this, but only remind you that "the Father prunes the vine" (Jn 15,2). If the Father wants to remove the poisons from our nature, he must do surgery. Think about what it means to belong to Christ. If we want to be his members, images of Christ as the community

wants us to be, then we must simply expect that this cannot be attained without suffering.

You must realize: *perfected childlikeness reveals itself precisely in suffering*. Should I tell you this from the psychological viewpoint? Sufferings are not to be borne like a war-tempered soldier, but—and that applies both to the community and to each individual—as a child. *And the child has a right to cry when he is hurt*. You see, the recruit must stand bravely until told: Right face! Left face! This is not the child's way of suffering, not even Our Lord's way to suffer. If you want to learn a lesson in how a real man suffers, study how women suffer. Then make sure your suffering is truly human! Women can teach us how to suffer the right way. You know, I think this "soldierly" attitude to suffering weakens our childlikeness to some extent and makes us coarse.

Let me show you what I mean with an example from Our Lord. Our best school of childlike suffering is the *school of Gethsemani*. Who among us has not had Gethsemani hours! If God has preserved us thus far, such hours will come—sooner or later!

What do we mean by "Gethsemani suffering"? It is when the soul no longer feels anything to counterbalance the suffering; the suffering is given free rein.

We are all weighed down by great sufferings at times, but often still sense that our inner moorings are secure. At other times, however, we are totally handed over to suffering; we feel the total collapse of every inner support which allowed us to withstand it!

Try to study the Gethsemani hours in the life of Christ. I think that for our purposes we should differentiate between *two aspects*.

*First, there is the child's cry*. I have good reasons for wanting to stress this. During suffering we have the right, just as Christ did, to cry out with childlike pain. We must tell this to our people! We must not be like drill sergeants or brutal savages. Then we have a kind of suffering which crushes human nature and our childlike spirit!

How must we picture Our Lord? Totally overwhelmed by suffering... prostrate on the ground. How human! He, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, feels abandoned. He seeks consolation, wants to pour out his heart to his friends—how human a desire! To need to pour out one's heart in a reasonable way is not a sign of failed childlikeness; I must only know to whom I can speak my peace. Our Lord gives in to this purely human need, but the heavenly Father does not grant the consolation. What do his disciples do when he comes? They sleep!

Childlike suffering knows how to protest. It knows how to complain to the Father. If you have been a father to someone, you will know from experience that when a simple child comes and whimpers, "It hurts," it wins a greater place in the father's heart. It is not a hindrance! You must see these things much more humanly. If we see things more humanly, we will see them more divinely. What does Our Lord do? We hear his childlike cry: "Father, let this cup pass me by!" (Mt 26,39). We often imagine these things incorrectly. We usually think that Christ said this as some kind of memorized quote. But Sacred Scripture tells us how much he suffered. As a man he not only broke out in a sweat—we know of people who break out in a sweat when they are in great fear—but that he sweat blood! He fell prostrate! We say: All his manly pride was broken. By the way, I think we need to revise our concept of manliness—Christ was always a man, was always an example! I think I have the right to imagine Our Lord crying out to heaven again and again: Father, let this cup pass me by! It took time for his human nature to say: "Not my will, but your will be done!"

To my mind, filling in the details like this is an entirely appropriate approach for biblical and dogmatic theology. It is also very important for modern man. We must remain human in our suffering, and that means childlike. Note the expressions: my suffering should be childlike—not military, not savage.

If you want to go deeper for a moment: It is not an imperfection to "tell God off" now and then, to scold God in a childlike way and tell him what's bothering me. I think that God is pleased by that in a certain sense.

*Secondly*, it seems to me that we should not want *to console too quickly those who are bearing a cross*. We should let them "tell God off" and shed as many tears as they need and not come too soon with a list of reasons why it is a good thing. This is the second lesson which Gethsemani teaches us: After Our Lord cried out to God and sought a moderate measure of consolation in others and in God, but did not receive it (and perhaps this is something we must experience quite often, at times as individuals, at times as community), he was able to say: "*Not my will, but your will be done!*" (Mt 26,39). When we accept suffering in a childlike manner, then we can expect that the second part will not be too long in coming: Father, not my will, but yours be done! Still, I may not regain my inner composure right away. The storm may still sweep over me. But my childlike will is then clearly [anchored] in the wish and will of God.

This should give us the necessary clarity about the self-surrender of

Our Lord.

### Our Reflection of Christ's Self-Surrender

Now think about how this is in children. After considering the model, we consider the reflection. Is such a self-surrender also found in children? The answer is 'yes,' though with strong traces of egotism and self-seeking mixed in. As we have said: What the child possesses imperfectly and in passing, we must acquire perfectly and permanently to the highest degree.

*Hence the third thought:* We must become the most perfect possible reflections of the child, the most perfect possible reflections of Christ.

At this point you may ask: What can I do to practice childlikeness as a deep self-surrender to the wish and will of the Father? I have time to raise only a few questions.

#### *Our Constitutions*

Must I not, as a genuine child, consider *our constitutions* as an expression of the God-man's wishes and, to some extent, an expression of his will<sup>1</sup>? We will return to this sometime this afternoon. We must say to ourselves: even if our constitutions only express the wish [as opposed to an order] of the heavenly Father, that is enough for me. If I am always looking for loopholes: "This or that is not really binding," then I have not understood the ABCs of childlikeness. Hear the words again: On the royal ship of God's love there are no galley slaves—only free rowers!

Our whole community depends on magnanimity. You understand the reason why. The juridical bonds have been kept to such a minimum that an extra effort is needed to keep the spiritual bonds rigorous and strong. In end effect, we must be the epitome of magnanimity. If I tell myself that this or that transgression is not a sin and then drink it down like water, I have not yet reached the land of true childlikeness. Our attitude must be this: If it is not a sin, I will try even harder to obey! Why? Because it pleases *HIM* and makes *HIM* happy! The individual points in the constitutions make the heavenly Father happy! And he does not want to place them on me as a burden. No, he does so because it gives him joy. Hence,

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Kentenich's terminology implies a difference between obeying God because I am obliged by his *will* through the law (such as the Ten Commandments and the constitutions of the community) and, on a higher level, obeying God because I discern his *wish*—not imposed on me as an order, but offered as a chance for me to show and grow in my love for him.

everything I do should be because it is my food to fulfill each wish of the Father (cf Jn 4,34) expressed in even the least significant details of our constitutions.

Many of the saints who died in younger years, the patrons of youth, are shown on holy cards with their constitutions in hand. It should be something like that with us. When one of us is canonized, others should be able to prove that he became a saint because he lived—to the last detail—the principles of sanctity set forth by the constitutions. That one of you is canonized should be a canonization of your constitutions and institute. That may give you a certain motivation. A religious community such as yours, which is so unique in the Church, must eventually justify itself by producing saintly members and truly canonizable saints. This is a goal for which you must strive, and do not think it an improper ambition! Your educators must point out this standard again and again.

This is where we can also mention the wishes of God found everywhere in our *daily schedule*. We do not want to be slaves but free children who do what the Father tells them in the spirit of faith. The same applies to the *wishes of our superiors*. Here too: not as slaves! Later on I will have to clarify this to you in greater detail. We must practice childlike obedience. Such an obedience is endlessly magnanimous—and as frank as a child. Do not only hear the one side of the equation. Think about how you can practice Our Lord's self-surrender in your everyday lives!

You notice that these things make us interiorly free because they are not under pain of obligation or sin. The less I am threatened by sin, the more interiorly free and magnanimous I will be.

Become what the child is!

### 3. A Unique Union with God

There is still one more thought to discuss. The child, as we said, is a unique revelation of God—not only as a unique prophet of God, not only as a unique reflection of God, but also as being in a unique union with God. What does this mean? You must *study the child's religiosity*. With what faith, trust and love the child constantly circles around God! A union with God through faith, hope and love! This makes the child an extraordinarily unique revelation of God. Become what the child is: *an incarnation of the three divine virtues!*

You will have to excuse me from going into this in more detail here. If there is time, I will do so later, when we clarify the metaphysical nature of childlikeness.

Let me come to a close. We stand at the end of a long train of thought. After discussing with one another the meaning of childlikeness, after demonstrating that it is the way to heaven, we began to examine the content of childlikeness. We found a positive side and a negative side, a transformation into something new and a reformation of something old.

What does the reformation, the negative aspect entail? We will work on that this afternoon. It will also serve as the preparation for private confession time. For you sense what Our Lord said so clearly: Unless you change and convert and become like children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. What must be reformed in us? That is the great question we must ask ourselves to become children. What do we need to reform to make more effective the transformation into something new?

#### ELEVENTH CONFERENCE

### II. Reforming Something Old

"Unless you become like little children..." is the call of Our Lord. With these words he wants to impress two things on us: We should strive to be transformed into something new—into true children—and, at the same time work to reform our lives. In other words, if we want to be children in the full sense of the words of Christ, we must not only be born anew, but also reject something old. This is why he says, "Unless you *change* and become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

*Two questions* interest us at this point. First, what must we reject? Secondly, what must we do?

#### A. What Must We Reject? (The Unchildlikeness of Sin)

We begin by returning to *the question's direct biblical context*. The point becomes clear at once: We must reject all that is unchildlike or, if you will, all that is childish and immature.

Please re-picture the situation (in reality it is quite clear already). The apostles were quarreling about the highest places in the kingdom. What did Christ tell them? Cast off such unbecoming ambitions! He points to the child so quickly that he might just as well have said: You must cast off this unchildlike-childish behavior and pursue the ideal that really matters—that you become true children!

Let me remind you again that there is still a great deal in the child which is immature. We must therefore learn to cast off this immaturity a bit at a time. When we view the child as an ideal, it is only with reference to what is noble and good in the child. Please recall why the heart and life of the child can be so immature even without an apparent outside cause. As we know so well, this is an effect of original sin.

These things may be of lesser interest to us. We are more interested in the *second* question: What, *in the context of the entire work of salvation*, must we reject? At this point we can view unchildlikeness and childishness from a different angle. What is unchildlikeness, what name shall we give it? It is sin and imperfection. Hence, we must reject sin and do battle against imperfection.

To repeat: Unless you change and become like children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven! Unless you reject sin—serious sin and voluntary venial sin—and fight imperfection, you cannot—either not at all

or inadequately—enter the kingdom of heaven.

Here we ought to pause for a moment. The thoughts I will share are nothing new. I mention them so that we know that these serious thoughts are also a part of the spirituality of childlikeness, are also a part of our retreat. I want to touch on all the points, but you will have to understand that because the time is too short for me to go into each in detail.

## 1. Sin

We must now go step by step: first considering immaturity, then sin, and finally imperfection.

### Preliminary Thoughts

Let me preface my thoughts with something very important, especially for a pedagogy and asceticism of childlikeness. Have you ever thought about why our *sense and awareness of sin* is generally so weak? I could answer this question for you in many ways. But one answer is probably the most important one for our retreat: *because we lack a strong vital sense of being the living Father's child!* The answer sounds almost trivial, but it is very revealing. Think about it. If my sense of sin is only inspired by a vague idea of God, a law which I must obey, it will not go in very deep. For a deep awareness of sin one needs a deep awareness of being a child of the personal Father. As simple as this sounds, it is the answer so many of your personal questions. If I had a more sensitive, childlike, tender, intimate relationship with the heavenly Father, I would therefore more deeply experience the imperfections I commit as something immature and deficient.

Make a note of this: to have a sense of sin, one needs to be formed more deeply in the true awareness of being a child. Therefore whatever you do to help your youth to set down roots or make their home in a deep, tender childlikeness is also a help toward *deepening their healthy awareness of sin*. Our awareness of sin must be healthy. We want nothing to do with a morbid or unhealthy awareness of sin. One of the causes and roots of such a morbid awareness of sin is the lack of deep childlikeness, for whatever the soul suppresses in one area will pop up in another area.

Let me mention a second point. When we review the history of Catholic thought from the standpoint of sin, we must distinguish between *two views of sin*. One is called the medieval-scholastic view, the other is the patristic, or early Christian view.

The *patristic* view sees and experiences sin most strongly as a loss, as

a murder of the God-willed being. In the *scholastic-medieval* view, sin is seen more ethically, that is, it is primarily experienced as a horrific crime of ingratitude which can only be made good through a corresponding horrific, infinite and eternal atonement on the part of the God-man.

Which view do *we* want to adopt? I think we should connect the two. It is so simple! In these days we have heard the two terms describing childlikeness—childlike being and childlike attitude. They give us firm ground on which to stand.

### Serious Sin

Let us begin by considering the perfect childishness, the perfect immaturity which is *serious sin*. It is often called mortal sin because it completely kills one's childlike being and childlike attitude. This is a new way to think about sin—from the standpoint of childlikeness! I cannot unfold it in detail, but can only give you a few meditation points.

#### a. It Kills our Childlike Being

As an act of total immaturity and unchildlikeness, as an act of perfectly childish behavior, serious sin kills, first of all, our childlike being. What do I mean? It robs us of the divine nature, our divine childhood and makes us—in a very real sense of the word—children of Satan. As ordinary Catholics like to say: When God is driven from the soul, the devil moves in. Nowadays we occasionally hear about people who are possessed by the devil. If I am in the state of serious sin, I am—in a different but nonetheless real sense of the word—possessed by the devil, indwelt by the devil. I do not need to explain that to you in detail now. You can think that through for yourselves.

In addition to losing divine life and the being of a child, I also lose that marvelous beauty of the soul which comes with being in the state of grace and lose all claims of honor and right to God's kindness, love, and mercy; I also lose all merit previously acquired.

I lose *the beauty of my soul*. There are mystics who have marvelously profound things to say about the singular beauty of the soul in the state of grace. They stress that, next to God, hardly anything is as beautiful as the soul in the state of grace. If this is true, we can likewise infer how ugly a soul must be that lacks this divine life!

Perhaps I can begin by asking you to compare God with Satan. We can understand how souls in the state of grace shudder when they see the Devil, an image, a horrendous image of the Devil. If I can take my parallel

further: Must not a soul held captive by Satan, who has delivered himself up to him, be singularly ugly? Be that as it may, the soul in the state of grace certainly loses its marvelous beauty when it falls from grace.

What else does it lose? *Apparently all merits*. This is something one can also observe in earthly government. If someone offends a prince or monarch, his merits are rendered useless; he is immediately arrested. It is the same with God; in sin we lose, above all, *God's good pleasure*.

But a soul will only respond to such motives if it is deeply aware of being a child! What does it interest the servant, the slave, the lowest brute whether our Lord and God looks on him with joy and pleasure! Therefore hear it again: If you want a healthy awareness of sin that protects you from sin, you must work to deepen your childlikeness. Just think of how it hurts a child to see that *the father no longer looks on him with pleasure*! That strikes the heart to the quick, much more than any punishment or beating. Beatings do not form the soul, at least not unless they convey the heavenly Father's displeasure.

"Unless you become like little children..." means in this context: unless you reject serious sin, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, for mortal sin murders the childlike being.

### **b. It Kills our Childlike Attitude**

We want to be fair to both views and show how universal childlikeness allows us to easily erect a comprehensive, organic spirituality. We therefore now turn to how serious sin murders the childlike attitude. It is clear that serious sin is diametrically opposed to every kind of childlikeness.

I will do best to begin from *two angles*. They are familiar to you, but we should refresh our memories.

*First Angle: Sin is an Act of Indignation, Contempt and Ingratitude*

First: serious sin is a terrible act of indignation, contempt and ingratitude toward God, and in such a way that it cannot be reconciled with the attitude of a child.

What kind of an *act of indignation*? This is not just the indignation of a subject who insults his ruler, but of a child insulting his father. This Lord may be King and Ruler, but he is also Father of the subject, of the child. This will necessarily intensify the indignation the higher we stand in the kingdom of God and heart of the Father. We are his children, we are his officers—both at the same time in the heart of the heavenly Father. What a horrific crime it must be when we commit a serious sin!

At this point think of human parallels. Suppose a crown prince rises

up against the king who is also his father. What would happen? That is our situation!

Serious sin murders the attitude of a child through an act of indignation, but also through an act of *contempt*. As his child I know the Father's features: I know his omnipresence, his justice, holiness, omniscience. Now think about what kind of an act of contempt it truly is—to know all this and to think that I do not have to care about it in the least!

Serious sin causes the death of the attitude of childlikeness also because it is an act of horrendous *ingratitude*. Think of all that God has given to you!

Again, see to it that this stirs your noble self, so that you swim practically day and night in the ocean of God's benefits! This is important, for we are children to the extent that we know we are loved. Hence you must tell this to the youth of your community. Not too onesidedly, for these blessed truths only begin to educate and form when we are at home in these happy realities. It is an extremely strong shift of accent!

This explains our primary emphasis on our call to greatness and, only in second place, stressed the stain of sin. It is always this way: the stain of sin in my life weighs more heavily on me if I have previously experienced all the greatness which the mighty God has offered and given to me. Why are we often so terribly ungrateful? Because we think too little about the good things God has given us. This comes from a profound lack of sensitive childlikeness, from a lack of living in twosome solitude with the Father. If I were childlike, I would seek more solitude in him; but because I am so little childlike, my heart is constantly on the move, constantly searching for some satisfaction in the outside world. I ought to be more childlike, then I would have a more sensitive eye and ear for God's benefits: I would be alone with him and receive the strength to avoid and erase the black ingratitude of serious sin.

In summary: Unless you become like little children, unless you reject serious sin, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven! This is meant literally.

### **Venial Sin**

Secondly, we must reject *venial sin*.

Let me say a few words about venial sin. When I only say a few words, do not think that we should take these things lightly. In speaking of childlikeness one only needs to say the one or the other thing; then the soul immediately understands.

We can distinguish between venial sin as voluntary, or not entirely voluntary, sin. We can say *that the more deliberate the venial sin, the uglier it is*—in other words, the more deliberately and maliciously it is done, or, the more it comes from a bad habit which is ignored and untended. While we consider some of its characteristics and traits, we can think about the effect venial sin has had in our lives thus far.

Ask yourselves for a moment: Why fight venial sin? Let me repeat: What applies to serious sin is true in a lesser way of venial sin. *If serious sin kills the attitude of childlikeness, then venial sin weakens it.* Venial sin may not be a gross indignation, but it is an indignation. Venial sin may not be a gross act of contempt, but it is an act of contempt. Venial sin may not be a gross act of ingratitude, but it is ingratitude toward God. In a child's heart and awareness such mischief will still be felt as something very hard and ugly.

### *Second Angle: Effects of Sin*

I forgot to bring up a second point a moment ago. I must do so now, so that it can be applied to venial sin. What are the effects of this murder, of serious sin? There are *a number of effects*. It robs me of the right to the peace and freedom of the children of God. Serious sin robs me of the corresponding right to a happy death and a merciful judge. Perhaps I can say the one or the other word and apply it, with the necessary adjustments, to venial sin as well.

#### 1) *It robs us of the peace and freedom of the children of God.*

Let me look at this, first of all, *from the psychological point of view*. Suppose, for instance, that in younger years I drank down sin like water, maybe sins against purity—a subject which might give you the best insight into what we are talking about—or sins of uncontrolled anger or jealousy. Psychologically speaking, we get to the heart of the matter most quickly when we look at sins involving physiological changes. Why is it—to continue our assumed case—that in later years I am so terribly susceptible to the attraction of all sexual things? It is simply a piece of unfreedom which I have acquired as a consequence of sin. Someone else can go through life without any inhibitions whatsoever while I am sexually aroused by the most common things. Through my failings I have lost some of my right to peace and freedom. Let me use an image. Sin is like drinking from a bottle which has sugar water in the top half and arsenic in the bottom half. One drinks the sugar water and does not notice that he is also drinking poison. Soon the poison begins to have an effect. In our

case, sin robs me of my right to the peace, joy and freedom of the children of God.

If you prefer a more *dogmatic* reasoning, recall the definition of peace. Peace is *tranquillitas ordinis* [the tranquility of order], a tranquility that comes from submitting to the God-willed order. Because sin throws us out of the God-willed order, sin cannot bring peace. And what is joy? Joy is the resting of the appetites in the possession of a good. Sin is not a good and as a result, in the long run, it cannot produce genuine joy.

2) In addition, I have deliberately said that serious sin robs us of a *certain* right. From dogmatic theology we all know that no one has an absolute, guaranteed right to heaven. But whoever drinks the poison of serious sin even loses what was once his with a certain probability. How terrible will my the hour of death be if I am in the state of serious sin! (....)

When I return to the question of venial sin, then I think we must admit that all these effects are also true—to a lesser degree—of *venial sin*. Venial sin, too, robs us in some way—even if in a much reduced way—the right to peace and freedom, for every sin robs us of something of our freedom, especially if I have a habit of "drinking in" sin. Venial sin, too, can cause discomfort in the hour of death, for it makes our encounter with the eternal Judge in some way unpleasant.

## 2. Imperfections

We are reflecting on these things from the standpoint of plain, unaffected childlikeness: Unless you change and become like children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. I think we can correctly interpret these words from another angle. We would then have to say: Unless you also work to overcome your imperfections!

Should I briefly mention some kinds of imperfection? These are imperfections, however, which we only notice when we possess a deep sense of childlikeness. After all, if I am not a child of God, I do not bother with the inner promptings of God. I do what is expected of me, but do not respond to the more tender and personal things God sends me. I can only respond if my soul has a "seventh sense" for these finer impulses of divine grace.

Think about other kinds of imperfections: Omission of good deeds, or good deeds only done imperfectly. Or I become enamored of useless daydreams, sentimentality or activities in daily life. Such trivialities may not even be dangerous [but still distract us]. (....)

### Why Should We Avoid Imperfection?

I have mentioned a few forms of imperfection. Would you like to know why we should avoid them? I have already told you: It is *pronounced childlikeness*. If you want a more specific answer, I could repeat everything I said about the murder and weakening of childlike attitude. With imperfections, of course, it is all on a much lower level, but they too disturb and diminish the attitude of innocence after their own fashion. Because it is my ideal, I must overcome in me every enemy of childlikeness—not only the mortal ones—and try to banish them more and more.

### B. What Must We Do? (Reject Sin)

With that I have answered the question of *what* we must reject. This brings us to the second question of *how* to reject the immaturity of sin. The answer to this, too, is quite clear. I can rid myself of all sin and imperfection to the extent that I strive for a tender and effective childlike love. I think that this gives us a general answer.

#### 1. Tender Childlike Love

You must now examine for yourselves what tender childlike love means. What must we do to make our childlike love more tender? To repeat one of my favorite thoughts: *swim again and again in the ocean of God's mercies!* We must experience God more and more as a loving Father. We ought to recall repeatedly with a certain onesidedness the good things God has done for us—in our personal life as well as in our family and our community life. We ought to become rather ingenious at this. And because we have normally not used this method in the past, we ought to apply it onesidedly for a time. Our meditation and examination of conscience, too, ought to be a kind of resavoring of the good things received but not yet acknowledged. We will later see how deprived our heart is, how little nourishment we derive from God's benefits. How little they inspire our hearts! This is evidence of how unchildlike we are in our relationship with God!

At this point it would be good to recall that our constitutions commend us to *Our Lady as patroness* under the title of the Mother of Good Counsel. Mary knows how to give us good counsel. How does she do this? By imploring for us, when we ask, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love. If the Holy Spirit, Uncreated Love, does not enter into our inmost being, we will never be able to claim the spirit of childlikeness as something outstandingly our own.

Meditate on the mercies of God and pray fervently, perhaps most especially to the Blessed Mother, so that she sends the Holy Spirit—these may be the means which mediate for us a great and tender childlike love.

### 2. Effective Childlike Love

How does love become effective? Through *two attitudes*.

#### The First Attitude

The first attitude is characterized by a *fourfold gift*.

1) First, love must give us the *spirit of earnestness*. What does this mean? I must also strive with dead earnestness to rid my life of serious and venial sin under all circumstances.

Perhaps our example for this attitude can be St. Blanche, who so earnestly told her son, later the king<sup>2</sup>: "You know that I love you. But if I knew that you would commit a single serious sin in your life, I would rather see you fall dead at my feet."

A consistent feature of our lives from beginning to end should be the serious resolve to never commit a totally voluntary sin. As genuine children I think we ought to renew in us this great idea. You know what happens when we are guided by a radiant idea and ideal. A child never sins voluntarily, or at least uses every means, both active and passive, to avoid committing a totally voluntary sin. For sin causes either the death or diminishment of our childlike being and childlike attitude.

2) Secondly, love should have the effect of urging and driving us to *vigilance*—vigilance over our imagination, over the sentiments of our heart, over certain things and persons.

Some of what belongs here will be discussed when I talk about childlike purity. At this point I will only stress that our vigilance *with regard to persons* is best secured when we hold unshakably to the great principle: maintain the inner calm and outer untouchedness proper to your state in life. (...)

3) Thirdly, love must bring out in us a deep sense of contrition and, fourthly, the spirit of penance.

*Sense of contrition.* Let me remind you that true, genuine contrition is also a healing and sanctifying force. Because of the deep remorse that a sin or failing awakens in me, I will not only withdraw my will from the wrong but also fervently embrace the good I rejected. This is contrition's positive

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<sup>2</sup> St. Louis IX of France (1214-1270).



thrust. Suppose I have lied. It is too little if my sense of remorse causes me to withdraw my will from the lie. I must also firmly embrace with all the more fervor the good, the truth and, ultimately, the God I have rejected. Love must therefore urge us to a deep and childlike spirit of contrition.

4) Finally, it must also demonstrate a corresponding *spirit of penance* which especially expresses itself in an appropriate reception of the Sacrament of Penance, and a spirit of penance which otherwise shines forth in every area of our lives.

If I may speak a word about the Sacrament of Penance, about *devotional confession*, I must stress from the vantage of childlikeness how wise it was of God to institute this sacrament and place the father confessor, a living human being, as his representative in the confessional. Think this out for yourselves: If the father confessor fulfills his duty with any competence at all, how much healthy childlikeness it awakens! By the way, we should not view confession as merely a means of grace, but also as a means of education. We should attempt wherever possible to follow our custom of using confession as a moment to give an accounting of our failings and of our particular examination. You can do this according to your own customs. It is described clearly enough in *Everyday Sanctity*<sup>3</sup>. This is the great attitude toward sin which genuine childlike love should give us.

### *The Second Attitude*

The second great attitude: We will never achieve a true aversion to sin unless our childlike love draws down on us the Holy Spirit, i.e., the gifts of the Holy Spirit or, if you prefer, the gift of Fear of the Lord. Ordinary means of grace will never lead us to a *profound aversion to sin*. It may be true that theologians do not know exactly what we receive through each the individual gift of the Holy Spirit, but this is not tragic. Whether it is the gift of Fear of the Lord or some other gift of the Holy Spirit does not matter. We know that the gifts of the Holy Spirit increase in us the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit. This is the main thing, not whether it is this or that gift which gives it to me.

When I speak of the gift of Fear of the Lord, I want to follow the teaching of the mystics. They say that what the Holy Spirit gives us through the gift of Fear of the Lord is, first of all, the gift of *fearing nothing more than sin*. We like to use images to characterize this. They say we

should compare ourselves to someone walking through the night. Lightning and thunder strike suddenly—then all is quiet. This is how the mystics describe the Holy Spirit's sudden illumination of the soul through Fear of the Lord. A totally bright, radiant light flashes, and in this light the soul recognizes the ugliness of sin. Then comes one roll of thunder after the other; the soul collapses. It sees how unchildlike it was, how unchildlike its actions were. If such a soul, interiorly filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, could make the whole world happy but at the price of the tiniest venial sin, it would never follow through, for sin is the greatest evil it experiences and knows. It would rather let itself be cast into an abyss of fire and brimstone than save itself from any evil through a single white lie. Such things are easy to say. But you must consider: this is something only the Holy Spirit can give! Hence, if we want to become outstanding children, we must strive for the Holy Spirit in an outstanding manner.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit sees to it that, when we have sinned, we *experience nothing as more painful than sin*. It is true: in spite of our every effort, even if the Holy Spirit continually works on us, we remain weak. But the reaction? The soul experiences nothing as more painful than what this does to the Holy Spirit. The mystics use the example of a mother suffering for her child. But this is absolutely nothing compared to the suffering which afflicts the soul when it has offended God in the slightest way. This is something we cannot achieve through the ordinary means of grace—even if we would strive for it with all our might; it is a gift which only the Holy Spirit can give. This attitude is an effect of childlike love, an effect of reverence for the Father. This is not a slavish fear.

I therefore repeat—to be given a true, genuine, deep sense of sin, childlikeness must urge and drive us to implore the Blessed Mother to send us the Holy Spirit. Only he can open in us the full measure of childlikeness. Unless you become like children, i.e. unless you change and convert and reject sin and imperfection through the cultivation of a tender, effective childlikeness, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Everyday Sanctity* (1998), p. 67f.

## TWELFTH CONFERENCE

So far we have tried to gain a greater inner appreciation of unaffected childlikeness, and we are nowhere near an end. So far we have only discussed one point—childlikeness as the way to heaven. How happy this makes us inside! How grateful we are that the Holy Spirit has been at work in our family to give us, in a very special way, such a beautiful and universal ideal!

## SECOND: Childlikeness—The Way to Overcoming the Crisis of our Times

We will be convinced of this even more when we go a step further and become familiar with childlikeness as the great remedy for the modern crisis of our times. Childlikeness and historical crisis are often paired throughout history. I will refer to only the one or the other moment from the past decades.

### A. The Crisis of Our Times

In his *Apology of Christianity* Weiss<sup>1</sup> wrote about three men on a train—an Englishman, a Frenchman, and a monk. They began to discuss the reasons for the chaos of the world. Each had a different view. One—was it the Frenchman?—thought it was the fault of women. The other—perhaps the Englishman—said it was the fault of men. But the monk finally said, "The fault lies with children, for they no longer exist."

Think about that! We teach our children to grow up too fast. The monk was not far from the truth. Perhaps the others were right, too, but we will not discuss that here.

How is childlikeness presented? As a remedy for an evil of our times. Childlikeness is natural and down-to-earth, making it, without a doubt, the first remedy against all *calloused sophistication*.

In his own time, Scheeben<sup>2</sup> worked hard to overcome this spirit of the age. We especially confronted the opponents of papal infallibility. He had his own analysis of the spirit of the times: How absolutely unthinkable it

<sup>1</sup> Albert Maria Weiß, OP (1844-1925), German sociologist and apologist whose main work was the five-volume *Apology of Christianity*.

<sup>2</sup> Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-1888), German theologian.

is for modern scholars to submit to such a dogma [as infallibility]! This liberalistic spirit is the spirit of arrogance, and if it is not thrust back with the spirit of childlikeness, we cannot expect to be saved.

What did Scheeben mean? What was the crisis of the times that he fought against? *Arrogance*. And the great remedy he proposed for this arrogance and smugness was childlike openness and flexibility. Now you see that the two things—childlikeness and crisis of the times—are no strangers to each other. (....)

If we now say, "Childlikeness is the remedy for the crisis of our times," then for us the question naturally arises: What is that crisis? I could repeat everything we just said and add that our own day, too, is senile, callously sophisticated and ruthlessly arrogant. All of this is true, and yet I think that I can say this does not yet lay bare the characteristic feature of the crisis of our times. What is this *characteristic feature of the crisis of our times*? Please listen: It is *a terrible unshelteredness*<sup>3</sup>.

We must pause here for a moment. Is it true? Perhaps I should, as I like to do so often, substitute other words for unshelteredness. In other contexts I use words like "homelessness" and "uprootedness"—but it always describes the same thing.

A modern Catholic philosopher who has studied this problem in great detail, apparently because of the personal suffering it caused him, is Peter Wust<sup>4</sup>. Instead of "unshelteredness" he likes to use the word insecurity, *in-securitas humana* [human insecurity]. It is always the same, even though one expression emphasizes one side of the problem while another stresses a different one.

Looking into the anti-Christian camp (and anyone who wants to understand the times will do well to look into the enemy camp—where modernity and the modern crisis are much more acutely felt than in our more conservative circles) we find the modern existential philosophy of Jaspers<sup>5</sup>. He speaks of modern man's "*vulnerability*". You must not dismiss new words like these, for they express a dominant feeling of life.

<sup>3</sup> The opposite of the emotional security which comes from being and knowing that I am sheltered in someone's heart.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Wust (1884-1940), German philosopher whose work *Ungewißheit und Wagnis* ("Uncertainty and Daring," published earlier in the same year of this retreat, 1937) influences some of Fr. Kentenich's presentation here.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), German existential philosopher with a strong following in the 1930s. Here *Unaufgehobenheit* is translated as vulnerability.

The vulnerability of modern man! We are immediately reminded of what Pestalozzi said about man being a "nest-bound creature." Apparently modern man is no longer nest-bound; or rather, the drive for a nest is there, but not the nest. This primordial need for a nest is frustrated. He is therefore "vulnerable," not sheltered enough.

Perhaps the philosopher who is most in the forefront today, expressing most classically what modern man feels, is Heidegger<sup>6</sup>. His expression is even harsher, speaking of modern man as "*set adrift*." What is he trying to say? Man is thrown into life like a piece of wood—cast into the sea to bob aimlessly on the waves. Because man is set adrift, his characteristic condition is *anxiety*.

If it were my job to hold a philosophy class, we would all have to study more closely whether Heidegger's philosophy is ontological or existential. But for our purposes it is enough to simply consider (though perhaps a bit superficially) his view of modern man. I think that Heidegger wants to go much deeper, but that is not our purpose here.

I should remind you that Heidegger builds on Kierkegaard<sup>7</sup>. The conclusions which Kierkegaard made on the basis of religion, Heidegger transferred—in his own way, of course—to the modern philosophy of life and time.

But this is enough said. It gives us some sense of the direction of the modern crisis of our times.

Therefore: Unshelteredness! I think that I really ought to add an adjective: a *singular* unshelteredness, an unshelteredness that cries to heaven! Perhaps you will say: I don't notice anything like that! Later on I will demonstrate to you that we really *do* notice something, that we are influenced by this terrible insecurity. But for the moment this general signal of what troubles man today will be enough: singular unshelteredness.

## Remedy

When I now say that childlikeness is *the* remedy for this extraordinary unshelteredness, you immediately expect me to qualify it. It cannot just be a generic childlikeness; it must be childlikeness to the highest imaginable degree. Let me use the qualifying word "daring"—"the *daring of childlike-*

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), German philosopher and founder of modern existentialism; he had a strong following in the 1930s.

<sup>7</sup> Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Danish philosopher.

*ness*." This daring—of an extraordinary, deep-seated, outstanding childlikeness—is what is needed to heal the present crisis of our times.

Let me reflect for a moment on "the daring of childlikeness."

I think that Catholic philosophy must finally take seriously the need to develop a Christian existential philosophy<sup>8</sup>. Referring for a moment to Heidegger, the great existential philosopher who has analyzed human existence, human life as it currently exists. I think it would also be worthwhile to reflect on *Christian existence* in its purest form and rediscover its final principles. The reasons for this can be discussed later. For now let me take the two characteristics Heidegger finds in general human life and weigh them out: set-adriftness and determination. These are two characteristics which also play a role in Christian existence, though admittedly in another sense and degree of the word.

What does Heidegger want to say with "set-adriftness"? Man is simply thrown into life like a piece of wood. From where, by whom, for which end... these questions do not interest him. But *we* know who "threw" us into life—God!—and for which end; still we must characterize our Christian existence to some degree as set-adrift and insecure. Or do you think that our Christian existence is as secure as we often imagine? Our Christian existence is often very *insecure*! Later, when we have progressed a bit further, I will explain to you how limited our purely natural security is regarding the fundamental questions in our lives. You see, we almost want to say: the closer we get to God, the more we are set adrift. Observe what God does to mystically gifted souls—how he often casts them aside to a degree we would not expect! Being set adrift is therefore typical of Christian existence, too. But in the end we know that we can expect a certain security, though on a higher plane. (....)

## Philosophy of Insecurity

Philosophers examining this problem will be interested in two questions. First: What are the laws governing insecurity? Second: What are its causes? (....)

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<sup>8</sup> It was typical of Fr. Kentenich to see the great trends of the times as a "voice of God" issuing a challenge to develop a corresponding answer (and not just to withdraw "safely" into a familiar corner). In this case, existential philosophy's search for meaning in a more insecure world should challenge certain Christian values to come to the fore: existence as a "game of love," security in God, flexibility of life forms, active searching for and total surrender to God's will, etc.

## 1. The Laws of Insecurity

For the sake of becoming more familiar with the laws of our unshelteredness, let me remind you of the *parable of the prodigal son* (Lk 15, 11-32). In dogmatic theology we like to think of this parable as a compendium of Catholic teaching on justification. In my opinion we must also learn to view it as a compendium of all the great laws which define a Catholic existential philosophy.

Does not this parable present three great laws of insecurity?

*First law:* Security and insecurity coexist.

*Second law:* There is security in the insecurity.

*Third law:* There is insecurity in the security. (....)

Let me say the one or the other thing about each law.

*Security and insecurity coexist.* We know this from experience. For instance, we may have grade school classmates who live in financial insecurity while we, perhaps, live in financial security. The law of insecurity applies to all forms of life—financial, spiritual, friendship, etc. Look at the parable of the prodigal son. Here you have security and insecurity at the same time. How insecure is the prodigal son and how secure, it seems, is the son who stayed at home!

The second great law: There is *security in the insecurity*. Why? Observe for a moment the prodigal son who was away for so long. At first glance he does not appeal to us, but by the end of the story he is the one with whom we sympathize! See how insecurity is transformed into an incredible security! I will draw on this later to prove the related law: The purpose of human insecurity is security on a higher level.

Furthermore, there is *insecurity in the security*. Observe the son who remained at home. At first we are attracted to him, but by the end of the story we don't like him at all! The parable does not tell us how the story really ends, but the son who stayed home and felt so secure is suddenly totally insecure when he finds that the prodigal son has been welcomed by his father and transformed from insecurity to a higher security. He is confused and does not feel at home any more; he wants to argue with his father. (....)

## 2. The Cause of Insecurity

Philosophy gives us the reason for this insecurity. We have already considered it in a different context. Do you still remember our discussion of "Man as a pendulum being"? Man is always on the move, constantly searching. Recall the reasons. He is a pendulum being who oscillates back

and forth. Man's being is where we find the philosophical reason for the great law of unshelteredness and insecurity.

If you now want to trace this law and its root in man's "pendulum being" to its characteristic elements, you will find that the characteristics reveal themselves in (1) life's constant fluctuations and (2) life's erratic inconsistency. These are the two expressions which we will examine in detail tomorrow morning. (....)

## THIRTEENTH CONFERENCE

In order to more deeply grasp the meaning and value of genuine childlikeness in overcoming the crisis of our times, i.e., in overcoming its singular, unprecedented insecurity, we must first become more aware of this crisis. We therefore want to stress two things:

(1.) Insecurity is simply inseparable from the essence of Christian and human existence. This is extremely important, but it is a forgotten and buried truth; this is why there is often so much inner confusion and lack of inner clarity!

(2.) This otherwise normal truth is even more radically valid today. This normal component of Christian and human existence explodes into human existence today with a force that cries out to heaven. We would be well advised, therefore, to take this human insecurity as it manifests itself in the changeability and inconsistency of all forms in life and pursue it into the individual levels of being and living. For tonight it will be enough to shed some light on the most basic level of being and life, namely, on the life of the drives.

#### a. Insecurity on the Level of the Drives—Fear of Ill-Fortune

On the level of the drives, or of the "animal" in us, we are mostly driven by three kinds of goods: vital goods, economic goods, and pleasure goods. We moderns idolize these goods and make them the only thing we really strive for. Depending on the good, we might hear how modern man is described as "vitalistic" or "materialistic" or "hedonistic." "Vitalistic" means he idolizes vital goods like blood ties and ties to the land, health in mind or health in body—all undoubtedly values, and perhaps values which we Catholics have neglected. The materialistic man idolizes economic goods. The hedonistic man idolizes pleasure.

We want to 1) confirm the fact, 2) discuss the causes, and 3) seek a solution.

#### *The Fact (Insecurity on the Level of the Drives Exists)*

We can confirm that we are constantly exposed to fluctuation, insecurity, inconsistency, unreliability in these three areas. One does not need to look far. One must only open a map. How were the economic goods distributed a few years ago and how are they distributed today? When we think of individual peoples and nations—fluctuation and inconsistency all

down the line! Or think of individuals—people we know, ourselves, our families, both biological and spiritual families—how suddenly the crash can come. On the top of the world one day and on the bottom of the heap the next. Today financial security, tomorrow financial insecurity. Today the power to buy this or that pleasure, tomorrow as poor as a church mouse. Health today, sickness tomorrow!

#### *The Cause*

Of more interest to us is the cause of this constant fluctuation, this insecurity. I have alluded to the *fear of ill-fortune*. The term "fortune" comes from Machiavelli<sup>1</sup>, a man who, in many regards, anticipated the modern condition. Machiavelli was a cold calculator and schemer, but he also knew life. According to his observation and experience there are two great powers with which one must come to grips: the rational power of life (*virtù*) and the vital power of life (*fortuna*). The latter is the alogical, irrational power of fate, or fortune.

What did he think, live, and teach? To master life, one must try to obtain power rationally. Reason and thinking allow one to master much of life. That is what we hear and see today in the politics across the border [in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy]. The one with power will master life! Machiavelli was shrewd enough, though, to also say that life cannot be completely mastered rationally. He said: against the dark background of life there are things which cannot be mastered rationally; this is what he called the alogical, irrational power of fortune.

Upon closer examination, this alogical power of fortune is felt in three major ways.

The first is the so-called *ontological rectitude of things*. Anyone with a good grasp of our frequently stated axiom "*ordo essendi est ordo agendi*"<sup>2</sup> will know what Machiavelli means. Look across the border again! When a revolution gradually deprives man of personal freedom, it is an ontological revolution. It sins against the "ontological rightness" of things. In the long run it will fail.

Still, we should not forget that dictators and wizards of mass psycho-

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<sup>1</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Italian political philosopher famous for his book *The Prince*.

<sup>2</sup> The order of being is the norm for the order of action, i.e., our choice of actions should respect the total reality of who we are and what all things are even in their deepest levels and most intricate uniqueness.

logy know quite well how to give man the illusion of having some bit of freedom! A revolution can sustain itself as long as the illusion of freedom is maintained. But once man realizes he has been robbed of that which is most personally his—his personal freedom—the revolution ends or devolves into a great bloodbath. (....)

There is a second way this power of fortune expresses itself. We normally refer to them as *natural catastrophes*. We have probably experienced it more than once: a sudden thunderstorm, a violent storm of the most terrible kind. How can I protect myself? One can have this or that safety plan, but there is no absolute safety. However this is not the fear of ill-fortune which alarms man today.

The third effect of this allogical power of fortune is what Macchiavelli called a *numinous world omnipotence*, which seems to play with the fortune of the world and of individual men like a boy in a fickle mood. Truly well said! Not everything that happens in the world around us can be explained through rational, tangible factors. Often so much remains unexplained; it truly seems like a mood-driven game! (....)

### *The Solution*

How can we solve this great riddle? Two attitudes are possible: one philosophical and another psychological. You can see one attitude at work in our neighboring countries.

Much depends on how I interpret this numinous world omnipotence. If I see it as a divine Father, the corresponding attitude makes more sense and you will better understand what I mean by "*the daring of surrender*."

We must remind ourselves that there is much darkness. Things are not as bright and full of light [as we would like to think]. Of course, if our attitude from childhood on had been naive faith, it would have, for all practical purposes, solved this universal riddle in our own lives. But it does not solve it for others! Nor for our intellect! It is only solved for childlikeness. The way out of this tangle, this terrible darkness can only be the daring of surrender—I surrender myself to the Father-God. I almost want to say: I close my eyes and just blindly place everything into His hands. The daring of childlikeness!

This fear of what fortune can do, this terror in the face of a numinous world omnipotence is often called *Job's (or Jobian) fear*<sup>3</sup>. Let me add: in the way that we perhaps live, we probably don't even taste such Jobian

anxiety. Why? In part because we do not systematically think through all the inconsistencies of life, in part because our faith is so strong. In case it is our faith which sees us through, we must still recognize that there is such a thing as Jobian fear and acknowledge its terror, utter darkness, and insecurity. And remember what is happening in the countries around us! There the anxiety is so real you can feel it. Religious men and women today must be aware that such fear can be their fate, too. It is therefore good to already imagine what it is like before it happens. Then we will know where to find the solution. The insight is a beautiful one: we are "pendulum beings;" hence our security must be pendulum security. The higher level of security ultimately comes from the daring of plain, unaffected surrender to the Father. You must all prepare yourselves for this while there is still time. Otherwise you will be bitterly disappointed when you are the one who faces Job's fear. The beast lurks all around you. [If you know this] you will try much harder—in your meditation, in living your constitutions, and in all else—to truly dare the heroism of childlikeness.

Look at the entire world situation today! How does the other side respond to this numinous world omnipotence? Through *defiance*! This is quite understandable psychologically speaking; one will either respond with self-surrender or defiance—a self-surrender that transcends all darkness or brutal defiance. (....)

In which of these two ways do we respond? I think I can speak for most of us when I say that it is not the God-antagonistic defiance of our enemies. But neither is it the total heroism of unaffected childlikeness. How many of our souls still manifest some defiance when we face the difficulties of life—difficulties with our superiors and in all the areas we have talked about! If I become bitter because of these difficulties—and I have already said that our cloisters and rectories are filled with bitter people—is this not a kind of defiance?

You will notice that if we do not strive for the heroism of self-surrender when faced with difficulties, life will break us. It must not be a God-antagonistic defiance, but can take the form of a bitterness which is also defiance. You may surmise from this that what can save us from every kind of fear—be it of ill-fortune or "Job's fear"—is nothing other than the daring of childlikeness.

That should be enough for today. Tomorrow we will bring this thought to a conclusion.

<sup>3</sup> That is, the fear faced by Job in the Old Testament.

## FOURTEENTH CONFERENCE

In order to grasp the meaning of childlikeness more deeply and to increase the warmth in our hearts for our community and its task and mission, we recall how human and Christian existence is marked by an all-pervasive insecurity. Whether we call it "adriftness" or "unshelteredness" or something else—the term may not matter if the concept is clear—this insecurity can take three forms. We have already mentioned them as

fear of ill-fortune (or Jobian fear),  
fear of uncertainty, and  
fear for our salvation.

We know the fear of ill-fortune for it is something we constantly experience. The present course of international finance and world events leads us to expect that we will be forced to taste this anxiety more and more. Concern for the financial survival of our community, concern for vocations... these are the concrete ways that the fear of ill-fortune touches our lives.

In this context you may recall the options we discussed last night: I can clench my fist in defiance, or I can give in with a certain fatalism, but neither is the correct answer. What should we do? We expressed it this way: heroic surrender to the One who is found behind all darkness.

God is Father, God is good, everything He does is good!

Scripture has a beautiful passage for us in just such moments when we fear for our fortune: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other things will be granted you besides!" (Mt 6,33). I think we ought to take that literally. It should not only be the procurator's fear when our community's finances are on shaky ground; no, it must be the concern of us all. When do we contribute the most? When we all strive for the sanctity befitting our state in life, when we all strive for the heroism of childlikeness. I think that we then force God's providence to give us the necessary financial means. We will return to this theme when we talk about poverty later on. But I think that in this context we cannot stress seriously or clearly enough that the ultimate and most important means for us is childlikeness. Hence, when such difficulties drive us more strongly into the arms of God, you can be certain that God will take us more strongly into his arms!

I think I ought to say that the same applies to our concern for vocations. If I may be frank, I must point out that there is a great deal of competition

in our country for vocations. It could happen that this eventually turns ugly, with so-and-so-many communities haggling over the same young man. What would such a young fellow say about that!

I like to look at it this way (putting it in quite human terms): Imagine that I am the good Lord. If I were God, I would send my favorite children where they would get the best education. In other words, if we cultivate the right spirit, i.e., striving for childlikeness, then this spirit will attract vocations. We can advertise, too, but the way I see it we should not rush into such merely exterior means. It is my conviction that in the long run they actually turn away vocations; after all, we cannot be telling people what to do! If we really try to cultivate the spirit of the community, namely the spirit of childlikeness, of plain, heroic surrender to God, then don't you also think that God will take care of our financial concerns and our need for vocations? To be sure, this does not mean we do not make an honest effort. We must certainly do our part, but we must not fret! (cf Mt 6,25-34). You must try to apply these thoughts more concretely to your own situation.

Let us now try to describe in a similar way the other fears which are part of Christian and human existence.

### b. Intellectual Insecurity—Fear of Uncertainty

For the human intellect this anxiety is the *fear of uncertainty*. This may not be such a strong experience for us because our spirit of faith is so simple. This fear has two manifestations: philosophical uncertainty [in general] and philosophical uncertainty about God.

Now imagine that you were not Catholic and did not live in the spirit of faith, and that you did not possess any supernatural childlikeness. Now suppose you had to face these two problems. You would see how vast the insecurity waiting to swallow you up. Things are not as absolutely certain as others often lead us to believe; things are not so absolutely mathematically certain.

### Philosophical Uncertainty in General

What is philosophical uncertainty? This is the question that motivates the search for the scholastic first principles, such as the principle of sufficient proof or the principle of non-contradiction. Are such things mathematically certain? *Mediaeval scholasticism* declared that such principles are postulates—they cannot and do not need to be proven. Hence, mediaeval scholasticism in its healthy and instinctive way simply assumed these things, in a pre-reflexive manner, as certain. In order to discover the ob-

jective content of the great metaphysical truths, it then turned its energy to exploring the metaphysical reality.

Then came *Descartes*<sup>1</sup>. For methodical reasons at first, he wanted to assume that these principles were not true. He took the position that one must view reason with suspicion. He spoke of the *genius malignus, summe potens et summe callidus* [reason is a malign genius, extremely strong and cunning]; reason as constantly trying to outguile us. He began to transform metaphysics into criticism, and many have followed in his footsteps. What untold suffering this has inflicted on thinking minds ever since! Try to empathize a bit with the tortures of the modern mind, forced to stand on the ground of systematic uncertainty. Although such extreme criticism has great disadvantages, it offers us one great advantage—that we are not too hasty to present things as absolutely and mathematically certain.

At this point I can share a sentence with you for the first time; it personally helps me a great deal when I ask myself: Why did God leave our intellect so much in the dark? *Pascal* gives an answer to this—and I really ought to repeat it every five or ten minutes until it is truly penetrates your hearts. He says: God's primary concern is our will. We would say: our love. God wants our love, which is why he wants our will. To this *Pascal* adds: If the intellect had absolute light and absolute certitude, the danger would be too great that the human will would be neglected<sup>2</sup>.

Let me turn to those of you who find this darkness hard to bear: Ask yourselves if this is not ultimately the purpose of intellectual uncertainty. God has let the already impenetrable darkness of the world and life be further obscured by so much intellectual uncertainty. "But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13,13)—that is, the less the intellectual certainty, the more that our love and our will must ardently bind itself to God.

Later, when we reach the climax of our deliberations, I will be able to say more clearly what the real masterpiece of daring is. It is this—that *with a minimum of purely natural insight we dare a maximum of love*. I say deliberately: with a minimum. I am assuming that all of us seek to know the truth and would like to have absolute certitude in all questions. Seen from this vantage point I speak of a minimum. Seen from another vantage

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<sup>1</sup> René Descartes (1596-1650), French philosopher, physicist, and mathematician. See *Meditationes* I, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), French philosopher, scientist, and mathematician. See *Pensées*, No. 581f.

point I say that we also have a great deal of light. We have a great deal of light, but with respect to what we have to live we have only a minimum of purely natural certitude. With this minimum of purely natural security and certainty we are called to muster the daring of as great a love and surrender of the will as possible. (....)

### Philosophical Uncertainty about God

A similar conclusion awaits us when we consider the philosophical certainty about knowing God. Can God's existence be philosophically proven, can it be proved with mathematical certainty? To the modern mind, this question breaks down into basically two parts: Is an absolute being an ontological necessity? And must this absolute being be ontologically perfect?

*Ontological necessity*. For us Catholics the answer is clear—we believe in God. I refer you to Vatican Council I. It says, "God... can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason<sup>3</sup>." But this does not say by any stretch that it can be proved with mathematical certitude. How the world has struggled for centuries with the question of God's existence! And how often have both his existence and the *ontological necessity of his perfection* been proved and refuted! Just look into your neighboring countries: What is being said there about the existence of a supreme being? (....)

Of course we smile at these things. But we must consider how trying this can be for a human intellect standing solely on the ground of reason. Then you will know that man is exposed to a certain insecurity. There is a fear of uncertainty, thanks be to God! If this anxiety of not knowing eludes us because we don't care, there is no virtue in that. But if we do not feel it because we have already found our security on a higher level, it is acceptable. May I repeat the words of *Pascal*? What is God's concern? The perfection of the will! The intellect must endure a measure of darkness so that it does not become apathetic. To some extent we can verify this from our own experience in life: How many great intellectuals do we know, extraordinarily gifted and learned people, but how is it with their will?! They are shirkers, because the will does not want to bind itself to God.

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<sup>3</sup> Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, No. 2 as quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City, 1992), No. 36. See also Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* No. 6.



### c. Insecurity of the Child of God—Fear for one's Salvation

We now come to the fear for one's salvation. The child of God [in us] is exposed to a complex fear for our salvation. I will consider two things: I will first describe this anxiety in general and then proceed to a more in-depth analysis.

#### *The Anxiety in General*

Think for yourselves how distressing life and faithfulness to God can be for the mind! This is the intellectual side of this fear. To be sure, Catholic philosophy tells us that man has a natural urge to God. But we cannot forget that accepting the God of revelation is a leap of faith for the mind. It is not as black a night as Karl Barth<sup>4</sup> makes it, but it is an abyss through which the intellect must pass in order to accept the God who reveals himself as Trinity. We do not want to give any false impressions. This is how things are. Night!

This is all the more true when we think of the heart and will and how hard it can be for them to live God and be faithful to him! Just think of how often our wills and hearts are exposed, as it were, to a tension between the God who is hidden and the God who is revealed. Today he is hidden and tomorrow he reveals himself.

#### *Its Causes*

I think that the two characteristic features which we discussed yesterday—life's fluctuations and inconsistency—affect religious men and women most strongly in their relationship with God, their dialogue of love with God. I am convinced that God does this out of an incredibly tender love and wisdom.

Ask yourselves: As religious are we not all in great danger of succumbing sooner or later to a subtle self-centeredness? To put it bluntly: one hardly finds persons as self-centered as religious can be. Ask yourselves if this is not true. Why have we left the uncertainty of the world? To find security in a monastery.

Let me remind you of the well-known quote of St. Francis de Sales: We should seek the God of consolation, not the consolation of God. Perhaps this makes my point clearer. Because the danger is extraordinarily great

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Barth (1886-1968), Swiss Protestant theologian who taught that God is "the totally other."

that men and women religious have left the world only in order to seek the consolation of God in community life, God in his love must thrust us away from himself innumerable times; he must plunge the intellect, will and heart into darkness; he must do so in order to form us by measured steps into full-fledged children after the image of his Only-begotten Son. We must learn to revolve as children around the Father. We cannot demand that the Father revolves around us. To do this, the Father must free us from all selfishness. He can only make us into his true children when he pushes us away again and again.

Study mystically gifted souls. You will find that they suffer most from life's fluctuations and inconsistency when they reach the highest levels of spiritual growth. Think of the extraordinary experience of divine abandonment these souls must go through, think of the dark night of the soul, the senses, the mind. Extraordinarily gifted souls are also extraordinarily tested. It is like a general rule: As Father, God must educate his child to be a child. Hence, the more he draws the child to himself and wants to draw him into conformity with himself, the more he must free the child from morbid self-centeredness.

Study how fluctuation and inconsistency are especially present precisely in religious life!

*Inconsistency:* If I compare my life as a religious with the lives of those I knew as a youth, I can ask: How does God treat me and how does he treat the others? Perhaps my way is easier, perhaps not. In either case it is an enigma. Others tried so hard in the novitiate—without any tangible success. But how many graces God gave me! Why? I must think of Heraclite again, who compared the entire government of the world to a boyish game, a word which shows up again and again in the religious literature of Christianity in many different ways, especially in the works of gifted souls. This is more or less the way we sometimes feel about God's dealings with me as opposed to others, whether I fare better or worse than my neighbor. When I compare I must really say: how arbitrary and erratic.

Please understand the lovely image of St. Theresa the Little Flower in this light: I am a ball in God's hand<sup>5</sup>. There you have the boy at play—or

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<sup>5</sup> Therese of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul* (Translation by John Clarke, Washington 1972), p. 136: "I had offered myself, for some time now, to the Child Jesus as His *little plaything*. I told Him not to use me as a valuable toy children are content to look at but dare not touch, but to use me like a little ball of no value which He could throw on the ground, push with his foot, *pierce*, leave in a corner,

rather, the Father at play. The Father is the measure of all things; he can do with the child whatever he wants, that is why he is the Father. What am I? God's ball. Does this not require a very mature unselfishness? I am in God's pocket one day, thrown in the mud the next, then left in the cellar, now treated with love again. Do you notice what it means to be a child of the Father when I give myself to the Father this way? Childlikeness is the key to solving all the deepest riddles of life. Eloquent speech does not do it, only the simple 'yes,' whether one is a handball or a football—I don't know which kind of ball is it the most uncomfortable to be.

By the way, we find St. Teresa of Avila using a similar image. She put it differently. She viewed the world, including the religious life, as a kind of game of chess with God<sup>6</sup>. St. Teresa began to think it over: How can one place the King, the Ruler of the World, in checkmate? Through the queen—and here she meant herself! When the queen is heroic in humility and love, the King is immediately placed in checkmate. You will notice that this image says—perhaps more attractively—what we mean by the "the daring of childlikeness"—the Father lets himself be won over only by simplicity and childlikeness, and nothing else.

#### *Fear for Salvation in Particular*

With that I have shown you just a few general features of fear for salvation. I can now give more detail. I say that fear for salvation can be

1. Fears about God, namely religious fears about God,
2. Fears about revelation,
3. Fear for one's salvation in the strictest sense of the word.

Just a few words on each point. In essence we understand each other and know the impact of these fears and how important they are as part of human and Christian existence. To consider them as a normal part of life is already a great step forward. If you think they are quite extraordinary, you are no longer looking at things in the right light.

#### *Religious Fears About God*

What do we mean by religious fears about God? We must distinguish between the philosophical aspect of the search for God and the religious one. Philosophically speaking, we wrestle to know God, to know with

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or press to His heart if it pleased Him..."

<sup>6</sup> Teresa of Avila, *Way of Perfection*, XVI, 1

philosophical certainty that God exists. The religious aspect is about the problem of our loving dialogue with the living God.

If you ask whether this is truly fraught with such fear, let me answer you as I did before: Our dialogue of love continuously oscillates between the God who is hidden and the God who is revealed, also as part of my personal life and experience. Verify for yourselves: this loving dialogue goes through a great deal of fluctuation and inconsistency!

#### *Fluctuation*

When I see our little community, I realize how much things can fluctuate! Where does this come from? God and us. *God*: God is free, he can do whatever he pleases. To be sure—in the table readings and many of the talks we have already considered the three dimensions of God's presence and activity—God is everywhere, including in me. And yet it is also true that God does not make himself felt in each person with the same intensity, God does not speak to each person with the same clarity. This is unfortunate. Or should I say: It is very fortunate! It depends. There are persons whom God pursues like a hunter seeking his prize, finding no rest until he has it in his grasp. Then there are others whom God almost seems to constantly ignore.

Let me pause again for a moment. Which kind of person am I? We are on retreat and do not need to pretend we are perfect. Is God pursuing me like his prize? Is God calling me as he did St. Augustine—"Take and read!"<sup>7</sup>—until I open the book of God's mercies? How has God handled me in the past? You see, the fluctuations in our loving dialogue with God has a first cause in God himself. The second cause is *us*.

There are three attitudes we can take toward this God who speaks to us and works in our lives. The first attitude is to neglect him and turn a cold shoulder to him. The second attitude is defiance. I resent it when he disturbs my peace and quiet. The third attitude is unconditional self-surrender. Which is the attitude we should take? In the dialogue between God and me a great deal depends on my attitude toward God and God's attitude toward me.

May I quote St. Augustine? *Timeo Dominum praetereuntem*—I fear that when God knocks on the door of my heart and I fail to open for him,

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<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* VIII, 12.

he will pass me by<sup>8</sup>. Perhaps the Heavenly Father will finally tire of knocking [in my life], too, if I do not pay any attention. Think about it: Have you not done this again and again? Allow me to ask you to interpret the question this way: in the difficulties of life, of my interior life and the life of the community, have I really tried to struggle through to God? This is the standard by which you must measure whether you have become great or small. Am I a real man or a little child? The smaller we become as children, the greater we become as men. Did I take on these difficulties in a manly way, or in a simple, childlike manner? God tests us in this way and may test us more in the future. Might this not be his way of preserving us from future tests which we might very well fail? Hence we sense the fluctuations in our loving dialogue with God.

#### *Inconsistency*

I have already talked about inconsistency. How inconsistent this loving dialogue is: warm today, cold tomorrow, the day after no longer there at all! Why? Our souls must be urged on again and again to the heroism of childlikeness. God wants our wills and hearts. There are so many misunderstandings and things I do not understand even in my personal life. What does God want? Pascal would say that he wants our will; in our language—he wants my childlike love. Precisely in such moments I remain still and say, "Yes, Father, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!" In this way man shows his heroism, that he is growing forward and upward into the greatness of God. Did not the Only-begotten Son of the Heavenly Father have to endure all these things, too? Look for other problems of this type...

#### *Fears about Revelation*

The second great problem is the fears regarding revelation. Here, too, I can show you how things really are. Here we distinguish between fear about revelation in the stricter and broader sense.

#### *Fear about Revelation in the Stricter Sense*

Is there really such a thing as supernatural revelation? Has his revelation come to us in a reliable way? Has it been correctly interpreted? These are serious questions. When you work in pagan lands and see how

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Confessions*, VIII, 12.

they too have built up a healthy secular culture, then such doubts might come. And all the more so in our neighboring countries where a whole different world is being built, causing us to ask: How is it with revelation? Is it verifiable, etc.? We know that the *preambula fidei* [preambles of faith] only give us a moral certitude. And if I prove everything scientifically, I will still not be able to come away with mathematical certainty.

#### *Fear about Revelation in the Broader Sense*

When I think about revelation with reference to Christ, it brings me to revelation in the broader sense of the word. Observe Our Lord. You will discover that even though there is much divinity in him, we also find him so incredibly human. Sometimes we cannot even tell if he wants to show more his divine countenance or his human one. There are times when his divine countenance recedes totally into the background. In any case, you see a constant tension in his life between the divine and human. (....)

It is the same question that faces us when we think of the Church. As it was with Christ, so also with the Church. The Church bears, similarly to the God-man, a divine and a human face. For instance, I could well imagine that priests in the missions exposed to a thriving culture based on a pagan religion might often say to themselves: What an insignificant sect we are in a sea of non-believers! I could imagine that this can leave the soul depressed, lethargic. Then we see the Church in our own day and the treatment she gets in the countries around us and must nearly think that she has been robbed of everything divine! Think for yourselves how difficult it can be to believe in the Church! We must, at least, be ready for the day when our faith will be tested, too.

What matters in this context is that we gain an objective picture of the crisis which modern Christianity faces and not deceive ourselves about how difficult it is. Why must it be this way? Why so little security? Why not at least a security of the mind? The answer is always the same: What does God desire? The daring of childlikeness! (....)

Here you can taste and pinpoint the source of our insecurity. God permits this insecurity, even largely wills it so that we find our security on a higher level—childlike security in him! We should not, of course, be presumptuous about our salvation, but neither should we be morbidly fearful. Certainty about salvation is to be found in childlike trust and faith. Again: the more you see and survey real life, the more you will find—even in the face of the basic anxieties of human and Christian existence—that the daring of plain, unaffected childlikeness is what resonates on the

ultimate and deepest level of your soul and being. May I repeat an image? We must not desire the security of a table [with all four legs on the ground] but a *pendulum security*. Here on this earth no security from below can ultimately satisfy us, it must rather be a pendulum security whose anchor is above. This tender, simple, childlike attachment to the Father is how all problems are solved.

Unless you become like little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven—how does this sound now! I want to be a child with my whole body and soul. The older and more mature I become, the simpler I want to be, for the simplest child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. This is Weiss' favorite thought. In his *Apology* he writes: The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is the smallest on earth—Mary<sup>9</sup>.

(....)

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<sup>9</sup> *Apologie des Christentums*, Vol. 5, p. 797 (22nd talk).

#### FIFTEENTH CONFERENCE

We are considering two ideas which help show the significance of childlikeness for our times. The first is the crisis of our times; the second is the solution for our times. We realize that the crisis of our times is an extraordinary, all-embracing insecurity and unshelteredness. If time permits, we may look into what Peter Wust wrote on the subject. He has studied this crisis energetically and in great detail.

#### B. The Solution for our Times

We now consider the solution for our times. In describing the difficulties we have always added the answer:

**The salvation of our times is *the daring of childlikeness*.**

But how can we make this "daring" work? We know that it is true! If knowledge alone were the answer, we would already be saints. The thrust of this talk must be the following: to impress this answer on our hearts as deeply as possible. I will therefore not present anything really new in this talk or the next one. Instead, we want to saturate with deeper meaning the thoughts we have already heard.

A wise man once said that what the devil fears most is someone who has read one religious book and puts what he has read into practice. You understand the meaning. It is a variation on the old adage: *Timeo lectorem unius libri*—I fear the man who has read just one book! May we not say that even the devil respects a man who stands up for a just one idea? And must we not be even more emphatic when this one idea is none other than *the* ideal of a particular family? For this reason we have stressed again and again your family's ideal—childlikeness.

"I want to know your one idea!" (Nietschze). We know this great idea. If we fail to make it come alive in us and in our family (....) then the devil will have won again—by distracting us from the ultimate reality, from living and experiencing the reality which we, by God's design, are ultimately supposed to live and experience in our family. We may just think a great and glorious thought but not live and love it. Then who on the day of judgment will be able to say about the history of our family (using the words of Christ): "I have completed the work you gave me to do" (Jn 17,4)—that I have truly embodied the idea which I was called to embody in the community and through the family!

In summation: Not only now—in this and the next talk, not only until

the end of the retreat, no, I believe we can say that we really ought to try to impress this daring of childlikeness deep into our hearts and will until the end of our lives. It is not too much to devote two hours to this topic—the daring of childlikeness!

### Other Terms

We want to try to portray and think through the following thoughts as plainly and simply as possible. To do this, let me ask if we might not substitute other words for the "daring of childlikeness"? It is a favorite method of mine when clarifying a concept.

You have probably heard of a little Frenchman (Guido Fontgalland), whose biography is being read all over the world today. The Holy Spirit had a great deal of influence in his life. He once asked himself, "Which word must make God the happiest?" He thought of the Annunciation and soon had the answer: Our Lady's answer to the Heavenly Father at the Annunciation must certainly be the word that makes God the happiest. Listening to Mary speak her Fiat, it became immediately clear to him that the word 'yes' is the one dearest to the Father. The daring of childlikeness! You immediately grasp what I am trying to say: The daring comes from *saying yes*. Our Lord spoke his 'yes' in a difficult moment of his life: *Ita Pater* — Yes, Father! And his words were anticipated by Our Lady. Her "*Ecce* [Behold the handmaid of the Lord]...*fiat* [let it be done to me...]" (Lk 1,38) is the same 'yes' in feminine form. It must therefore be something God desires of world history if the word 'yes' is so dear to his heart!

Would you like still other terms? Ask the simple man and woman in the pew. What word do they use instead of "daring"? They talk about a *living faith in Divine Providence*. And don't overlook the "living"! How should faith in Divine Providence come alive? In hope and in love. You must stress this a great deal. Knowing dogmatic theology, this should remind us of *fides caritate formata* [faith informed by love, cf Gal 5,6]. As it is generally understood, this word is applied to faith in Divine Providence: It must be living—not only in the mind and somewhat in the will, but forming and transforming the whole person!

Since your community also venerates St. Therese, the Little Flower, you can also look to her example. What term would she use to describe the daring of childlikeness, the daring 'yes', the daring of a living faith in Divine Providence? I almost want to say that you know this already. But, among other things, she had an expression that sums up her whole spirituality, but is not so easy to grasp. She reminds us she was a *victim of mercy*.

May I explain this a bit? We may know the term "victim of justice." It tends to conjure up the image of a vengeful God. He "rages and desires sacrifice." His justice has been offended and now he wants atonement. "The sea rages and seeks a victim<sup>1</sup>." Some imagine God the Father "raging" in the same way; they come to him pleading, "Yes, Heavenly Father, it is true, we have offended you much too much; you must have atonement. But let the others go, I want to pay the price for them."

A victim of justice! Being such a victim is perfectly fine, but St. Therese preferred being a victim of mercy. What does she mean? Here the soul surrenders to God's mercy every rightful claim to Divine Mercy it has merited. The victim of mercy knows that each good work it does in the state of sanctifying grace merits some reward. But the victim of mercy does not claim these good works, does not hope in them. When the victim of mercy builds on God's love, its only claim is God's mercy.

Pay careful attention! There is a subtle shift of accent here. Make no mistake: the victim of mercy also takes his good works seriously, but relies less on them than on an unlimited devotion to the mercy of God. That is the title on which the victim of mercy builds his case.

May I put that in simple, popular terms? If the book of life were lost, the book in which we imagine all our good works are recorded, then the victim of justice would be devastated. How would he ever get to heaven! His claim to heaven would no longer exist; it would have been erased... of course I say this *per impossibile* [it is impossible for this to really happen]. But the victim of mercy would march straight into heaven even if the book were lost. Why? Because the claim upon which he builds would still exist, even if the book of life were lost. For he builds with everything he is and has on God's mercy.

Please hear me one more time: the victim of mercy places his confidence only in one claim—God's mercy. No, there is a second claim, namely his personal misery. Here you may sense that being a victim of mercy includes an incredibly heroic childlikeness. The victim of mercy offers to God every claim based on merit and deliberately builds on God's mercy, which responds when we recognize our personal weakness and misery. We have already brushed on this thought by pointing out how "helpless" God's fatherly goodness is when confronted with the recognized and acknowledged misery of his children. Here you have a psychological extension of

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<sup>1</sup> Johann von Schiller (1759-1805), German poet, *William Tell*, I, 1.

the biblical passage, "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly" (cf Lk 1, 52).

We can, of course, find other expressions, and it would not do us any harm to take some time to personally reflect on this. I know many people who have the habit of saying in every need: "*Mater habebit curam*"<sup>2</sup>. They mean the same thing, only accentuate Mary's care as a concrete expression of God's mercy. Or there are expressions like "*Deus providebit!*" [God will provide!, cf. Gen 22,8]. Or: "God will answer!" All of these are an application of a living faith in Divine Providence. I could also repeat the little poem which we have heard already:

"Though storm may rage and wind may howl  
and lightning strike again,

I think as does the mariner's child:

My Father is at the helm!"

See if you can find such a slogan for your own life, as individuals and as a community. It must be something that really captures this spirit and awakens it again and again. I personally led an organization during the [First World] War which always used the motto *Mater habebit curam!* These words were repeated again and again, even in the most violent tumult of the war and the bloodiest days of battle. It was a simple reminder of the daring of childlikeness.

These introductory thoughts have served the purpose of making the ideas small enough to gradually penetrate your hearts.

To make another step in this direction, let me pose and weigh two questions. The first is about the characteristics of childlikeness—though under the simpler and more concrete title of "saying yes to God." I therefore ask

1. What does saying 'yes' to God look like?
2. What are the rewards of saying 'yes' to God?

Our momentary interest is not expanding our theoretical knowledge but allowing our hearts to drink these things in more deeply.

## I. The Characteristics of Saying 'Yes' to God

I therefore tell you that our saying 'yes' to God must be, first of all, enlightened and, secondly, daring.

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<sup>2</sup> Mother [Mary] will take care, a favorite saying of St. Vincent Pallotti which already became a catch phrase in Schoenstatt during World War I.

## 1. Enlightened

I ask you to first place your ear to the ground of the times. You will immediately sense that we stand in the midst of teeming life—modern, vibrant, even overflowing.

### a. Opposing Trends

Why do I stress "enlightened"? Because it draws a boundary between the Catholic and non-Catholic ways of saying yes.

The struggle over "saying yes" is going on almost everywhere. It leaves its mark on almost every modern current of thought which wants to make a difference. They all cry "Yes!" But what does their 'yes' look like? Let us quickly mark out the boundaries.

Our 'yes' is an enlightened one. It stands in stark contrast with the blind 'yes' of irrationalism or of quietism. These two terms capture the two main types of currents opposing us.

### The Blind 'Yes' of Irrationalism

We first consider the blind 'yes' of irrationalism. This can be subdivided into two currents: philosophical and theological.

To grasp the blind 'yes' of irrationalism *in the philosophical sphere*, we call on Heidegger<sup>3</sup>. The few things I say here will remain superficial. I am not giving a lecture on philosophy, but will only consider what applies to our topic. We have already heard Heidegger's idea of life as "set adrift" and something we must face with gritted teeth. Man is simply "set adrift" in life, as if tossed out onto a stormy sea. What is the implied imperative? I must say my 'yes' with "determination." What kind of a 'yes' is it? A blind yes, not knowing its source or its final end. It is bold and reckless. I am thrown in the water. I fiercely struggle against the waves. The water must be pushed back to either side. I must go somewhere; I must fight. It is a 'yes' with bravado in the face of the battles of life—the blind 'yes' of irrationalism.

In contrast, our 'yes' is a bright 'yes,' though admittedly "bright-dark"<sup>4</sup>. After all, it would be unfair for me to want to have it both ways. It was not

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), German existentialist philosopher.

<sup>4</sup> This terminology of "bright-dark" will recur at intervals throughout the rest of the retreat. By it, Fr. Kentenich means that God allows us to see much (of truth, of the direction of our lives), but that much remains enshrouded in mystery.

too long ago that I told you that there is always so much darkness in faith. *Everyday Sanctity* describes faith as a "bright-dark." It was read to us at table, though we may not remember the details. Even the mysteries opened to us by dogma are always enshrouded in a bright-dark or half-dark.

Their 'yes' is blind, ours is bright or bright-dark. Theirs is reckless, ours is daring! (....)

Our 'yes' is not the blind irrationalistic 'yes' of Heidegger's school of thought. Nor, secondly, is it the blind 'yes' of *dialectic theology*. To appreciate this you only need to study Karl Barth. Here, too, you find a blind 'yes,' but unlike Heidegger's 'yes' it is one of despair<sup>5</sup>. You will notice that everything about our times is reflected in this 'yes.'

Do you now sense how crucial childlikeness is? We do not speak a 'yes' which despairs, but rather one which is joyful and daring, even if it is surrounded by much darkness.

### **The Blind 'Yes' of Quietism**

When we consider the currents of our times from the philosophical standpoint, there is also the blind 'yes' of quietism. Ask the philosophers among you who have read Jaspers<sup>6</sup>. Jaspers can doubtlessly deliver a brilliant description of the situation of our times, but how does he stand up to life? Because of all the fluctuation he says: don't make any decisions at all, lay low!

How many millions take this approach, never making any decisions! There is always an excuse, always an escape. We wait and wait: maybe the tide will sweep us away, maybe it won't. This is how philosophers of quietistic decision-making approach life. You will notice that all the life-streams of today meet at the intersection of "saying yes." The word 'yes' is very significant.

Fatalism is one of the forms of quietistic decision-making. What is it? "What will be, will be!" Just let everything run its course.

While you analyze the currents of our times, you would do well to check and see if such extremes have not left a mark on your own life. "I am a man, and nothing human is far from me" (Terence). It is always best

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<sup>5</sup> Barth's teaching of God as the "totally other" forces us to speak our 'yes' to God and to His action in the world without hope of any real understanding of God or the Divine Plan in my life.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), German existentialist philosopher.

if we observe and know ourselves. Then we will immediately understand the times we live in and not always be dabbling without purpose.

Listen once more: What kind of a 'yes' should I speak? It must be enlightened and daring.

### **b. Description of the Enlightened 'Yes'**

Let us go into more detail. Question: What makes a 'yes' enlightened? Answer: When it is exposed to and enlightened by the light of faith. And what does the light of faith tell me? That my 'yes' is built on a threefold 'yes' from the heavenly Father.

### **The Heavenly Father's Threefold 'Yes'**

For me to say 'yes,' the Father must have spoken his 'yes' first. What does this *Ita fili, Ita filia!* [Yes, son; yes, daughter!] look like? It is:

first of all, a 'yes' spoken with fatherly kindness,

secondly a fatherly personal 'yes,' and

thirdly a fatherly heroic 'yes.'

Please allow me to express the things just as naively and simply as I can, even if here and there you feel it sounds too human.

### **A Fatherly Kind 'Yes'**

If my 'yes' is to be enlightened, I must expect that the heavenly Father has already spoken his 'yes' first, and that it is spoken with fatherly kindness. Which world does this open up to us? As theologians we want to grasp the final truth! It opens to us the entire depth and greatness of the *teaching of Divine Providence*. Let me therefore shed some light on that teaching.

What does this teaching say? It says that God, out of love and kindness, made from all eternity a great plan for the world and a little plan for me. He, with complete respect for my personal freedom and out of his love for me, guides all things in such a way that this plan for the world and for my life is ultimately fulfilled in all its detail.

Faith in Divine Providence involves two kinds of Divine action. The first is the act of the intellect. In human terms: his intellect proposes the script; God makes an outline for my life and all world events. His second action (although in God these two actions are really one and the same) is an act of the will, his execution of his plan. Let me ask you: Can you really say, fully convinced, that "Come what may, God has planned my life from all eternity"? [If you can,] see how much warmth and freedom this gives

you inside!

I know a sister, a simple child of the people, who totally lives the idea of Divine Providence. She works in the missions, and those of you who have been in the missions know what can happen there. A young sister from such a young community can suffer much more than a man. In everything that happened, her first thought was always, "Come what may, the heavenly Father has the plan of my life finished and etched in his heart. The Blessed Mother keeps this plan in her little Shrine and folds her hands and prays. I must only say 'yes' to it." This is the wisdom of life, the art of living, the mastery of life! I think that whoever shapes life with the help of few such deep thoughts is of greater significance than anyone who has God only knows how much science in his head.

Ask yourselves: What must my task be? To simply say 'yes'! Saying 'no' can be the worst thing I ever do. If I can only say 'yes,' then everything will be all right.

But you will argue, "I have done really stupid things!" Such stupidity is also part of God's plan; not because he makes me do stupid things, but because I do them. In this context let me add a saying of St. Francis de Sales: "The Father knows his child and knows that his child is small. He knows that I can only take baby steps, and that I will often fall." God expects our mistakes. The worst thing would be to stay on the ground and refuse to say 'yes.' If I say my daring 'yes' everything will be all right; then I can get up and keep going.

Listen to that serious word again: "Sculptor God, go to work, I am your block of marble!" Or better yet, "Sculptor God, go to work, I am your child!" This is a different way to portray the Biblical image that "the Father trims the vine so that it bears much fruit" (Jn 15,2). Think of your personal difficulties, of the difficulties of your family and of the Church! The Father certainly has a definite plan, otherwise he would not trim his vine this way. But come what may, "the father is at the helm!" I am not sticking my head in the sand when I say that—quite the opposite! I suffer with the Church and want things to be different, but I calmly go my way and speak my *Ita, Pater* [Yes, Father]. This *Ita Pater* must be enlightened and loving. I must receive all things from the loving hand of my heavenly Father.

### A Fatherly Personal 'Yes'

Secondly, the 'yes' of the heavenly Father is also paternal in the sense of being personal. I stress this point so much because we need it so much.

How much light this sheds when we consider the word "fatherly"—both from the standpoint of the 'yes' coming from the Father (*ratione subjecti*) and coming to us (*ratione objecti*).

### From the Person of the Father (*Ratione Subjecti*)

Who speaks the 'yes'? The personal Father. It is so important that we say to ourselves: The Father is not an IT, he is a YOU! My love for the Father must therefore not be an It-love, but a You-love. When we love, we as men have a tragically high level of It-love. For not a few of us, the practical result of the retreat will be that we learn to speak to God as a person. Do you know what we overcome when we do that? The deistic 'yes,' the fatalistic 'yes,' and the pantheistic 'yes.'

You can tell where I am going with this. For all practical purposes, many of us live as if we were deists or fatalists. What is the thinking behind this? God created everything, but now he is "taking it easy" in heaven and could care less about the further unfolding of the world. This is not our 'yes.'

Nor is it pantheistic. Nature worship celebrates victories in the countries around us and it immediately embraces materialism. This is not our 'yes.' We speak out in plain and genuine terms: Our 'yes' is a personal 'yes'! Our 'yes' is theistic. *Ratione subjecti*.

### From the Father to Us (*Ratione Objecti*)

We now turn to the *ratione objecti*. This point will take more time. God speaks his personal 'yes' to me as an individual. God loves me personally. I don't believe you really believe that—I mean with a living faith. If we were truly convinced that God loves us personally, that his love is so personal—as St. Paul says, "*Dilexit me*"..."He loved me!" (Gal 2,20)—we would see how quickly that would completely change our lives! Because we direct our prayer only to an It, we think that God views us the same way. We think that his love is It-love—love for a *thing*—but not You-love. We remain totally estranged from the fact that God loves us as persons. Think of the passages where Scripture tries to make clear to us not only that he loves us personally, but that he loves us as the apple of his eye (cf Dt 32,10; Ps 17,8)! Read how frequently such expressions appear in the liturgy! Take, for example, the communion verse for the feast of St.



Therese of Lisieux<sup>7</sup>.

If my 'yes' is to be enlightened, I must hear the personal fatherly 'yes' of the heavenly Father. Try to give this some serious thought. I only want to reimpres on you the context and then return to the subject of faith in Divine Providence.

#### *General Providence*

Sound Catholic theology speaks of *three levels of faith in Divine Providence*: We believe in God's general (*generalis*), special (*specialis*) and most special (*specialissima*) providence.

The book of Wisdom says: "But your providence, O Father, guides" the universe (Wis 14,3). What stands behind this? The fact that God, in his goodness, power and faithfulness, leads all things to their appointed end—the birds of the air, the plants, the lilies in the field... That is general Divine Providence. Am I affected by this general working of providence? By all means! But it goes even further: in my person I am also the object of the heavenly Father's special love. There is therefore also a

#### *Special Providence.*

Dogmatic scholars say that this *providentia specialis* is directed to those creatures endowed with spirit and grace. Their evidence for this is the Scripture passages of the Old and New Testament which compare the heavenly Father with a hen<sup>8</sup>, a mother, and so on. We ought to compile such passages and meditate on them again and again<sup>9</sup>. If you ever write your own meditation book, such reflections would really have to take a prominent place. Take note of such marvelous images as the child at the breast of the mother (Is 66,11-13); the mother who can never forget her

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<sup>7</sup> In the present Sacramentary this verse is now the Introductory verse: "The Lord nurtured and taught her; he guarded her as the apple of his eye. As the eagle spreads its wings to carry its young, he bore her on his shoulders. The Lord alone was her leader" (see Dt 32,10-12).

<sup>8</sup> See Dt 32,11; Ruth 2,12; Ps 17,8; 36,8; 56,2; 61,5; 63,8; 91,4. The Church fathers often spoke of God as a hen while alluding to these passages.

<sup>9</sup> Fr. Kentenich followed his own advice on this point while in Dachau. When he composed the prayer "I Beg You Father for all the Cross and Suffering" and included a beautiful meditation on the attributes of the heavenly Father, including *shepherd, mother, hen, and eagle*. See *Heavenwards* (Waukesha, 1992), p. 113.

child—and even if she did, "I will not forget you!" (Is 49,15). Or the image of the hen and the chicks (Mt 23,37; Lk 13,34). Or the passage in Matthew, "Consider the lilies of the field... and the birds of the air: If the Father cares for them, how much more will he care for you, O you of little faith!" (cf Mt 6,28-30). The Father is concerned about each and every detail of our lives. The greatest blossoming of the Old Testament knew a *providentia specialis*, though for the people as a whole and not for the individual. In the New Testament we then find how the Father loves each individual and is concerned about each detail in the life of every man and woman. We should absorb such things like a new Gospel!

#### *Most Special Providence*

In addition, there is a *providentia specialissima*, a most special providence. It refers to the elect: those with the grace of perseverance, namely those who have attained not only grace but also glory. Which leads to the difficult question: Can I consider myself one of the elect to whom most special providence applies? If I am, I belong to those for whom (as St. Paul puts it) the whole world was created (cf Rom 4,13ff and 1 Cor 3,21-23). Who can dare to say? I only raise the question. For sure I am the object of God's special providence, i.e. I am personally loved by God. And if I can assume that I am also the object of God's most special providence, then I am loved by God in an extraordinary way.

You know that theologians and scholars who are more versed in the details of dogmatic theology like to find *criteria* which allow us to assume with a fair degree of certainty *that we are of the elect*. Among them is the criterium of a deep and tender love of the Blessed Mother. According to them, it is one of the most certain criteria<sup>10</sup>. But such things are speculative. The mystery remains. Anyone who is simple and childlike knows how to leap over this abyss. But why should I not suppose that the theologians are right?! If our holy constitutions demand a deep Marian devotion of us, then thanks be to God! If I do what the community asks of me, I will have done all I can.

At the end of such a long passage, you only need to know one thing: My *Ita Pater* [Yes, Father] must be enlightened by the threefold *Ita fili* [Yes, son/daughter].

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, St. Alphonsus Ligouri's compilation on the subject in Chapter VIII of *The Glories of Mary*.

### A Fatherly Heroic 'Yes'

The Father's 'yes' to me must not only be fatherly kind and fatherly personal, but also fatherly heroic. It sounds a bit odd to speak of a fatherly heroic 'yes,' for God's activity does not cost him any effort. But try to think in anthropomorphic terms. You will grasp my point at once when I quote that famous passage of Scripture, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son" (Jn 3,16), even in the terrible form of being nailed to the cross. What do I conclude from his suffering and death? It proves how fond the heavenly Father is of me. For God so loved *me* that he gave his only-begotten Son!

At this point I really ought to stop and take some time to let it sink in. Similar well-known passages from Scripture could help shed light on the full meaning. Make an effort to grasp this: I have been purchased at a great price (cf 1 Cor 6,20; 7,23; 1 Pet 1,18f). Study how much God values you! If we want to become his children, we must personally experience our high dignity! Don't become a victim of the masses! They make us look at the horse from the wrong end. We stress how good God is—the misery of man has only been mentioned in passing. All things being equal, modern man must more strongly emphasize the [saying of St. Leo the Great]: "Remember your dignity, O man!"<sup>11</sup> The child must realize how he is enveloped by love, and experience faith as tangibly as possible.

These thoughts compel us to seriously reform our thinking. *Modern man must experience any way he can his high personal dignity in and because of God.* This is why we should, for instance, not be too quick to say—even though it is true—"O man, next to the universe you are so small!" We should rather look at the truth from the other side: "O man, next to you in the exaltation of grace, how small is the whole universe!" Is that true? Without a doubt! What is the beauty of the mountains and so forth compared to the soul in the state of grace?!

Today we need to be convinced of our elevated personal value. You should see how this increases your self-respect and how it awakens a great childlike love. "You have been purchased, and at a great price!" (1 Cor 6,20). I do not look on the life of Christ merely to tell myself how poor and sinful I am, but also to recognize my value, to lift myself up through the example of Christ's life and suffering to the experience of the Father's love. For God so loved *me* that he gave up to death his only-begotten Son! I do

<sup>11</sup> Pope St. Leo I (d. 461), *sermo* 21, in *Navitate Domini* 1,3; PL 54, 192.

not need many truths if I live out of this one truth.

How little we grasp this connection, how little we grasp St. Paul's *Dilexit me!* [He loved me!] (Gal 2,20).

It is so clear: If you know the psychology of love—and we have already discussed it—you will be convinced that *the most essential primordial drive in human nature is the drive to love and be loved*, not the drive to fear and be feared! Fear is also a primordial drive, as you can see in our neighboring countries, but when you motivate man by fear, you will only have him as long as you hold the whip.

Moreover, *in education everything depends on winning over the drive for love.* That drive is most quickly won over when we know we are loved. This is the marvelous pedagogy of St. John Bosco<sup>12</sup>: God loves me! Awakening the drive for love depends on man knowing he is loved. Now I know what I must do if I am an educator.

Let me remind you: Fatherliness is not grandfatherliness. Fatherliness is something strong, though always with the corresponding love and kindness.

I must ask myself: If I live out of this world, am I convinced that the Father has spoken to me and always speaks to me his threefold *Ita fili!* [Yes, son/daughter!]?

From the missions comes the story of a salesman who once visited a tribe in Africa. The chief wanted to kill a wrongdoer with an arrow. The salesman had pity on the one condemned to death. He begged the chief to give the man to him. But the chief wanted blood and shot the arrow. The salesman put out his hand in front of the heart of the condemned man. The arrow pierced his hand and the blood began to flow. "You want blood! Here is blood!" said the salesman to the chief. The chief was so touched that he spared the condemned man's life.

You understand what I am trying to say. What is the salesman's action compared to what Christ did! We cannot swim enough in the ocean of God's mercy or convince ourselves enough of how much God loves us.

We are on an eight-day retreat, but to change our whole lives it will take more than eight days. There is time enough to hear my words, but not

<sup>12</sup> St. John Bosco (1815-1888), Italian priest and founder of the Salesians, see his letter of May 10, 1884 to the Salesians of the Oratory in *Forty Dreams of St. John Bosco* (Rockford, 1996), especially p. 217, 219.

enough to really take them in. Just think of what changes you would have to make to refocus your whole system of education from the ground up! Do not think this is an easy task! I tell you, it is the opposite. If you really want to awaken heroism in yourselves and in your youth, then this is the only way. This or that educator may accomplish something using other methods, but it will not last. We must not delude ourselves: it may sound simple. But if you try to live it, you will notice that it involves a mighty power which can make us tremble. But it will make us happy because it brings to practical life the finest canons of who we are.

## 2. Daring (Heroic)

What must my *Ita Pater* [Yes, Father] look like? It must be enlightened and daring. Another word for daring would be heroic. Let me remind you that we are still circling around the same thought. Let me add that this heroic and daring 'yes' must be heroic both inwardly and outwardly. These are thoughts I will discuss with you in greater detail in the next conference.

### SIXTEENTH CONFERENCE

The solution to the crisis of our times is the daring of childlikeness—the enlightened and daring 'yes' to all things pleasing to the Father. We have talked about the features of an enlightened 'yes.' To know the features that make it daring, we must distinguish between daring as an interior attitude of the soul and as an outward activity and a profession of faith in the God-given order.

#### a. Daring as an Interior Attitude

Daring as an interior attitude is *the ability to muster a maximum of love and humility in the face of a minimum of natural insight and a low degree of the bright-dark insight of faith*.

What I just said is extremely important. I think I should repeat it, asking you to think it through for yourselves. I think it sums up everything we have discussed until now, reducing it to the simplest common denominator. Interior daring is the ability to muster a maximum of love and humility when given a minimum of natural insight and a low degree of the insight of faith.

Now I'm not sure which direction I should take in explaining this.

Let me begin with a reminder of *the weakness of our natural insight*, especially when it comes to the *praeambula fidei*, the preambles of faith<sup>1</sup>. We have already known and taught for centuries that the classical foundations of faith only offer a moral certitude. I think you will allow me to say that building on such a foundation means building with only a minimum of natural insight. We would do well to accept that. Do not think that all the mystery has been taken out of heaven and earth; do not think that man can discover and prove every secret down to the last letter. To do so would be

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<sup>1</sup> The "preambles of faith" refer to first arguments classically used to pre-dispose nonbelievers to the truth of God and the Gospel: e.g. the realization of a creator, the realization of a higher power directing our lives, the longevity of the Church, etc. Elsewhere, Fr. Kentenich stresses that it is the irrational (emotional) preambles to which we must pay most attention today. These include all pre-experiences needed for faith, hope, and love, e.g. the experience of personal love from father and mother in the family or experiences of being sheltered. See J. Kentenich, *Education and the Challenge of Our Times* (second edition: Waukesha, 1996), p. 36-38, and J. Niehaus, *The 31st of May* (Waukesha, 1995), p. 148-155.

to allow ourselves to be unfruitful for our times and an easy target for our opponents—not to mention the fact that we would be dead wrong.

Furthermore, I must remind you that even our *insight of faith is always only a "bright-dark" knowledge*. Go back to what we said about faith in Divine Providence: How many world events and how much of God's government of the world makes no sense at all! Is everything we see around us so absolutely clear? By no means!

If this minimum of natural insight and the low degree of the bright-dark insight of faith is to result in a *maximum of love and humility*, then it can happen only on two conditions (and with this I say nothing new, since this is what we have been talking about all along): *first*, such a maximum is possible only with a considerable degree of grace, and *second*, probably only by knowing that the aim of God's government is not primarily our intellect but our will. I think that these two conditions make the problem of our times more or less understandable for modern thinking. Without grace to guide our insight and searching, how could we hope to muster a maximum of love and humility! And again: If God's main desire were not to win over our wills, then we could not understand why he leaves so much about his governance of the world enshrouded in darkness.

A maximum of *love*. For the most part, I do not think that the world manages this daring of maximum love. This is why Christ and probably even the heavenly Father prefer the so-called "little souls": "Father, I thank you... that you have revealed this to the merest children" (Mt 11,25; Lk 10,21), for only the little ones manage to muster the maximum of love and humility in the face of a minimum or low degree of natural and supernatural insight. It is a tragedy in the life of the Church, in the life of religious men and women, perhaps even in our own lives, that while stressing so much the cultivation of the virtues, we have left our love so terribly uncultivated.

May I share with you a little observation of life which is verified by psychological observation? We know so many older confreres. We once got to know them and admired them. Then we came closer to them and had to work with them. We found that not everything was as noble and perfect as we thought from a distance. And now they have become old. Ask yourselves: Do you know many older confreres for whom you have a great, profound respect? I mean a profound human respect; if it is a product of my own virtue, then it is something else. I repeat: Do you know many older confreres or other religious who really command your purely human respect?

Do you know why we so often bitterly disappoint others in our old age? Because throughout our lives we pay too little attention to the most important ingredient of inner transformation—love. No virtue can form the soul as deeply as love. It is good that we strive for every kind of moral virtue—humility, obedience, purity, etc.—but none of these virtues forms the human person as much as love. If you would really understand this, you would set your sights much more on the immediate fostering of love of God, both in your own formation and in the formation of others. Love is simply *the* unitive and assimilating power. Everything else assimilates us to some degree, but *the* assimilating power is love. This is why I think our formation should emphasize love from early on; otherwise in old age we will bitterly disappoint ourselves and others. It is better to have beauty flaws—and we have them anyway. When our lives are weighed out, it is better to admit having a moral defect than to be uptight about our moral perfection. Work, rather, so that our soul's power to love is increased! Otherwise, what kind of community life must we expect later on? We will put up with things for now, but later, when something doesn't please us, we will ignore it—and then, when we are old and have been too weakly formed and "divinized" inside, how will we get along then! How is Catholicism supposed to show its ability to truly form the human person if we can't form our elite! We priests and religious should really show what the Catholic faith can do in education. It has been done in the past! Perhaps you do not sense the importance of these few thoughts. But observe how things are around you!

We therefore want to keep in mind that our aim is to commit to the daring of love, come what may! The more cross and suffering we have, the more unshelteredness, the more we know what God wants: to bind our power of love to himself. (...)

With that I have given you a general answer. What is it? The interior daring of the 'yes' consists of the ability, with the help of grace, to strive for a maximum of love and a maximum of humility—healthy humility, of course—given a minimum of natural insight and a low degree of the bright-dark insight of faith.

### **My Reaction to the 'Yes' of the Heavenly Father**

I now want to go beyond the general answer a bit and apply it to our everyday lives. Do you know how the soul responds when it has made this attitude its own? It also speaks its 'yes.' What does this 'yes' look like? It looks like the heavenly Father's 'yes' and has three characteristics. In my

view it is

first, a childlike joyful 'yes' to my way in life,

second, a childlike courageous 'yes' to my way of the cross,

and third, a childlike trusting 'yes' to my way to heaven.

You may have caught the play on words I am using: my way in life, my way of the cross, my way to heaven.

### A Childlike Joyful 'Yes' to My Way in Life

I begin by looking at the way God has led me and say to myself in the light of faith: This is really my way in life. You must take the word "way in life" literally. This is the way that makes me alive, a way which gives and promises me life on earth. I think I should subdivide this childlike joyful 'yes' into three subpoints: This is a 'yes' to my surest way in life, to my happiest way in life, and to my most fruitful way in life. You must not think that I am exaggerating anything here just to make my point. If you like, check the dogmatic foundations for yourselves and see how exact it all is, for such earnest realities must have a more or less sound foundation.

#### *'Yes' to My Surest Way in Life*

Is it true that my way in life is the surest way in life? Absolutely! Why?

We must now harvest the fruits of our previous deliberations.

*Who has planned my way for me? My Father!* Is that enough? Will my Father choose for me, his child, the surest way in life? You must answer this question for yourselves. If everything which we discussed in the last talk was true, it is a necessary consequence. My way in life must be the surest way in life!

Let me give you a second reason, though with a certain question mark. The second reason applies if I am one of the "elect." Am I one of the elect? My soul trembles again. In simplicity of childlike faith I can dare to assume so, perhaps especially because God has given me *a truly tender Marian devotion*. Be that as it may, I think I can still assume that my way in life is my life's surest way—on much safer ground than if I had designed it myself. (....)

#### *'Yes' to My Happiest Way in Life*

Furthermore, I can say that this 'yes' to my way in life is also a childlike joyful 'yes' to my happiest way in life. What does this mean? Is this really true?

The proof is, first of all, purely philosophical. Through my life God

wants to increase his glory in some unique way. Part of this glory is my happiness. If I therefore glorify God through my life as he desires, I will be happy. For me personally this means that my way in life, whether as a missionary in China or spiritual director, treasurer, or mission promoter, is the happiest possible way as long as God vouches for it (and he vouches for it through holy obedience) even if my natural inclination is to do something else. Why? The deep metaphysical or dogmatic reason is this: the growth of God's glory is always connected to the growth of my own happiness. I am always the happiest when I am seeking God.

Would you like some confirmation of this serious thought? Listen to Our Lord. He spoke the powerful words: "Whoever loses his life will gain it. Whoever wishes to gain his life must lose it" (Mt 10,39). What does this mean? If I seek my own interests, if I am allured by this or that even though God wants something else, then the words apply, "Whoever wishes to save his life," that is, follows his own interests, "loses his life," that is, his interests and, most importantly, his life. "But whoever loses his life," that is, when I offer to God my interests, troubles, worries and give them to him—that is my 'yes'—then it can be said of me, "he will gain his life," namely God and in God a happy life.

#### *The consequence is therefore:*

If we want to be true children, then we must not ask "Where am I the happiest?" but "Where do I give the Father the greatest joy?"

This is a very significant pedagogical-psychological shift. The immature child asks, "Where am I happiest, where am I most sheltered?" But the mature child asks, "What gives the Father the greatest joy?" To be sure, this will also be connected with the most security, but it is a security which then comes as a fruit (*ut consecutivum*) and not as a direct striving (*ut finale*). My awareness of shelteredness and my need for shelteredness are then fruits of my full surrender.

At this point I can repeat those hard words which I said earlier: The table of family life is not primarily a table of pleasure but of sacrifice! What do I want from family life? To give joy to the Father! The more mature we are, the more we must abandon the conscious, direct search for security and relaxation. No, relaxation, happiness and security come on their own if we seek God unselfishly. This is why you as a family must foster the hearthfire of a burning "bearing and enduring" love which serves

the other. This is my definition in the spirit of Adolf Kolping<sup>2</sup>. It always leads to the same result: the most important thing is that we seek God unselfishly! This powerful attitude must also be mine in family life.

It would, of course, be abnormal for the superior to say, "How can I make the table of family life a table of sacrifice?" No, he must make sure that there is enough to eat and enough relaxation! You see, the things always have two sides. If I as a superior am a permanent and inborn ascetic, then God have mercy! Then to stick it out we would all have to be not only canonizable, but canonized saints! What does tradition demand of a superior? He must be, first of all, not too healthy, secondly not too holy, and thirdly not too learned<sup>3</sup>. There is much wisdom in that.

You must keep the following law in mind: The superior is not the community ascetic; that task belongs to us all! If I were only speaking to superiors, I would say the same thing differently. My task as superior is to make sure that everything takes a healthy middle route. Under normal circumstances, I must never make demands which go beyond a middle measure. I must see to it that meals are neither too spartan nor too lavish and that the demands on the health of my confreres are moderate. Of course, those of us who are not superiors must have a different attitude.

By the way, if we have been good subordinates, we can become genuine superiors.

This is the 'yes' to my happiest way in life.

#### *'Yes' to My Most Fruitful Way in Life*

Thirdly, I can also say that it is a 'yes' to my most fruitful way in life. Why? Because our vocation is an apostolic one. God has called us to fruitfulness. God will therefore also take care that wherever I am and work there will be opportunities to be apostolic, either directly or indirectly—through my sacrifices.

#### **A Childlike Courageous 'Yes' to My Way of the Cross**

What does my *Ita Pater* [Yes, Father] look like? It is a childlike joyful 'yes' to my surest way in life, to my happiest way in life, and to my most fruitful way in life. To which we now add, this 'yes' is also a *childlike courageous and powerful 'yes' to my way of the cross*.

<sup>2</sup> Bl. Adolf Kolping (1813-1865), German priest and pioneer of Catholic labor issues who founded the International Kolping Movement.

<sup>3</sup> In Latin: *Abbas ne sit nimis sanus, nimis sanctus, nimis doctus*.

There is no other way. Our way in life must be a way of the cross. That is my personal way in life, that is your community's way in life, that is the Church's way in life. Let me say this from the outset, so that you start with a clear outline. It is

a 'yes' to a difficult way of the cross,

a 'yes' to an easy way of the cross (even though that seems to contradict the first point),

and a 'yes' to a fruitful way of the cross.

#### *'Yes' to a Difficult Way of the Cross*

Is my way in life a way of the cross? I believe it has to be. Do you know why? Because Christ's way in life was a way of the cross, too. That is a very simple answer.

Do you want another way to look at it? Because I am a creature burdened by original sin and my soul is weighed down by all kinds of poison and toxins, the Father wants to free me from these toxins; suffering is the only way he can do this.

It seems to me that those of us in the world today must prepare ourselves more for a serious and difficult way of the cross than other generations did. Do you know why? Because we live in the modern world. It seems to me that, just as there are times in history when Christ wants to relive more his life of glory, there are times when he wants to relive in a preeminent way his life of scorn, humiliation and crucifixion. And we live in just such times. What does this mean for me? From the very outset I must simply expect that my way in life will normally be a heavy way of the cross.

I now ask you to turn inward for a minute and think of your way of the cross. It may involve strong temptations, inner compulsions or something abnormal or morbid nesting in the soul. Do not forget: This is *my* way of the cross! My answer will be *Deo gratias* [Thanks be to God!], *Fiat* [Be it done to me], or *Sitio* [I thirst] depending on my maturity, but it is *my* way of the cross! Or perhaps my confreres and superiors do not recognize my talents. I feel like I'm always persecuted, put down, misunderstood, denied. And if this way of the cross is difficult for me, then I speak my *Deo gratias*!

#### *'Yes' to an Easy Way of the Cross (It is a Way of Blessing)*

My way in life is a way of the cross, and a difficult one at that. That is simply par for the course. The child is ready to say 'yes' to whatever happens. It is especially important to remember that if the Father reveals

his fatherliness to the only-begotten Son by sending him such horrendous crosses, we must be careful not to develop an incorrect concept of fatherliness. If I say 'yes,' if I am willing and open to being formed, then I must expect that the Father will work on me so intensely that the chips will fly! But we remember that everything he does is done out of love. A noble personality only rebels at one thing—that the cross would be only a punishment sent out of justice. We must apply this to our education and remember always that behind the cross is the Father's love. He sends me the cross out of genuine love. Then you will see how, in spite of everything, the way of the cross becomes a way of blessing, even a happy way.

This is why I want to add: as difficult as the way of the cross may be, it is also easy. Why? Because the Father has foreseen this way for me. I remind you again of the simple truths which ordinary Catholics live without a lot of theory: God will never send me more than I can handle! In these things, too, we should fall back on everything which our parents and grandparents taught us. It comes from a genuine Christian wisdom which has proved itself in ordinary everyday life. Learned theories lack such wisdom! We must simply be convinced that God will send the grace we need. If God gives us a cross, it will not be heavier than we can bear.

This may remind you of the legend of the "Vision of the Cross." A man was carrying his cross. He thought, "It is too heavy for me, I can't carry it." God heard his wish. He took his cross away and said, "You may choose your own cross. Go, pick one out." Now you can imagine that the man felt so relieved not to feel the weight of his cross any more! But he was a good man and wanted to have some kind of a cross. He tried one. It was too light. He tried another one. It was too heavy. Finally, he found one lying in a corner which seemed just right for him. He chose it and took it to the heavenly Father. Then the Father said, "That is the cross you started out with."

The simple, unaffected truth in this story is that God does not send me a heavier cross than I can bear. As a result, my way of the cross is a relatively easy way of the cross.

#### *'Yes' to a Fruitful Way of the Cross*

My way of the cross is doubly easy because it is a fruitful way of the cross. When I am raised up on the cross like Christ, I too can join the Savior in drawing the world to God the Father (cf Jn 12,32). I too can have a creative effect through my way of the cross. My response is therefore, "Thanks be to God!"

### **A Childlike Trusting 'Yes' to My Way to Heaven**

Finally, my 'yes' is a childlike trusting 'yes' to my way to heaven. What do I mean by that? Will my way of life ultimately lead me to heaven? Put another way: Am I one of the elect? I cannot answer this [with absolute certainty]. Only childlikeness gives certainty. (....)

When I say that "the hero grows apace with the difficulties he faces," then you must apply this to screening candidates [for your institute]. If your goal is clear—that you must fulfill a great and serious task—then you may only admit persons with a capacity for heroism. Those who are spiritual cripples will collapse along the way. Remember that heroism and daring must be there and depend on the person having the aforementioned characteristics.

#### **b. Daring as Outward Activity**

Daring as an interior attitude takes concrete form when faced with the challenges of life. This is daring as outward activity. Let me explain to you the reason for it, the kinds of daring, and its characteristics.

#### *The Reason*

The reason is obvious. If the attitude of my soul is heroic, it must show in deeds. This is obvious, but becomes all the clearer through Sacred Scripture. Because of Christ, this heroic attitude runs deep in the blood of Christianity. This is easily forgotten, especially if we live a comfortable life. Your unique mission as a community asks you to be prepared for anything; therefore Christianity's heroic side should be something you especially see and acknowledge. Hear, for example, the words of Our Lord: "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence,"—this does not mean political violence!—"and the violent take it by force!" (Mt 11,12). Christianity is not a religion of comfort, but of heroism.

By the way, can you blame so many pagans for rejecting Christianity when the only Christianity they see is enslaved to comfort? We really need to form a much more united front. Why do we have so much infighting? The enemy is upon us and beats the drums of heroism—and we? Sometimes one is reminded of what Görres once said<sup>4</sup>. He compared the Germans to horses. What do they do when attacked? They back into a circle and kick each other! Isn't it a lot like that in the Church? We should really

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<sup>4</sup> Johann Joseph von Görres (1776-1848), German publisher and Catholic lay theologian.

look beyond the trivial and secondary. At stake today is the whole future of the world! According to the wish and will of its Founder, Christianity is a heroic religion.

### *Kinds*

Do you want to hear other expressions to back this up? "If your eye is your problem"—how brutal this sounds!—"gouge it out and throw it away!" (Mt 5,29; 18,9; Mk 9,47). Or: "You must give up home and farm..." (cf Mt 19,29). These are not words for the faint of heart; Christianity demands the ultimate heroism! You will always notice that Christ does not only demand a heroic attitude, but also heroic deeds.

To be sure, we must immediately add that Our Lord is reasonable; he does not demand the highest heroism from all. In our neighboring country, every man in the street thinks he must be a hero overnight. But heroes are not born in a day!

Consider the *wise moderation of Our Lord*. His concept of the universal Church is really a Church of the people. He knows that most people are not heroic and cannot be heroic. I think (and I say this for the benefit of the superiors) that even if we are an elite, as soon as we gather in too large a group, we become a mass. This is quite a peculiar thing. The mass is easily influenced, even an elite mass. And the larger the group, the more one loses one's independence. If we were on our own, we would take the initiative, but the mass tends to level things in. Christ is therefore moderate and does not want to quench the smoldering wick (Mt 12,20).

But on the other hand we hear *his maximal demands*. Where can we find the golden mean? The way I see it, if we make maximal demands it must always be with an appeal to magnanimity. Make a mental note of this for your work as educators and superiors: If you make maximal demands using a moral-theological "must," you will break the noble soul. It seems to me that this is especially true here, for by nature the Swiss are very democratic. If I therefore make the highest demands, it must always only be in conjunction with the "you may" and not the "you must"! This is how Christ did it.

St. Ignatius knows how to apply this in classical fashion. Recall his meditation on the two standards<sup>5</sup>. On the one hand is Lucifer in a cloud of fire and brimstone. How he rages at the masses, rages like an angry bull! To the left and right, everyone must do his bidding. This is how Lucifer is

<sup>5</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, Second Week, Fourth Day.

portrayed. And Christ? He is not seated on his throne. He is with his own! How marvelous an image... "If you want to be perfect..." (Mt 19,21). An appeal to our good will.

It is a master stroke to govern a community this way—on the one hand firmly demanding what is required, on the other hand appealing to heroism through the "you may." Whoever finds the golden mean here is a master educator.

Christianity demands heroism, but normally a heroism asking the maximum on the level of "you may," not "you must." There are times, of course, when there is no other choice but for the individual Christian to be heroic or lose his relationship with Christ. We are gradually entering times like this. Under normal circumstances the heroic Christian will be an everyday saint who shapes the simple everyday circumstances of his life with a great spirit of love. But if circumstances change, Our Lord demands—and Christianity too—that we be heroic in professing our faith and in sacrifice. A heroic religion demands outward heroism. (....)

### *Characteristics*

When you ask about the characteristics of this outwardly courageous 'yes,' then I can mention two features which are of importance to the modern sensitivity. It must be *faithful* and *assertive*.

### *A Faithful 'Yes'*

A faithful 'yes' means the faithfulness of intellect, heart, and will. Apply this loyalty to Christ's Church and apply it to your community. We want to *remain faithful to the community*, even when it has blemishes and wrinkles. Christ's Church has wrinkles too. Every human organism has wrinkles. We will be loyal—and our loyalty will be given its first chance to be heroic when we think, humanly speaking, that we have good reason to be unfaithful. If your attitude from below [as subordinates] is that the table of family life is a table of sacrifice—the superiors must take care from above that the table of sacrifice is not too difficult—and you maintain both sides of the equation, then I think you will create a healthy human atmosphere and a sound community.

We want to be faithful in mind, heart, and will, even when loyalty costs a great deal—otherwise it is not heroic.

I don't know if I should say this, since it is a personal opinion of mine: I get around in the world a little and, do you know what bothers me most? When communities talk about their weaknesses to anyone on the street. It is clear that no community is perfect. But it is not clear and should not be



clear that we take every unpleasant thing that we experience in community and spread it abroad. That shows lack of character and family spirit! It is especially the older communities who do this without any scruples whatsoever, and it bothers me. Jesuits do not do this; in general they stand *together*. No one knows what happens behind the scenes, but things must happen, for where there are humans, there is human frailty.

I don't know if you agree with this. I only want to tell you this because it is my firm conviction. If things are a mess in my community, then I tell *my superiors*! I will complain [to them] on occasion, too; *frankness* is always part of healthy obedience. If I cannot speak my peace inside the community, then it is inhuman to demand that I not do it outside the community. A great deal depends on how we bring these two dimensions together. As superiors we should educate ourselves to see it as the highest act of trust when someone can say to us: "You totally messed up. You should be removed from office." Then everything is in order. But if I build a wall around myself, I will be treated with outward respect, but only outwardly. Then the frustrations will be vented elsewhere. (....)

We should be much more realistic and *count on human frailty*. Human failings are part of life—will I change that? Does it make much sense to talk a lot about it? If the answer is 'yes,' then go ahead. Otherwise keep your peace. I reform the community by reforming myself and the little place in life God has given me. I am a professor or rector or whatever: That is where I create the "ideal state" as much as I can. Once I really try to create an ideal state I will notice that I can't do it either. And when you become a superior, you will see how different things look. Often those subordinates who give the impression that everything would be cleared up in no time are the superiors who are the most insensitive and insufferable.

I want only that we examine ourselves and see the human failings, but see them as a task! This is what I call true heroism. My daring must therefore be faithful and, on the other hand, as a superior I must also be grateful when someone is willing to criticize me to my face. Let me say it quite humanly: I cannot stand it when someone criticizes me behind my back. Whether that happens or not depends to a great extent on the superiors.

But when my superior is incompetent, I should not say, "Because my superior is incompetent, I will not try at all." It is just the opposite: Then I should want to try all the more!

We would do well to be totally realistic when we discuss these things. Later on you may be able to observe other communities and develop your

own experience. You will see that "not all that glitters is gold." Upon closer examination you will find that there is much darkness because we are not free from sin.

### *An Assertive 'Yes'*

Secondly, our daring must be ready to fight. (....) What does this mean? We must assert ourselves: for the Church, for the kingdom of God in the missions, and so forth.

We must assert ourselves for the community. No one will count it against me if I say that my community is the best. To the Franciscan his community is best! That pride would be misplaced only if I would say that my community is the best for everyone. I must stand up for my community when someone speaks against it. My daring must be assertive.

My assertiveness should also express itself in leading only those potential vocations to the community who I feel are worthy. It is important that we have sound principles of selection. If we accept people haphazardly, we must release people haphazardly...

I will also be assertive in the sense that I always do my work well out of love for my community! We must have an ethos, a sense of pride in who we are.

These are general rules. We should tell ourselves: Wake up and wake each other! If our 'yes' in this direction is an enlightened and daring one, we can push out onto the high seas—as individuals and as a community. We can then assume that God will bless whatever we do.

## SEVENTEENTH CONFERENCE

You may have noticed that we are still on the first point, and the retreat will soon be over! We therefore want to try to finish the first point tonight.

## II. The Fruits of Saying 'Yes' to God

After considering the characteristics of our 'yes' to God, we turn to its fruits. Or should I first warn you of a certain danger? At first glance, "saying yes" can sound quite passive. But if you have taken my meaning correctly, we speak of a 'yes' which is both active and takes the initiative. Anyone with more experience and maturity will know that the 'yes' we have described involves a great deal of activity. In fact, we have had a chance to stress this active and initiative-taking side when we spoke of the 'yes' as assertive. Anyone who wishes to expand on this active side, with its strengths in autonomy and independence, can see it as an unfolding of the assertiveness of this 'yes.'

Which fruits accompany the 'yes' to God? Here, too, you must not expect new ideas, but only a deepening of what we already know so that it more deeply penetrates our hearts. God willing, there are two fruits which we receive. The 'yes' gives us:

security and  
strength.

### 1. Security (on a Higher Level)

Please do not think that I am contradicting what I already said about insecurity and unshelteredness. Absolutely not! What the 'yes' gives us is security on a *higher level*. You must always remember that earthly things can never give us security to the degree for which we long. It is only on a higher level, in God, that we can truly find the security and shelter we crave. "For those who love God, all things work together unto good" (Rom 8,28). That is St. Paul's way of saying it. If we try to love God and grow in love whenever blows of fate, insecurity and unshelteredness come our way, all things will work together for the best.

But I must ask you to understand me correctly. This does not mean: "I love you God; therefore I am safe from all financial setbacks; therefore I am safe from all political setbacks." "For those who love God, all things work together unto good"—this means to be secure and sheltered in God. Take the image of the pendulum again. The pendulum swings back and

forth. The pendulum of our life is also pushed by world events and economic difficulties. We want to experience our share of difficulties. We should not be exempt from this. You see, if our love for God were freed from all difficulties, then the danger would be much too great that we would fall again. We cannot be allowed to stay back on the lower level, but must reach the heart of God. *This is the God-willed meaning of all insecurity and unshelteredness: a still greater security and shelteredness in the hand and heart of God.* This is true of the life of individuals—you can pause here a moment and apply this to your own life—and of nations.

Think this through for yourselves: Don't you think it is plausible and even obvious, considering how God governs the world, that the deepest meaning of our own era is the preparation of a new era of fervent faith? You notice that we touch on the great riddles of world history. If the meaning of personal unshelteredness is a higher shelteredness in God, then I think I am justified in saying that the meaning of the unshelteredness of the nations is the higher and deeper shelteredness of the human race in God.

If you want to break this down to its component ideas, then you must think again of (first) the fear of ill-fortune or Jobian fear, (secondly) the fear of uncertainty, (thirdly) the fear for our salvation, and apply this principle to the three kinds of fear.

### *Fear of Ill-Fortune*

We first consider the fear of ill-fortune. Here there are two possibilities. Either I think of myself, as an individual or a community, as one of the propertied class—in which case I am not particularly burdened by major economic or political blows of fate—or I belong to the unpropertied class. In the latter case, what effect does my 'yes' have when fortune fails me? In every need I will receive a *threefold attitude* from having my security on a higher level:

First, the attitude of radical trust. Is this true? Theoretically it should agree with everything we have already said.

Secondly, the attitude of a deep shelteredness in the riches of God. Since I lack earthly riches, perhaps this works to my great advantage by giving me a better grasp of the riches of God. Be that as it may, whoever speaks a childlike 'yes' is always wealthy in the sight of God, even if he is as poor as a beggar. The poorer one is in exterior and economic goods, the more one appreciates this wealth.

Finally, there is the attitude of detachment from all earthly things. I am

detached and not shackled to all the worldly things, or at least not inordinately attached to them.

If God has placed at my disposal the necessary economic goods, perhaps even a certain level of luxury, if I am therefore economically well off and I nonetheless remain a child and speak my 'yes,' what does that mean for me? A simple and unending "Thanks be to God" for all the help that he has sent my way in fatherly kindness, including so many economic blessings. It also means a simplicity of spirit, for I know that what I have is from God; my responsibility is to use it well and give a proper accounting for it. Finally, it means a constant readiness to give it up at any time, should God so desire.

With that I have given you a simple outline of how we ought to act both when we are well off and when we are poor; how a child—why, I nearly want to say—how a member of your community would handle all financial difficulties and questions of security.

If you are able, please apply these principles to your daily lives, especially those of you who are responsible for the finances of the community.

#### *Fear of Uncertainty (or Not Knowing)*

How is the fear of uncertainty overcome through naive childlikeness? I should say *two things*. Naive childlikeness makes for better science and scientists.

If I use philosophers as a kind of example (the same could be said *mutatis mutandis* of all scientists), the childlikeness of a scientist shows not only in an outstanding striving for intellectual perfection, but also for perfection of life. I will come back to this in a different context tomorrow when I speak about wisdom. After all, philosophy is love of wisdom. For religious people, science must therefore always be wisdom. And wisdom is the perfecting of life, not the perfecting of the intellect. It is because of this that those who undertake science without being children are always in danger of gradually becoming religiously superficial and shallow in character.

Secondly, childlikeness not only does the scholar good, it also makes his science more fruitful. You know the reason. Speaking first of philosophers: it is because childlikeness gives us the ontological immediacy and the down-to-earth intellectual soundness which is helpful or even necessary for scientific study.

#### *Fear for our Salvation*

Finally, childlikeness and fear for salvation. I need not say more on this point. The greater the fear for salvation, the stronger it should urge us into the heart of God—into the security proper to our *primordial nest*. The term "primordial nest" is one which we should remember. Man is a nest-bound creature, i.e., he has a strong drive to call a nest his own. When God allows us to fall out of all kinds of nests of second- and third-level importance—and he certainly does that—what is his purpose? He wants to bring us into the final nest, the original nest of his most holy heart.

Stepping back again, can you see that a profound and precious fruit of childlikeness is security? But please: not security on the lower level—there we still face insecurity—rather security on a higher level: in God.

## **2. Strength**

The second fruit is strength. Childlikeness gives us strength. I can now proceed with our retreat topic without further digressions. Where should I begin? With everything I just said about fear. I want to interpret strength this way: Childlikeness gives us the strength to *bear all anxieties in the right way* and, to a great extent, to overcome them. How shall I prove this? Think about everything I said about the psychology of fear. As a psychologist and philosopher I can say it again: in keeping with the organic relationship between nature and grace I should try to overcome each fear with the antidote that corresponds to its source. How? I must first ask: Which is the root cause of the anxiety? It can either be in the body or the soul, or in both.

### **Physiological Root Causes**

If the primary cause of the fear is physiological, in some lack of the body, then I can apply the proper medical corrective. What might it be? Now, you have to know this better than I or have your doctor tell you, although I think—but this is my personal opinion and you do not have to agree with me—we should not rely [too much] on doctors! You see, he who goes to doctors too often will be sick a lot. I would not be too quick about going. If there is a real problem in my organism, it is fine: I let myself be diagnosed. But by and large my strategy should be maintaining a healthy outlook on life, a healthy feeling of life.

#### *House rules for a healthy feeling of life*

May I give you a few house rules? We must see to it, first of all, that we develop a healthy feeling of life. I should therefore educate myself and

be able to sense where my limits are. No doctor can tell you that. He can only say, "Try this!" If I have a healthy feeling of life and can sense that "this is as far as I can go," then a great deal has already been won.

Otherwise, in the ordinary things of everyday life, we ought to use common sense. For instance, *getting enough exercise*. I don't know if I need to point this out to you. We are, for the most part, healthy. But if you have to work with women religious you will notice how often they are embarrassed to say things in the confessional. I can say: how many difficult illnesses of the body come from having too little exercise! How many physical and spiritual complications this can have! This is often the case with women religious. One fails to hear the cry of nature because one must work: one, two, three, four and five days. That is worse than a difficult illness!

We should really pay much more attention to such ordinary things. It can free us from physiological complications or at least give us some moderate relief. If the root cause lies within the body then we can remove it with the help of a doctor, but I think that in most cases we can take the initiative and quietly observe ourselves without constantly pampering the body. We must develop a healthy feeling, a healthy feeling of life. When we become older, we must naturally see the doctor more often because our bodies can no longer fight everything on their own. In general, I think we ought to educate [ourselves to a certain] austerity, especially when we are priests and missionaries.

Let me say this as an aside: In our community we say, "It is better to pay the baker than the doctor." You understand what I am trying to say. It is obvious that we should make sure there is *enough food on the table*. It is more or less the common custom of all religious communities to make sure that meals are a bit above average in quantity and taste. It is true that if you must be frugal, do not be frugal with the food. These are things we can discuss in the context of dealing with anxieties so that we keep our bodies as fresh and resistant as possible.

Francis de Sales even advised that in younger years we should be especially cautious *about sacrificing sleep*. Even old, austere ascetics have said that it is better to use the scourge than to deny sleep. In younger years we can stand it, but it wreaks its revenge later when God no longer gives the special graces. That is the first point: relieving anxieties.

### Psychological Root Causes

The second point presupposes that there are also psychological causes

and that they are always in the mix. Wherever there are anxieties, the root cause is not in the body alone. Physiological conditions do not leave the soul untouched. Medical doctors suggest visiting a different place or climate. We can try that. It can give us some relief. But I am convinced—and perhaps you are too—that deeper-seated fears will not be overcome by such changes. That is what I want to stress: all the means which are proper to medicine can be employed, but without a corresponding naivete and childlikeness they will not solve the problem.

Other methods speak more directly to the soul. To give just the main points: the ascetical tool of *agere contra* [not immediately giving in to my natural inclination] can also be used as a kind of "medicine."

For instance, suppose I fear uncertainty. Ask what the cause is—then *agere contra*! Whoever is familiar with anxieties will know that this normally does not overcome the fear, but it alleviates it.

*Agere contra* can also be applied to the will. What causes my fear? What is my fear trying to keep me from doing? For instance, I have such a hard time singing the parts of Mass, or to say Mass at a certain altar. While you are still young you must not just cave in to these things!

I may tell myself that such an austere *agere contra* will not alone solve the problem; spiritual motivations must still be added. And the simplest and most effective motivation is always: *I do what gives the heavenly Father joy*. If it gives him joy that I make a fool of myself, then I want to rejoice in that too and sing the Mass or say Mass at that altar.

You must see how, all other things being equal, childlikeness really gives the strength to wrestle down our fears, to bear them and, in certain cases, to totally overcome them.

I don't know if the doctors would agree with me on these things. I think that healthy Catholic doctors will try, just for medical reasons, to connect their field again and again with the world of religion. Even non-Catholic doctors frequently know how to put these religious motives to work for Catholics and Christians; they sense that, at the very least, there is a power at work here.

Try these things yourselves. Don't study a lot of things; rather live them! When we experience them in our own lives, we gain certainty; if others experience the same thing, then we gain a knowledge built on experience. And when we have such experiential knowledge we are less likely to be deceived by all kinds of theoretical speculation.

### THIRD: Childlikeness—the Way to Understanding our Constitutions

I think we can now conclude the first line of thought. What have we been talking about? The value of childlikeness. In giving the outline I mentioned a third point. I did not want to talk about childlikeness only as the way out of the crises of our times but also as the way to understanding and animating the observance of our holy constitutions. My intention was to tie this together with your constitutions. But I have referred to your constitutions again and again along the way (....).

Tomorrow we will begin with the second fundamental pillar: the root of childlikeness. We have been constantly circling around one main thought. Perhaps your soul is gradually getting tired and needs to see other worlds. At the same time, we do not want to forget to pray, for all the knowledge in the world will not do it alone. The Holy Spirit must come with his grace to make us fruitful again and again.

#### EIGHTEENTH CONFERENCE

We have discussed the value of childlikeness at quite some length and, I suppose, also absorbed it to some degree on the experiential level. It should not be too hard for us to make shorter work of the second fundamental pillar of our lifestyle.

### THE SECOND FUNDAMENTAL PILLAR: THE ROOT OF CHILDLIKENESS

The second question is: What is the root, or source, of childlikeness?

When our longings are ignited by some lofty good, we spontaneously ask: How can I obtain it? This corresponds to the psychological question: What is its root and source? Some answers came to light as we discussed the ways of childlikeness. In speaking of its true greatness, we mentioned the manly vigor it takes to acquire and maintain it, but also the prudence and wisdom of age. This was the first time we heard childlikeness described in connection with wisdom. We listen to Tagore's words again: "God wills that in holy wisdom we reconquer childlike ways." Tagore's insight is apparently the fruit of sound experience and observation of life. We will take his words at face value, though interpreting them in our fashion—in the light of faith, but also under the influence of a sound philosophy and psychology.

#### The Root is Holy, Heavenly Wisdom

What is the source of childlikeness? It is holy wisdom.

#### I. Holy Wisdom and Unholy Wisdom

Before we go into detail, I must first turn to Sacred Scripture. Why do we speak of *holy* wisdom? The word immediately conjures up its opposite: unholy wisdom. You already have an inkling of what this is: If holy wisdom is the source of childlikeness, then unholy wisdom is the source of childishness. Scripture uses other words for holy and unholy wisdom. You will find the letter of St. James helpful in this regard. What do we hear there? How does James describe wisdom? He speaks of a *sapientia coelestis* and *mundana*—heavenly wisdom and worldly wisdom (James 3,15). See Tagore when he speaks of holy wisdom.

Biblically speaking, *holy wisdom* is *heavenly wisdom*. How can we explain this? *By wisdom we see God as the Supreme Good and have the*

*strength to strive wholeheartedly for this Supreme Good, keeping far from all that offends him or lessens his joy.* What did we call this life process and task? (....) "Simplicity." In this light, wisdom is the source of simplicity. One single "fold"—all for God—*omnia uni* [all for the One (God)]! Wisdom gives us this simplicity. Wisdom lets us recognize and love God as the Supreme Good and reject all else.

Our Lord teaches us this heavenly wisdom when he admonishes us to seek it like a great treasure in the field (Mt 13,44).

Paul teaches this wisdom when he describes his own thinking and willing: Everything which I once accounted gain I now consider loss; I view all else as rubbish so that I may totally possess Christ (cf Phil 3,7-9). Here you have the entire deep, simple meaning of the simplicity which flows from the source of wisdom. Total giving of self to God and Christ means the total sacrificing of self. I give all things to him. Ask yourselves how you see the things of this world. As rubbish. And everything I account as rubbish is something I throw away. Why? In order to win Christ—heavenly wisdom.

We can research this question with St. Francis. He cast aside all worldly plunder in order to gain the Father and Christ. With that we have a general impression of what the wisdom of heaven is.

St. James calls *unholy wisdom the wisdom of the world*. Because this topic means thinking our way into a new concept, we must allow ourselves to take it in one drop at a time until we see the whole reality.

### *The Biblical view of "World"*

The wisdom of the world. Biblical scholars ask: What is the world? This is a question which especially interests us for we have a mission to be the intermediary between secular priests and religious priests. What does Sacred Scripture have to say about the world? I think that in the spirit of the Bible we can interpret the word "world" in two ways.

First, by "world" we mean evil men and their evil principles. This leads to the admonition: "Do not conform yourselves to this world!" (Rom 12,2). We should not conform ourselves to the world, i.e., not to the evil, anti-godly ways of the world and worldly-minded men.

But "world" can also mean all things created, earthly, creaturely, but only to the extent that they exert a regrettable influence on us, to the extent that they enslave us. "World" is therefore also everything which can and wants to bind me to itself in an inordinate way. In this sense we have the well-known saying of St. John: Have no love for the world, for whoever

loves the world is not pleasing to the Father; enticements for the eye, carnal allurements, the life of empty show—all these are from the world (1 Jn 2,15f). Here are meant earthly created things—to the extent that they arouse and foster in us a threefold craving: for possessions, pleasure, and power. The wisdom of the world.

This reaching out for the world can take three forms. St. James (3,15) uses three terms:

*sapientia terrena* [earthly wisdom],

*sapientia animalis* [animal wisdom or the wisdom of the senses],

and *sapientia diabolica* [diabolical wisdom].

What does "earthly wisdom" mean? We cling inordinately to earthly economic goods. If I cling inordinately to the earthly things which allure and fascinate, then I have a wisdom that leads and guides me, but it is not the wisdom of heaven. What I then do is not an expression of childlikeness, but of childishness.

"Animal wisdom" is a term used with many variations in Scripture, as by St. Paul who speaks of "the man of flesh." To him this *homo animalis* does not know what is of the Spirit, while the man of the spirit understands all things (cf 1 Cor 2,14f). This "wisdom of the flesh" is a wisdom which reaches out for sensual pleasures. Its inordinate clinging is not so much to possessions as to sensual earthly pleasure.

"Diabolical wisdom" is an inordinate drive for achievement. It seeks to realize the craving for power.

Think these thoughts through for yourselves, word for word, and I think you will quickly grasp the psychology behind them.

Where do the different kinds of worldly wisdom converge? They all elevate something created which is not God (or may even be against God) to "supreme good" and treat it as such. It turns reality totally on its head. The wisdom of the world—the wisdom of heaven.

### **Flight from the Spirit of the World**

As a bridge to the next thought, let me remind you that the world has always greedily stretched out its hand for God's children. I remind you that from the very start, Christianity has worked seriously to protect its children from the world and the spirit of the world—i.e., the wisdom of the world. If you study early Church history and the early history of Christian religious life, you will find the urge to flee from the world, to escape the fetters of the spirit of the world. What motivated this? The awareness that the spirit of the world is otherwise too difficult to escape. The aim was not

to leave the world just to be out of the world, but to secure the *sapientia coelestis* [wisdom of heaven]. They fled because they equated being in the world with being given to the spirit of the world and taking in its spirit through every pore of the soul. The spirit of the world and the danger of being ensnared by it essentially contributed, though it was not the only factor, to the gradual development of the religious life. One wanted to leave the world in order to escape the spirit of the world. Hence the serious effort to make the *sapientia coelestis* at home in such religious communities. We know how often this failed and how many monasteries became even more worldly than the world they left behind. (....)

### What We Must Do

We now come to an extremely important and well-known word. What must we do to seek and find the source of holy wisdom? Let me speak with imperatives. We must first make a serious effort to eradicate the root of unholy wisdom from our souls. Secondly, we must strive in an enlightened, effective manner, to foster the root of holy wisdom.

With these two imperatives we have not said a lot, but we must see both sides. If we only see the positive side, we are too onesided. In this talk we therefore want to at least shed a little light on the way we should free ourselves from unholy wisdom.

### A. Eradicating the Root of Unholy Wisdom

Let me first discuss the reasons why we must eradicate unholy wisdom and then later how it should be done.

#### 1. Reasons

Why should we eradicate unholy wisdom? Let me give you two or three reasons. They are so simple that I can just name them.

I simply begin by alluding to the words of Our Lord, "Unless you *change...*" and interpret them thus: "Unless you eradicate the root of unholy wisdom..."? Please think that one through for yourselves.

Second, recall the principle of contradiction: I cannot *look on God as the Supreme Good while at the same time adoring some part of creation as supreme good!* If becoming a child demands giving my whole being to God, this automatically precludes clinging to unholy wisdom.

Here I must remind you again of how many secular and religious priests—perhaps even including ourselves!—try to do the unholy balancing act of attempting to serve both the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of

heaven. They want to be totally at home in the world and enjoy its pleasures while being with God and enjoying his pleasures. Such men condemn themselves and those around them to mediocrity.

I think I have already told you: the tragedy of the Church is not that the bad are bad, but that the good are not striving to be totally good. Applied to the religious and priestly life: the tragedy is that we, by virtue of our vocation, should be the Church's elite—but we don't have the courage to be totally good. Instead, we sell out too much to half-heartedness—or more concretely: we make too many concessions to the world. In reality we try to sit on the fence, and that is never comfortable. It would be easier if we would simply be on one side or the other, even if it were the side of the "world."

You must perhaps examine for yourselves the perils of life today. Why? Because the world tries to ensnare us with thousands and millions of grasping tentacles. The world of today has created an incredible amount of pleasure. We can think of all kinds of things: radio, cars, etc. These are things, of course, which can be blessed and should serve God and the spirit of prayer. But see for yourselves how pleasure and hedonism are proclaimed to us today from every rooftop. It is extraordinarily difficult today—perhaps you can use these few days of retreat to deepen at least this one thought—to be in the world and not fall victim to the spirit of the world. To do that we need to have such deep roots in holy wisdom that we can truly take full advantage of the times available to us, especially the prayer times, to immerse ourselves in an enlightened and effective manner in the world of God.

Ask yourselves: Do we always have this before us as our clear and guiding thought? The saints liked to compare the world and the spirit of the world to a spider web—whoever gets too close is ensnared and cannot get out again, like a fly trapped in a web. This is the master stroke: to be constantly around the web and never get caught! You must see how difficult a task this is! Remember: one cannot "serve both God and money" (Mt 6,24). I cannot look on both the spirit of God and the spirit of the world as the highest good. The spirit of integrity must be there: if God, then God! This applies not only to us as a community, but to each one of us who wants to become a saint. Which gives us the second reason, the principle of contradiction, to tell us we must eliminate the root of unholy wisdom in our lives.

Do you want a third and fourth reason? We are *children of the Father*. We must therefore make the *Father's world of values* our own. What does

St. Paul say of the heavenly Father? The wisdom of the world is foolishness to God! (1 Cor 3,19). If I am therefore a child of the Father, I must also make his world of values my own.

Moreover, if I am a *brother and member of Christ*, his *world of values must also be my world of values*. What was Christ's attitude toward the spirit of the world? His life was one great protest against everything called "the world" in the negative sense of the world. I need not add any further reasons. They are obvious.

## 2. How It Should be Done

How do we go about this serious striving, this work of eradicating the unholy root? Let me express myself in clear and sober terms: We must strive—in an earnest, enlightened and effective way—to *overcome every inordinate attachment to all that that is not God or is against God*. This is the seasoned lesson of centuries of Christian experience.

We could, of course, use one of many specialized terms describing this work of destruction or removal. Ignatian spirituality puts it this way: We must overcome our inordinate affections. The *Imitation of Christ* (I,6; III,37) says: We must become free. Free from what? From the enslavement of inordinate attachments. More positive expressions are in vogue today: Our sole standard is to please God. However expressed, the clear goal is to overcome and destroy in ourselves the inordinate attachments to all things created.

What I stress is the *inordinate* attachment. There are also *ordinate* or *ordered* attachments. We must be careful not to approach this in an unenlightened manner; we must not destroy attachments at will. They are from and for God. Let me remind you of the third part of *Everyday Sanctity* which carefully describes how far an ordinate attachment can go. St. Francis de Sales is marvelously adept in leading souls on these paths. His view is that we should seriously strive to make use of all creatures—and take them with us—so as to reach the heart of God as quickly as possible. If the entire power of my love belongs to God, then this must show in my attachments to created persons and things. In God I belong to creation and love God in his creation. It is the inordinate attachments and not the ordinate ones which we should overcome.

All of this applies not only to persons but to things. Let me discuss the importance *leisure and recreation*. I should not say: "Recreation is not for me—I want to kill the spirit of the world!" Recreation should mean enjoying creation. We must guard ourselves from either too much or too

little. There are priests who constantly need relaxation, but "need" in quotation marks. There are proper times for recreation, but it is not right if it becomes incessant. However one should also avoid relaxing too little. Those who take too little time off, who use created things too little in order to be refreshed in body and soul, must expect that their bodies and souls will eventually have serious difficulties. We should not be narrow-minded but moderate in both the quantity and quality of our recreation.

It might be wise for a young institute like yours to create a tradition in this regard. Note how often one needs free time. Observe the diocesan clergy. It used to be common in Germany that everyone had to make his vacation at this or that spa. Was that real recreation? I actually doubt it. For an institute it is worthwhile to create a certain tradition because there are no applicable laws. And a tradition, a custom can eventually take on a measured quality of being law. In the formative years of the community we must be especially attentive to these things. Later on they will be the precedent that one falls back on. But whether this way or that way, the *principle of sanctity* must be respected. After all, we do not want to be just a herd of people who have fled from the world to get through life more or less unscathed. If so, we should quit right now. We want our community to become the fruitful mother of saints. This, and not so many other things, must be the criterium we use to judge our recreation again and again.

We must make a serious effort to remove from our lives all inordinate attachments to created persons and things. What does this mean in particular? It includes either a permanent or at least a moderate temporary *renunciation of created things out of love*.

Permanent renunciation. It is clear that when I permanently renounce something, it lessens the danger that I become enslaved. But let me add: this must be done out of love, including when the renunciation is permanent.

The following is told of the brother of Cardinal Vaughan: The little fellow had gotten into trouble for some misbehavior at table, probably for eating too fast. His father scolded him and said he must not become enslaved to things. The boy was very sensitive. He was hurt and in his uneasiness he muttered, "Yes, Father, but why is it that you always have to smoke your pipe after supper?" His father immediately stood up and left. A short time later he returned and said to his son, "From now on you will never see me smoke a pipe again!" I don't say that we should imitate this. I only want to make clear that permanent renunciation preserves us from enslavement.



If we cannot decide on a permanent object of renunciation, Christian wisdom asks that we make at least some temporary renunciations, without which no asceticism can last. This too must happen out of love, of course. You know the saying that *it is the practice of every Christian to give up all sin and, here and there, to even give up something which is rightfully his*. I believe that without some renunciation, at least here and there, we cannot remove unholy wisdom from our souls.

### 3. Cultivation of the Spirit of the Vows

I can start by asking myself, "What can I give up?" To give you a more concrete answer, I will present this same thought using a different terminology.

When we say "either permanent or temporary renunciation of created things out of love," this means the same as "cultivation of the spirit of the vows." This spirit of the vows must be cultivated. Perhaps I can do you a service by taking some time and telling you what I think about these things that are being so strongly discussed among secular priests. I present two thoughts: first, a perennial word about the spirit of the vows; second, a word about securing this spirit which is determined by our times and stands in relationship to our constitutions.

#### What do we Mean by the Spirit of the Vows?

By the spirit of the vows we mean an inner independence from created things and persons out of love. It is clear that every Christian must cultivate this attitude, including every secular priest. There is no getting around the spirit of the vows for anyone who wants to become reasonably holy. Therefore we too as members of a community must stress this spirit with all that we have and are.

In the Church the spirit of the vows is embodied in the spirit of poverty, obedience and purity. What I will say is generally valid for anyone striving for sanctity, from secular priest to servant girl.

#### a. The Spirit of Poverty

Age-old ascetical wisdom is that the *spirit of poverty is one of the most essential roots of sanctity*. This is so true that all founders of communities have gone to great lengths to spell out the principles of poverty. It is so true that if any of you would be called to found a new community, you would need to see to it that the community accepts the principles of poverty. The principle of poverty must be organizationally secured in every

religious community. For instance, I must be able to prove that canonized members of a community became saints not in spite of their membership but because of it. It is quite conceivable that someone living alone can accept the principles of sanctity more easily than in a community. Therefore, if one of you is ever canonized, it must be proved that the principles as they are lived in your community—in this case concerning poverty—truly made that person canonizable.

Study this or that part of Church history (....). I don't think a religious community has ever failed because of too much poverty, but many have gone under because of too much wealth. When you go through the Church today, you will find many prospering communities. You will see how these communities keep a tight rein on the principles of poverty. There are religious fraternities in which the rectors must swear an oath never to tolerate in their time of office that the principles of poverty be watered down by even the tiniest bit; they can be made stricter, but not looser. You see how vitally important the spirit of poverty is for true sanctity, including for any community hoping to produce saints for the Church.

You have made the Ignatian retreat many times. Has the psychology behind the "meditation on the two standards"<sup>1</sup> ever dawned on you? What do the standards mean? They are symbolic of final principles: the Standard of Christ stands for the spirit of Christ down to its final details, the Standard of Satan stands for the final principles of the spirit of the Devil. How does Ignatius describe it? What does the Standard of Christ look like? Love of poverty and of contempt. Behind it is a psychological and theological insight which is particularly keen. What does the spirit of Satan boil down to? At first blush it sounds quite harmless: love of possessions, love of honor and reputation. You might want to read something about the psychological dimension of Ignatius' retreat to see this context more clearly.

Such deliberations ought to tell you: as an individual and a member of a community you cannot become a saint if the spirit of poverty is not anchored in a very deep manner.

#### Practical Application

You may now say: I agree so far, but what should the spirit of poverty

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<sup>1</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, second week, fourth day.

look like in daily life? (I will only give you the answer which applies to each one personally; I will speak about that which concerns the institute a little later when I speak of the safeguards for the spirit.) I merely need to study the old masters of the ascetical life and ask: What must I do to foster the spirit of poverty? I will give the answers in quick succession as you already know them.

1) We must first learn how to give up luxuries (out of motives of love, of course),

2) Secondly, how to give up necessities, and

3) Thirdly how to acquire a deep interior mendicant attitude before God.

By the way, at table we are currently reading the section [in *Everyday Sanctity*] about heroic attachment to things<sup>2</sup>. It is somewhat long because of the references to the encyclicals, but it includes everything about poverty that is useful to persons striving for sanctity.

#### *Giving up Luxuries*

The first degree is giving up luxuries. What is a luxury? Now, don't start to get nervous. (...) The older I become, the better I understand why religious can get rather extreme in this area, saying for example that one can only have a pictures or two in his cell. Anyone who leads an organization and is responsible for others' striving for sanctity understands such things well. But you must not do it that way! That would be totally against the spirit of your institute to regulate everything down to the last detail. You must see the problem, however, and it is a difficult one.

Now that you do not expect me to regulate everything from top to bottom in all detail, ask yourselves out of the responsibility which comes with belonging to the founding generation: How can we form a certain tradition and still allow individual freedom? It is not easy. The term "luxury" is relative, even theoretically. By "luxury" I mean "not necessary for one's state in life." What is necessary for my state in life? What goes beyond that?

#### *Giving up Necessities*

Then comes the term "necessity." Here, too, necessity is meant with reference to one's state in life, not in the sense of "necessary to survive." That is, of course, a very broad definition. I ask you to take the problems

<sup>2</sup> *Everyday Sanctity* (1998), p. 133ff.

with you and not to try and solve them too quickly.

If I want to help you form a viable community, then I must bring up all these questions. In general I am not distressed by responsibility nor do I feel under pressure because of it. But in the case of poverty I feel genuine distress. For women it is even more difficult than for men, because women always come and say, "In the name of family spirit I still need this and that!" As an honest man I must confess: As a transition these things are meaningful. Let me apply this to your situation so that you see how to think through these problems. It can happen that it is temporarily better to have a comfortable and fully furnished apartment than to be plagued by God only knows what kind of sexual difficulties. We want to be honest about these things: it is possible that a comfortable, delicate family spirit helps keep the soul free from all kinds of sexual complications. This is the dilemma. Objectively speaking, it is difficult for everyone. Subjectively speaking it is harder for women than for men. Of course, I could respond to this using a term from *Everyday Sanctity*—one must not become "emotionally calloused"<sup>3</sup>. This can happen when poverty is practiced without the counterbalance of love. If the riches of love are backing me up, then you should see how even bare walls can satisfy one's sense of beauty. I am mentioning only a few insights without intending to solve the problem.

Ask yourselves concretely: What is a luxury for me? There is no one watching over your shoulder and saying, "You can't do that!" All the more reason for you to ask God, "Does that make you happy?" You must take these things seriously for yourselves and for your family! When I look upon you as cofounders of your family, see your actions not only in isolation, but in the way they affect coming generations as well. If you truly love your institute, one of the most important questions must be, "What must we do to safeguard the principle of poverty?"

We are at the second degree of poverty: We should also give up something of our necessities, of the things which are proper to our state in life. In the missions you will frequently have to do this, but always out of love!

#### *A Mendicant Attitude Before God*

The third degree: I suppose we would say we all have this already, this

<sup>3</sup> M.A. Nailis, *Everyday Sanctity* (1998), p. 140.

attitude of being a mendicant [a beggar] before God. But don't deceive yourselves! What does it mean to be truly mendicant in our approach to God? Ascetically speaking, if I say, "These things do not belong to me, but to God!" If I really take this seriously, then everything could be taken from me and I could even be made the lowest monk in the kitchen. If we really have this inner attitude, it must show in practical everyday life.

This should be enough to make you aware of the problem. You must give these matters serious thought and see how you can progress in this area.

### b. The Spirit of Obedience

This also applies to our second point, the spirit of obedience. Let me mention the general principles. At the same time, however, I must tell you that hardly any other community is as dependent on obedience as you are. Why? Because obedience is the only bond that holds you together as an organization. I will return to this question when I speak about your organization. Unless you especially cultivate obedience, the organization of your institute will not be on solid ground, even if you commit yourselves with a "solemn and sworn promise<sup>4</sup>." The community I lead<sup>5</sup> has also radically chosen obedience as its organizational anchor. Anyone who knows your institute must therefore say that the formation in obedience is a matter of life and death for the whole community. Formation in poverty is a matter of life and death for the sanctity of the institute, but the institute cannot exist organizationally in the long run if it is not held together by obedience. I will come back to that, but for now I want to look at the question from a more ascetical angle. What I now explain is what I tell every secular priest and is found in *Everyday Sanctity*<sup>6</sup>.

*Ascetically speaking* one must distinguish between *three kinds of obedience*, but always remember that each kind must be motivated by love.

First, the obedience of execution. I do what is ordered. Catholic obedience sees Divine authority behind all legitimate earthly authority. This is the foundation. I do not worship the authority of a man but that of God. That is why it must be accompanied by love. How must I execute the order? Punctually, exactly, precisely. If we want to become saints, we

<sup>4</sup> The form of the juridical bond of the Bethlehem community.

<sup>5</sup> The Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Everyday Sanctity* (1998), p. 214ff.

must take these things seriously.

Secondly, obedience of the will. This happens when my will coincides with the will of the superior. Then obedience is not difficult.

Thirdly, obedience of the intellect. Remember that I review these principles for those who really want to become saints. If I want only to dabble and "survive" community, then it is enough to do what I am told and have a little obedience of the will, but obedience of the intellect can be forgotten. But that is beneath our dignity! We want to stand for something! I assume that we desire our vocation whole-heartedly; otherwise we are playing with God, with grace and with the institute. Which brings us to the objectively difficult question: How can I practice obedience of the intellect? Let me speak about real life. For instance, to bring the principles into sharp focus, suppose that my superiors make decision after decision which is really foolish. If I want to become a saint, I must also obey with the intellect. This is often called "*blind obedience*." This also applies to secular priests! But your immediate objection will be: This means death to the intellect! No! We do not want that and we ought not do that.

### *Principles for Blind Obedience*

Let me briefly discuss for you the principles of blind obedience, both as they correspond to grace and to a healthy outlook on life.

I must begin with the attitude that God who is good leads me through my superiors, governs me through my superiors, sanctifies me through my superiors. This is the *objective fundamental attitude*. In our formation we must constantly lay this foundation and not jump too quickly to the applications. God's normal method is to lead me through others; this is the Catholic view of things. Recall what Christ did when St. Paul, enveloped by light, was suddenly struck down. He could have said, "Do this and that!" But no, he sent him to a priest [to Ananias, cf Acts 9]. Applied to our lives: God works in all these things through our superiors. This is the foundation.

Now comes the *subjective fundamental attitude* which we must have. Examine it critically, for we are dealing with extremely important matters. My most basic fundamental attitude from the very start must be: *What my superiors say will be right*. Please think about the reasons for this. If the objective foundation is more or less true, then the fundamental psychological attitude must be: What my superiors say is right. I simply take this as my starting point. Of course I know—and you do too—that the modern

attitude mostly runs in the opposite direction: Everything that *I* say is right—and what my superior says is nonsense! From the very start! When he is no longer superior then I can agree with him again!

Now I know what you are going to say: What if I know that a decision is indeed foolish? We want to honestly admit that superiors are capable of making bad decisions. No charism is universally infallible; in fact, tomorrow you may be a superior too! Even the Holy Father can fall on his face. His charism of infallibility does not reach into every aspect of life. Human frailty is a human right and it cannot be taken away! I think we ought to be reasonable and accept this, because otherwise we raise the ascetical playing field so high that we will have a breakdown. Foolish decisions are a part of life.

In any case, my predisposition is to always do what my superior says. Now suppose that it is not right. From experience I may even know that this superior messes up again and again. It is in just such cases that we must practice blind obedience. I presuppose, of course, that what he orders is not sinful; in that case we are not bound to obedience.

But suppose that he orders something imprudent, not very good, that might endanger the finances or the reputation of the community, etc. Now what? The way I see healthy Catholic obedience, it is now my right, even to some extent my obligation *to respectfully object*. Part of blind obedience is respectfully raising my objections. Now let's suppose that the superior does not change his mind. If I were a superior I probably would not change my mind either; my seeing things differently does not disqualify me. Now it will be a question of prudence whether I repeat my objections, or intensify them, or look for a different way to express them. I know that I can be misquoted on this. There are persons who are 99.9% frankness and one tiny tenth of a percent submissive. All things can be quickly abused if one does not keep the whole picture in view.

Well, I have practiced frankness. And the superior still says that we are going to do things his way. What now? *I reduce the intensity of the purely natural intellect and increase the brightness of the supernatural light of faith*. At first you will think I say this in jest, but I mean it very seriously. What do I tell myself? Yes, God can also lead me and the family through the mistakes and foolishness of my superiors. In the light of faith I know that God not only knows how to make mistakes, but even sin, work unto good. My attitude will therefore be to do what my superior wants without resentment.

Now comes real virtue. I could tell myself: Oh well, I don't have any

other choice but to grit my teeth and bear it. (...) Then when I become superior I can do things differently. But remember that everything we do should at least approach the quality of sanctity. If in human weakness I fail in this or that point, it is normal and I take it as a matter of course; but we must hold unshakably to the principles. May I read to you what is found on this topic in *Everyday Sanctity*?

"The everyday saint knows the art of sanctifying all his relationships and making them into Divine Worship. In the light of faith he knows as someone under authority that God wants to speak, lead and sanctify him through his superiors. In all things he strives for the highest. He is not satisfied with executing the orders or wishes in an exact, timely and perfect fashion. For him it is not even enough to embrace the command with his will. He strives for the highest degree of obedience—the obedience of the intellect, a healthy blind obedience. From the very outset he therefore takes the position that what his superior asks of him is right. If in his view it is not good, he points it out in respectful frankness. If that does not lead to a change, he blinds the purely natural eye of the intellect—practices blind obedience—and allows the light of faith to stream into his soul with still greater intensity. This light of faith clearly shows him how God leads all things, even the mistakes of superiors, in his plans of Providence to the best result, if only we try to love him. And, without resentment or injury to the mutual relationship, he goes his way. If at a later date he can decide the matter himself, however, this does not hinder him to resolve the issue and act according to how he feels is right. This is how frankness, initiative and reverent obedience are interrelated<sup>7</sup>."

### c. The Spirit of Purity

I will deal with the spirit of purity in more detail when I speak about the essence of childlikeness. For now we want to recall a few practical points.

The spirit of purity is the *unconditional surrender of self to God*: out of unconditional devotion to God I give up the otherwise licit use of my sexual powers.

What can I point out to you for your practical lives? We must take care that our soul has the attitude of, first, a certain healthy distrust, secondly,

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<sup>7</sup> *Everyday Sanctity* (1998), p. 216f, retranslated from the German.

a certain caution, and thirdly a proper respect. We will pass over the metaphysical underpinnings for now.

#### *A healthy distrust*

First, we must have a healthy distrust [of the satisfaction offered by earthly things], but also find its immediate counterpoint in trust in God. I will not go into this in detail.

#### *A healthy caution*

I will mention one caution in particular—compassion. You deal with women again and again, so you should be reminded that most men who leave the priesthood because of relationships with women are led astray by compassion. These men were caught off guard. *Compassion is purity's greatest enemy*. Now, don't think I mean to bedevil compassion or say it is a sin! It is not. Honor is not lost overnight. We must be honest. It is clear that when pure and noble priests like yourselves meet a woman who is totally helpless, this stirs a great compassion in us. Thanks be to God! We do not want to destroy this. But you must remember that because of the body-soul principle<sup>8</sup> compassion of the soul quickly communicates itself to the body. The natural tendency is then to express this compassion through physical contact. Now I do not say that this is sinful or leads to sin overnight, but as a community you must take particular care to pass to coming generations *this* principle as a tradition: Absolute untouchedness! *Everyday Sanctity* calls it "the untouchedness of my state in life."

Which brings us to the third point:

#### *Respect*

For those of us who face life's challenges, it is my conviction that this *principle* is the correct one for ordering our relationship with members of the opposite sex: *interior unaffectedness and exterior untouchedness*. Without these two principles no one can remain pure in the long run.

Please! Stop thinking, "It's not a sin!" Something in us protests if we run too quickly to the categories of sin and not-sin. We know enough moral theology to say that this or that cannot be sinful. But I propose these two principles because they correspond to the most intimate ontological truths of a healthy virginal soul. This complete self-possession of my

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<sup>8</sup> Namely, that the body and soul are interdependent and what happens in the one has an effect on the other.

personality in dealings with the opposite sex has its foundations in God. Let me tell you that it is something inimicably beautiful to see two people working together and to know that they are very close—and yet, with absolute untouchedness.

*In a certain sense I would call "untouchedness in keeping with my state in life" a relative absolute.* What do I mean? Let me speak bluntly—more for the psychological benefit of your ears and emotions: It would be enough to say "untouchedness," but I say "absolute untouchedness" because under certain circumstances our nature feels such a strong urge to signs of affection. We observe the usual courtesies<sup>9</sup>, of course; but no touching to show tenderness, no touching not demanded by common courtesy. This is absolute untouchedness. I cannot go into this in detail right now; perhaps there will be a chance later on.

Important as the *regula tactus*<sup>10</sup> is, it seems to me that a community with as much freedom as yours, and in which each member is free to meet with whomever he likes, should observe more than the principle of untouchedness. This is something I tell every secular priest. If you do this, it will bring great blessings to your ministry. Whenever you overstep this boundary—even when it was not sinful—make it a point to mention it in confession. This is not because it is a sin, but to force yourself to return to the principle. In general these are things which affect us right now. How much we face as priests!

You see, if you apply this without exception, you will be spared many surprises. Later on, be it here or in the missions, there will be times when I am perplexed by a certain case. I will think that I can save someone by allowing myself this or that sign of affection. Don't believe it! You can sense that I am no novice! I have had countless opportunities to observe life. I can also tell you from my knowledge of the feminine psychology: The way a woman perceives you today in total untouchedness will no longer be the same when you think that a sign of affection tomorrow will awaken this or that noble sentiment. The nobility which is awakened through untouchedness must not be destroyed tomorrow or the day after through a physical act of tenderness. Our object is not to play the doorman. What we work so hard to accomplish is a full moral authority. After all,

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<sup>9</sup> Handshakes, hugs, and the like as are customary in a given culture.

<sup>10</sup> The "rule about touching," namely the stated principle of "untouchedness."

that is more the style of your institute: the reasoning is from above to below and not the other way around. If we come too strongly from below then we will give in too quickly, but if we see things from the ideal we will make no concessions. Think about what we can do in this regard. These thoughts are only a beginning.

What did I say before? If we want to eradicate the root of unholy wisdom we must work and strive for the spirit of the vows. It would be worth your while if you would later ask someone to give you a series of talks on this subject.

#### **d. Attachments: Safeguards for the Spirit of the Vows**

I now need to discuss safeguards for this spirit, but I have already gone over my hour and must conclude. Let me give you the outline points and you can think them through for yourselves. The topic is "safeguarding," not so much from the standpoint of the individual (though that is important, too) but of the community.

Please think about the necessity of such safeguards. We call them "attachments" or "bonds." They are not only our heaven-directed attachments, out of love, but also our earth-directed attachments to things and persons. The individual needs these because of original sin. To only bind ourselves heavenwards would be a utopia. Love is not so strong that it can thrive without a modicum of earth-directed attachments. For a community such attachments are doubly and triply important. I only need to remind you of the saying I shared with you earlier: "Community is condensed original sin," though, as you also remember, "community is condensed grace."

I ask: how can I understand these attachments? Looking at ourselves as a community, you can say that an attachment can be seen as an ascetical principle, an organizational principle, or a pedagogical principle. Please study for yourselves to what extent your community has attachments fitting these three categories. I will continue this thought this afternoon.

#### *NINETEENTH CONFERENCE*

Anyone who wants a tree to grow will care for its roots. If we compare childlikeness with a tree, holy wisdom is the tree's root. It is therefore imperative that we strive for holy wisdom! This presupposes that we are also working to eradicate from our soul the root of unholy wisdom. This morning we talked about removing that root. In the end we summed it up with the formula: We must strive for the spirit of the vows.

The spirit of the vows means two things: detachment and attachment; loving attachment and detachment from all inordinate things. Without the spirit of the vows there is no true living and striving for sanctity. Because our family wishes to be a holy community, we are interested not only in practicing the spirit of the vows "by chance" but also by plan: that it becomes a sound and secured part of the life of the family. In this context the words of our holy constitutions take on a whole new ring—we hear them as laws somehow co-inspired by the Holy Spirit, constitutions which really form saints.

In the interest of our family we now ask what safeguards we would need for the spirit of the vows. Such safeguards are commonly called attachments or bonds, and such attachments can be seen from three angles: as an ascetical principle, an organizational principle, and a pedagogical [educational] principle.

#### **i. Attachment as an Ascetical Principle**

Attachments are seen ascetically when we consider them as bonds of love, i.e., bonds which create, strengthen and reenforce love. Expressed philosophically: by its very nature, love seeks a form; love as an attitude urges one to love which shows in actions. From this perspective, any attachment must be an expression of love, and, secondly, a means of deepening and securing love.

Let me remind you that the vows are bonds of love. If you ignore that, you will miss the organic context. Vows are attachments made because we love God.

#### **ii. Attachment as an Organizational Principle**

The second point is of more interest to us. Attachments have an

organizational dimension<sup>1</sup>. In this context attachments are not seen first and foremost as bonds of love but as juridical and obligatory bonds.

Is it not true that organizers who start a community seek ways which allow it to survive the times when the spirit of love cools off? Just think of what you would do if you had to found a community. It is clear that careful attention would need to be given to the quantity and quality of bonds required to guarantee the survival of a family. To create a family which only carries and supports us today is not enough; we want to create a work which outlives us, which, if at all possible and with the grace of God, can last until the end of time! We therefore raise a serious juridical question: Are our bonds sufficient or insufficient? Some bonds are necessary, of course; the organizer's question is whether they will suffice to bring the institute through times when the spirit of love is weak.

If we think about our constitutions and ask, "Is there an organizational principle underlying all the parts?" we must answer, "Yes!" The *principle* is: *Obligatory bonds as much as necessary, freedom and cultivation of the spirit as much as possible*<sup>2</sup>.

#### (a) Obligatory bonds as much as necessary

Be sure to notice the two accents. The first is easy to grasp: Obligatory bonds *only* as much as necessary. But second comes: Obligatory bonds *also* as much as necessary.

Organizers seek enough bonds to hold their family together. They must find them even if it means introducing bonds which they personally do not like, for the bonds must keep the average member above water in difficult times. Organizationally speaking, we do not set the rules for those who are extraordinarily gifted. Organizers are concerned with the average member. Because of this, we too must have an interest in maintaining the principle of obligations *as much as necessary*, but also *only as much as necessary*. This is a point which sets your institute apart.

Now remember that we are not looking at the ascetical angle right now.

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<sup>1</sup> The organizational importance of formalized attachments is in the foreground when one speaks of the "juridical bonds" which bind individual and community in the consecrated life. Because of this, the term *Bindungen* will be most often translated "bonds" in this section.

<sup>2</sup> Or, as we saw it at the beginning of the Seventh Conference: *Restriction only as much as necessary, freedom as much as possible, cultivation of the spirit as much as possible*.

From the ascetical standpoint you can have all the bonds you want—six, seven vows. I am speaking from the organizational point of view, and if you do not grasp this, we will misunderstand each other and be unfair to the classical orders. Your institute's organizational uniqueness lies in the fact that you permit only as many obligatory bonds as are absolutely necessary.

We now stand before the great question: Has this principle been thought through and carried out exactly? Let me go over it with you one more time. I do not think we need to dwell on the one side—obligation *as much as necessary*; after all, you are generally of the opinion that you have too many bonds, that they are more than sufficient. We will therefore examine the other side: obligation *only* as much as necessary.

What does the principle say in particular? Perhaps two things. First: Where one bond suffices we need no second. Second: Where a natural-law bond suffices we need no positive-law bond. Please bear with me as I think this through:

*Where one bond suffices we need no second.*

I think this principle has been carried out exactly [in your community]. If you compare yourselves with the strict orders or most congregations, you will find that these have at least three vows: poverty, chastity, and obedience—three bonds. We have said "only as much as necessary," i.e., if one bond is enough, then use no second or third one. For all practical purposes you only have one bond—that of obedience. Once your institute is founded, obedience is what keeps it afloat. Hence, obedience is the only bond which is structurally guaranteed. If you grasp that and are one of those who educate the community's vocations, you can see how important it is to cultivate the spirit of obedience in the family, for your institute lives and dies by obedience.

Secondly, let me point out that obedience is your safeguard for elements like poverty. And purity? You are bound to celibacy, of course. But unlike others, no other law or specific bond binds you to purity except the bond which binds you as priests through ordination. At the very most you could say that purity has a certain safeguard via obedience, because the superiors can give orders. Where one bond suffices, you have no second.

*Where a natural-law bond suffices we need no bond by positive law.*

For the moment these things are not up for debate because Rome has

acted<sup>3</sup>. Rome is of the opinion that you are insufficiently secured as an institute if you stand only on the ground of natural law. At the moment Rome's view is that there should be as many obligatory bonds as possible. I repeat: for you the case is basically settled because Rome has spoken. For my part I can only show what the bonds of natural law and those of positive law look like.

*The bonds of natural law.* We reach our goal most quickly if we compare our family with a real, natural family, with a marriage. It is constituted [i.e., juridically established] by a contract. We, too, are constituted by a contract. Now I am convinced that this contract binding you to the institute and the institute to you, must bind *sub gravi* [under pain of serious sin] as a *contractus bilateralis onerosus sub gravi obligans ex iustitia commutativa*<sup>4</sup>. Why *sub gravi*? Because we are dealing with serious matter for both parties.

Would you like me to put that more juridically? Then you must know that an institute without such a guarantee of permanence could collapse without warning. Put concretely: Suppose that perseverance [in one's vocation] were only binding *sub levi* (under pain of venial sin), i.e. *ex fidelitate* (on the grounds of fidelity)—that will not work! Anyone could leave whenever he feels like it. For instance, if we were in a parish or mission and suddenly felt like leaving, we could just go. This would make it practically impossible to accept the responsibility of a parish or mission station; it would be unstable. The common good of a family simply

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<sup>3</sup> The Bethlehem Fathers' Constitutions obligated the members of the community only through the bond of obedience. The Religious Congregation had insisted, however, that a private vow of virginity be obligatory for all members of the community in the time prior to Holy Orders; once they reached Orders, they were bound by the vow of celibacy proper to the sacrament.

<sup>4</sup> This juridical definition sums up the following: 1) The contract is binding on both parties, namely the individual member and the community as a whole (*contractus bilateralis* = bilateral contract). 2) It does so in a strict juridical sense (*onerosus* = under the weight of law). 3) Its foundations reach into "natural law" because its binding claim is on the level of the social obligation to carry out one's contractual promises (*iustitia commutativa* = justice in one's dealings with others). 4) To the extent that all interhuman activity has a religious dimension and this particular activity is of grave importance to carrying out a religious vocation, it is, in this case, also made binding under the pain of serious sin (*sub gravi obligans* = binding under pain of serious sin).

demands that safeguards of the family's existence, like faithfulness and perseverance, bind in a serious way. Do you think the same? The natural family is constituted by a contract and so is ours.

When a marriage contract is sealed, it not only lays the foundation for marriage, but is also the root of a new family. And being a family naturally gives the parents the right to order the children in certain situations either *sub levi* or *sub gravi*. Applied to our case, and one should see these things quite graphically, the contract constitutes the family, and the family character of our community is the foundation and source for the superiors' right to give orders. (So far we are looking only at how the institute is constituted on the premises of natural law.) From this standpoint alone, superiors enjoy the same rights to give orders that parents do, even binding under serious sin. This also applies to the sisters I direct.

Now comes a further grounds for this right. Rome wants it this way. It corresponds to the way Christ elevated the marriage contract to a sacrament. For you it is the oath. The degree of the bond is at least comparable to the contract; in addition, the oath adds a new kind of obligation through the virtue of religion. This gives your superiors a twofold right and duty toward you and [gives] you [a twofold right and duty] toward them. The superiors can give you an order either on the basis of the virtue of religion or on the basis of their domestic authority.

Now that you have these two rights, place your constitutions on the ground of "bonds only as much as necessary." To the major superiors are reserved the rights founded on the virtue of religion; the minor superiors can give orders only on the basis of their domestic authority. This is pretty straightforward.

If you think through these thoughts once more, you will immediately find that *your community must have such a pronounced family character* because it is so largely oriented on and constituted like the natural family. (...) Now childlikeness and fatherliness—including the rights of rectors—take on a special meaning. I have already said that according to the constitutions, the rectors have a right as fathers. This is clearly thought through. The constitutions are internally consistent. The obedience we must practice and cultivate now gains its unique flavor: it must be *family-like*, not military. Of course you must not think that family-like obedience means "I do what I want"; that is not family-like obedience. It must be as firm as military obedience, but on the basis of love. Family-like obedience: I obey out of love for the heavenly Father; out of love for his reflection, my



superior; and out of love for the family. In this way the institute gains a great deal of internal coherence.

It would be worth your while to draw a line through everything you do as a community, and see it in this light, because it increases your love for the institute. If you have no love for the family, you can drive the horses left and you can drive them right, but you will find it very hard to keep the community afloat. But if you love the family, you can order what you like and it will do no harm because I am a part of my family and my family is a part of me. Thus a healthy self-love becomes family-love.

Whoever is on fire for the idea of the family can make sacrifices. Suppose that my main motivation for becoming a priest was pastoral work, but now I only do administrative work. "I can't stand it, I have to get out and do pastoral work!" But in such a family there will always be positions like this which will ask heavy sacrifices of the individuals. But if I know that the family is a part of me and I love my family, then I can give up a legitimate fulfillment. Otherwise think of the theory of the state where each one makes up the state. If we are not aware that we belong to a family, we will only ask: What can the community do for me? Not: What can I do for my community. This makes everything look different. The family is a table of sacrifice, not primarily a table of pleasure. May I remind you of the principle? Organizationally speaking, you are truly in line with the principle: "Obligatory bonds as much, but only as much as necessary."

Try to think for yourselves what you would have done if you had been the founder of such an institute and had to make sure it would stay afloat and make its mark on the world; not just a little rowboat that keeps one going for 10 years. For one person we would not need so much pitch to seal the ark, but the ark we are building needs it because no one knows what heavy currents the ark will have to face! You must think beyond yourselves, and be inspired by a great idea!

We have now thought out the first part of the principle: "Obligatory bonds only as much as necessary!" And: "Obligatory bonds also as much as necessary!" In the formation of our novices or brothers I remind them again and again: Bonds are necessary. In your kind of institute things should not be as in some religious orders: these things are accepted, but without knowing the reasons. We must know why things are the way they are. On the one hand we must be able to defend [the principle] and say: "That's enough!" On the other we must be able to say: "Yes, this will be enough to assure a rich future!"

### **(b) Freedom and Cultivation of the Spirit as Much as Possible**

Then comes the principle: "Freedom and cultivation of the spirit as much as possible!" I need not repeat what I have said about freedom. We have given this enough thought already. But *cultivation of the spirit!*

#### *Cultivation of the Spirit is Organizationally Necessary*

Let me remind you that in the present context we are considering this law in its pure form as an organizational principle. On the organizational level we must therefore establish so many means of cultivating the spirit that you can say with full right: Whoever joins our community with its minimal bonds and with this strong spiritual cultivation can truly become someone great.

For the moment I am speaking only from the organizational point of view. Ascetically speaking, I stress carrying out my devotional practices to the full, add a few later, and so on; this is what each one must do for himself. When I speak as an organizer, for instance as a rector, then I know that a crucial stone in the building of community life is the way we promote the cultivation of the spirit of the community. I think I can rightfully say that here too, your constitutions are by and large, and even into the details cut from whole cloth. As I leafed through them for the first time I noticed how it says three, four, five and even more times: Stress the religious exercises! Not only that. If you had to create such a work and had so few obligatory juridical bonds, you would be very deliberate about creating bonds of a spiritual nature and securing them in the organization of the community! I therefore think that as a rector of a filiation I must know that I should not be too quick to say: "2 times 2 is 4—but sometimes it's 5, so I dispense you from..." Of course I have the right to do that. But if you want an institute which is cut from whole cloth, you must often stress such things more insistently than members of religious orders would—organizationally speaking.

I am speaking my mind. You might even be surprised if you would study *the institute I direct*. There the principle is even more rigorously thought out, with regard to the cultivation of the spirit as well. May I tell you what is foreseen for us? First come two years of novitiate; then a four-week-retreat; then a contract for one year and a second one for two years; then comes another half year of novitiate ("tertianship"); then a contract for three years; then the perpetual contract preceded by still another half year of novitiate ("second tertianship"). This is the principle carried out to a "T" in its purest form.

In your constitutions there is a clause that every ten years each member has the right to make a four-week-retreat. If I as organizer would be building your work, I would say that everyone *must* make a four-week-retreat every ten years. If I were living only for myself, I could say *may*, but the organizer says *must*. The ascetics can think and speak differently. It is always difficult to balance the different viewpoints. (....)

*Cultivation of the Spirit is Necessary for our Mission*

Having considered this principle from the organizational standpoint, I almost think—or rather, I am convinced, although you may be of a different opinion—that precisely these principles, when rigorously carried out, indicate that the Holy Spirit wants a *new type of person*. I must express myself carefully, because it is difficult to say this without being unfair to the religious orders. If you keep the distinction between "organizational" and "ascetical," we will understand each other. Is it not true: Organizationally speaking, to govern a community is easier if there are many obligatory bonds; when I give an order, the society must jump; for all I care there should not be just five vows but ten! Of course, the religious orders will remind us that the vows also have an ascetical value and are therefore bonds of love and not only juridical bonds.

Now suppose that I would be your general superior—and I think I would feel quite at home in your community—and I would take the stand: No, I do not want to have it so easy with governing the community; I only want those bonds, organizationally speaking, needed to keep the institute above water. What else would I have to say as general superior? In this case the only persons whom I could use would be those who can respond to such a minimal obligatory bond. Not everyone is made in such a way that he can react to a minimal bond. In other words, as organizer I must presuppose that I have a body of members who are outstanding in their spirit of *magnanimity*. Isn't this true? Must we not be especially outstanding in magnanimity?

If members of religious orders were here, they would challenge: "And us?" Let me repeat that I am speaking from the standpoint of organization. Ascetically speaking, the members of religious orders can be more magnanimous than we are! But as an organizer I must say that if not everything is built on magnanimity and if our formation does not inspire it to a high degree of magnanimity, I will be at a loss in leading the community. (....)

### iii. Obligatory Bonds as a Pedagogical Principle

Thirdly, I said that attachments and obligatory bonds can be seen as a pedagogical principle. We recall: "Obligatory bonds as much as necessary, freedom and cultivation of the spirit as much as possible!" What does it mean when I look at this as a principle of education? Then it is, first of all, a formational principle and, secondly, a principle of selection.

The first means that I must now use every means at my disposal to create a type of person who emphasizes the spiritual attachments with all his strength and is deeply magnanimous, who has the quality of responding relatively easily and quickly to "the slightest whisper," for love is ready to follow even when it is not directly commanded. This is a *formational principle*. It is an art to be able to form such personalities. I could imagine that many will say, "This is a utopia: no one can become like this. It has scarcely ever happened that such a community has been created in the Church." We have the task of proving that it is not a utopia, for we would otherwise have to abandon our whole institute.

*Principle of selection*—what do I mean? You must admit only those persons who can successfully realize this principle in their lives. This is something extremely important for any community that wants to be cut from whole cloth. If you accept anyone and everyone, in the future you will have a watered-down community or you will have to build a different structure for your institute. You must not say: I shape the institute to the people I have. You must choose the people according to the idea of the institute; otherwise you will never have healthy vocations. If you think rigorously and make the corresponding demands, you will probably never have a lack of vocations. A noble person always respects serious demands. And we must work very seriously to realize these same demands in our own lives. If we only speak the demands with our lips and teach something else with our example, then we are not being honest and this will not attract noble personalities.

With that I probably have said what is helpful to you in this context. Think these ideas through for yourselves and speak about them often until you come to full clarity. Those responsible for formation in the family have, of course, a particular responsibility to find clarity and unity of approach and purpose.

### B. Making the Root of Holy Wisdom Your Own

So, what must we do? We must eradicate the root of unholy wisdom and use every means at our disposal to acquire and cultivate the root of

holy wisdom which is the source of genuine childlikeness.

Wisdom can be viewed in two ways—as a virtue and as a gift of the Holy Spirit. In turn, wisdom as a virtue can be viewed in two ways—as a natural virtue and is a supernatural one. You will not mind if I consider the natural and supernatural virtue as a whole. The effect they have is ultimately the same, though the root of supernatural wisdom is grace.

When we therefore speak of wisdom as holy wisdom and strive for it, our efforts are directed first at the virtue and secondly at the gift of wisdom. The extent to which we can acquire wisdom as a virtue and a gift will also be the extent to which we bring true and genuine childlikeness to our own life and that of the family. We begin by considering

### 1. Wisdom as a Virtue

Let me start with a negative statement: Not all knowledge is wisdom.

#### a. What Wisdom is Not

Wisdom surely implies knowledge, but not all knowledge is wisdom. What is wisdom?

First of all, it is *not* the same as *being learned*. The deeper reason for this is that learning's immediate object is the perfection of the mind, while wisdom's object is the perfection of life and being. That is why the wise man is always enlightened, while the learned man can too often be "enlightened" in the cynical sense of the word<sup>5</sup>. Just observe life and see how wide the discrepancy often is between being learned and being wise.

Secondly, wisdom *means, even less*, being *a know-it-all*. Pascal distinguishes between dogmatists and pyrrhonists. The dogmatists are the know-it-alls. They claim to know everything with absolute certainty. From this you can conclude how little respect they have for the truth. The pyrrhonists are the not-yet-know-it-alls. They never reach any conclusions. They always say to themselves: this is not yet true, and that is not yet true either, and so on. Each in his own way may know many things. But wisdom knows how to steer the middle course. Wisdom has respect for the light of truth as well as for the darkness of truth.

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<sup>5</sup> Most particularly when "enlightenment" means "I'm too sophisticated to believe in God."

#### b. What Wisdom Is (Characteristics of Wisdom)

That brings us right to the positive characterization. What is the virtue of wisdom? In general it is *a special kind of knowledge*.

Which qualities must knowledge have to be wisdom?

1. Wisdom is a wonder-filled and reverent.
2. Wisdom is qualitative.
3. Wisdom is personal and experiential.
4. Wisdom is charismatic.
5. Wisdom is inexhaustible.

This outline will have to do for now; I will fill in the details in the next talk. It would be better for you to focus on the organizational questions; I threw them at you so quickly. Perhaps we can accompany the matter with some prayer. What good are the constitutions if we do not grasp their spirit? What good are the constitutions if they gather together ten thousand ideas but fail to focus us on the great idea upon which our institute was ultimately founded and which wants to make it great? "I want to know your great idea!" When you are clear about this great idea and have made sure that it grows from a complex of truths to a complex of values, then you will see what a great task you have in the Church, especially in such revolutionary times! It will therefore be your task to contemplate in prayer the many facets of the few thoughts which I have been able to share with you about your institute.

## TWENTIETH CONFERENCE

The source of true and genuine childlikeness is wisdom—wisdom as a natural-supernatural virtue and wisdom as a gift [of the Holy Spirit]. In order to be encouraged to strive earnestly for childlikeness and for wisdom, we want to briefly consider the characteristics which knowledge must have to become wisdom. There are five such traits.

*Wonder-filled, Reverent Knowledge*

First of all, our knowledge must be *wonder-filled and reverent*.

Let us look briefly at the whole landscape of this question as seen philosophically. Why *reverent, wonder-filled knowledge*? Because knowledge is not only connected to insight, but also to love. Why insight *and* love? For two reasons: because *wisdom means standing in wonder before the light of truth and the warmth of goodness*; and at the same time standing in wonder before the dark aspect of truth and the obscurity of goodness. These two statements need a little explanation.

You may still remember from philosophy class some of the axioms like "*Ens et unum (verum, bonum...) convertuntur*" ["Being and oneness (truth, goodness...) are interchangeable"]. To understand wisdom this is where you must start.

Being and oneness: My being is that of a complete individual, a complete whole.

Being and truth: Every created person and thing is an incarnate idea of God. Therefore the process of recognition includes the insight and, at the same time, the perfecting of the mind because one is thinking an idea thought by God. It is therefore not just knowledge, but insight.

Being and goodness: We also know the other saying: that every created person and thing is an incarnate wish of God. In other words, being and goodness are interchangeable. Every created person and thing contains some part of God's goodness. And if I give myself to that goodness embodied in the created person or thing, then I not only have insight, but also love. Take, for instance, a totally abstract truth viewed from an entirely abstract philosophical standpoint:  $2 \times 2 = 4$ ! This is truth, but also goodness. In what way? If I know that  $2 \times 2 = 4$  and if I owe the baker money, then—this sounds quite trivial—I cannot be cheated, and this is plainly a good thing. But beyond that, if  $2 \times 2 = 4$  really means thinking an idea of God, then this also means a clarification and purification for my will. Why? Because I have submitted to an idea of God which is not

merely truth, but also a part of goodness. Wisdom is therefore not merely insight, but love—a reverent standing in wonder before the light of truth and the warmth of goodness embodied before me.

Before we go any further, we must also see and mention the flip side: Wisdom also includes reverence and *wonder for truth's darkness*. We have mentioned the dogmatists and the pyrrhonists. Every truth is ultimately a continuous, ongoing reflection of God. Can I ever really absorb a truth entirely? It continues endlessly into the future! We have already said of dogma that it is a "light dark" or half-dark. Let us say "light dark"; then every natural insight is half dark. Insights can always be penetrated more deeply and completely. We cannot say too quickly: I know something totally! As a result, wisdom means always having a reverent wonder for truth's darkness.

Let me repeat: every truth has two sides—somehow bright and somehow dark. This applies to natural truth and even more so to supernatural truth. When I acknowledge the darkness of truth, my knowledge becomes wisdom. And when, beyond that, I say to myself that every incarnate idea of God is also an incarnate wish of God, then there must analogously also be some darkness of the Divine Goodness planted in each created thing. I cannot fully exhaust the goodness of created persons and things! How long does it take to advance from being to Ultimate Being [i.e., God]? That is what wisdom strives for. It always tries to penetrate more and more deeply until, at the foundation of all being, it discovers Him who is Absolute Being, the One who says of Himself, "I am who am" (Ex 3,14).

In addition, I need to say that this *wonder-filled, reverent knowledge* represents a *creative force of the first degree*. If this is true, it helps explain why so few people today are creative. What is missing? The creative force of reverence, wonder and wisdom. When, historically speaking, does the child first become aware of himself? Modern philosophers flesh that out that for us so well: the first and most indicative sign of the awakening of the child's full self-consciousness is reverent wonder. Michelangelo captured this in his "Creation of Adam<sup>1</sup>." You know the image. There we see God the Father in the fullness of his might. He reaches out his finger to the sleeping Adam, who opens his eyes full of amazement! What glowing wonder, what warmth of love! Adam immediately responds to the touch of God's goodness. Hear it again: the child first begins to reach full self-

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<sup>1</sup> On the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome.

consciousness when he begins to show wonder. The first self-conscious act of the child is reverent wonder for everything he sees.

Creative force—just try and see if anything creative can be done in science without reverence and wisdom, or in education without reverent wonder. The educators among you would find this a worthwhile topic for reflection. True love always includes reverence and respect. If love is what makes education creative, then you must never forget that reverence is what makes knowledge creative. (....)

#### *Qualitative Knowledge*

*Secondly*, wisdom is also *qualitative knowledge*.

I have already touched on this indirectly. Wisdom does not remain on the surface. We want to advance from the periphery to the core, from the superficial to the essential. In terms of knowing, wisdom has no rest until it has discovered, at the very foundation of being, the someone who calls out, "Fear not, it is I!" (Lk 24,36). True wisdom is always in search of the Ultimate, of God, of the Primordial Principle. That is why wisdom is qualitative knowledge and not just quantitative knowledge.

#### *Personal, Experiential Knowledge*

*Thirdly*, wisdom is a *personal or experiential knowledge*.

The reason for this is already given in the first point: because wisdom not only involves insight, but also love. And true love is not only abstract knowledge, but also personal, experienced knowledge. This is why, after all, wisdom does and must always perfect the person.

#### *Charismatic Knowledge*

*Fourthly*, wisdom, we might add, is *charismatic knowledge*.

Wisdom is a natural virtue: Philosophers correctly tell us: without a special *concursum divinum generalis* [general convergence with the divine] knowledge cannot become wisdom.

The supernatural virtue of wisdom consists in this: that God is at our disposal in a special way with his actual graces, so that knowledge becomes wisdom.

#### *Inexhaustible Knowledge*

*Finally*, wisdom is an *inexhaustible knowledge*.

What is the reason for this? Because it is a knowledge which is connected to love. And love can always grow, for love can never totally grasp the object of love, which is ultimately the highest good.

### **Dealing with Spiritual Dryness**

Here we can pause for a moment to make a few practical connections from abstract theory to practical everyday life.

Why is it that our wisdom is at times so quickly exhausted? It may well be a sign that our wisdom is lacking an essential ingredient.

Which brings me to a point of great importance for our ascetical life: If wisdom also means love, then the most difficult, significant and decisive periods of our spiritual life are the times when God withdraws from us, when our soul becomes totally filled with dryness. If we do not know how to deal with this correctly, our wisdom will not progress like it should because our love will make no progress. If my knowledge is supposed to become inexhaustible in the sense of wisdom, then we must seriously strive to correctly understand and love God in the times of dryness in our life.

What should we do in such situations? *First*, we must *guard against questionable forms of compensation*. See for yourselves how such situations evoke a strong urge for compensatory pleasure. The compensation itself might not be dangerous. All things considered, when are we the quickest to be gluttons at table?—I am deliberately pointing to such little things; pay attention to them!—When you experience no joy in prayer! That's how it is! When we cannot feel the love of God we begin to shed our restraint in eating or chase wildly after sensual pleasures. We run from Pontius to Pilate, from one room to another. In and of themselves such things are not sinful, but do you notice the danger? If we do this, God cannot attain his purpose in letting us fall into the cellar. What does God want? He wants to recharge the batteries of my spiritual life. Give him a chance to recharge me.

*The second thing* he expects of me: *that I constantly send him sentiments of longing* with great love.

*Thirdly*, I should *not give up any of my commitments*. If I have committed to, or if the constitutions prescribe for me to make a daily meditation, then I will do my meditation exactly as prescribed. In such circumstances—precisely when the dryness is so great—Ignatius would suggest doing some sort of *agere contra* [going against the stream], let's say by extending my meditation for just one minute, etc. Why? Because I want to respond correctly to what God expects and demands of me.

If you give it some serious thought, you will notice how dangerous times of dryness are for abandoning ourselves to compensatory pleasures. In addition to harmful compensations there are harmless ones, of course. In such situations I can, for instance, *be consciously more joyful and light-*

*hearted*: I can allow myself a natural pleasure here and there, but within the framework of my ordinary duties; I can loosen the tight reins on my studies a bit—this is where the true master shows himself. I must also be able to be prudent when my soul is tired. But as soon as compensation is sought in the sensual sphere—if I eat more gratuitously and so on—then the sexual side will also be more quickly aroused. Look and see if that is not really true. When do the strongest temptations come against holy purity? When the soul finds no satisfaction in God. That is why, if we want to learn true wisdom, we must strive especially seriously to remain recollected in times of dryness. Instead of spreading our energies too thin and pouring them out everywhere, concentrate more on sending deep sentiments of longing to God.

You must take note that the soul cannot live without joy. If the soul does not try to find joy in God, it will chase after the pleasures of the world. It is important to remember that for your educational work, too. A pedagogy of joy is indispensable, not only for youth, but also for adults. You are familiar with Bishop Keppler's saying in his book *More Joy*: "A school without joy deserves to be closed at once." How right he is! The deeper reason for that? If a boarding school lacks an atmosphere of joy, you can bet that tomorrow and the day after it will be overrun with a "swamp atmosphere." Take that very literally. We must therefore *cultivate joy in every area*. But when God removes our joy, when he throws us in the cellar—and we still have fresh in mind that God does this quite often to help us overcome our selfishness—then we must be on guard against natural urges that might sweep us away in an inordinate fashion. I can look for more licit compensations, of course, but must otherwise be strict with myself, observe the silence, and so on. I think we all really ought to develop a special sure-footedness in this area of our life. We ought to strive to be real masters of life, not just apprentices or journeymen! We often take the religious life much too superficially. For this reason we do not go deep enough. We work and work, fish and fish and in the end catch nothing. Why? Because we are too little enlightened.

With that I have said the most important things about the virtue of wisdom. I do not want to be more concrete because in our practical daily life the virtue of wisdom normally flows over into the gift of wisdom. And become we are striving for a higher degree of childlikeness, the virtue of wisdom—as you will presently see—will not be enough for us. We must strive with everything we have and are for the gift of wisdom.

## 2. Wisdom as a Gift of the Holy Spirit

Here is where our train of thought starts to become particularly concrete. Therefore, let me describe the abstract truths which belong here in somewhat more concrete terms.

Once more, there are two thoughts which we need to consider.

- a. Wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit.
- b. Wisdom is a *special* gift of the Holy Spirit.

We will give some thought to both aspects, and this outline should allow us to consider all the pertinent points.

### a. Wisdom, a Gift of the Holy Spirit

Two words need to be explained. I can first stress a gift of the *Holy Spirit*, and then a *gift* of the Holy Spirit.

#### i. A Gift of the *Holy Spirit*

We would do well to briefly recall the Holy Spirit's task in our spiritual life. Let me turn to dogmatic theology for a brief bare-bones review. There are four subpoints.

*First*: The Holy Spirit is the author of our supernatural state, of the divine life in us. Let me leave aside the nuances of this statement, for it is something that we all know. In these days we have already talked several times—and heard at table—about our sharing in divine life, about the elevation, the exaltation of our nature through divine life. What is it? Who gives us a share in the divine nature? The Holy Spirit is the author of the new supernatural state. And with this supernatural nature, with divine life or with sanctifying grace, with this new foundation and principle of life—all expressions for one and the same thing—he simultaneously gives us new supernatural faculties: the infused divine virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the cardinal virtues.

*Secondly*: the Holy Spirit is also the author of our supernatural actions. He is our co-worker inasmuch as he must give us the supernatural gifts of actual grace.

*Thirdly*: the Holy Spirit is the author of genuine sanctity on the way of the virtues. Here we mean the divine virtues and the moral virtues. If we want to develop our moral and theological virtues, the Holy Spirit must cooperate.

*Fourthly*: the Holy Spirit is the author of sanctity on the way of his seven gifts.

With that we have established the bridgehead needed to understand the

second accent. We instinctively want to ask: What do we mean when we speak of the gifts of the Holy Spirit? After all, he works in us through his gifts and leads us through his gifts on the way to holiness. By the *gifts of the Holy Spirit* we mean

*infused, supernatural faculties  
which make the graced soul able and inclined  
to obey the impulses of the Holy Spirit  
quickly, surely, joyfully, and heroically.*

I think I should briefly explain each word.

### Gifts — Virtues

You see, there are many points where the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the infused, supernatural theological virtues converge. But there is also a boundary between the two.

*What do the gifts and the virtues have in common?* Both are supernatural and both are infused abilities and faculties. What does this mean? We can develop from within as brilliantly as we have a mind to, but we will never reach the point or stage where we can say that these divine, infused virtues and gifts will come on their own from inside of me. They must be infused in us from the outside! And just as divine life is by its very substance supernatural (*supernaturale quoad substantiam*), so too are the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In this context you can let the dogmatic theologians tell you the significance of "*supernaturale quoad substantiam*". You can then stand in deep reverence for the Divine and the divine infused faculties. The soul can never reach such heights on its own, even with a superhuman effort. Dogmatic theologians tell us: "Something is supernatural by its very substance if it exceeds all power and capacity of nature, be it created or capable of creation." What does this abstract definition tell us? There is no nature created or capable of creation which could be so deeply or substantially supernatural to be called "by its very substance supernatural." What this means to say is how endlessly great is the gift offered to us creatures of spirit through divine life and the attendant gifts and virtues. These faculties must be infused, namely given to us as a gift.

*So what is the difference between the gifts and the virtues?* Perhaps we must first insert an intermediate reflection. Theologians tell us in general terms that both the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to us the moment we receive grace. In other words, when we receive sanctifying grace we also receive the whole complement of gifts and

graces. When we are baptized, therefore, sanctifying grace is accompanied not just by the supernatural virtues, but also the supernatural gifts. The difference, as the theologians tell us, is that the gifts only unfold at a later date. Some experts believe that the gifts are quietly at work in the deepest regions of the spiritual life, but only come to the fore when we have reached a certain moral proficiency. That is why we say at the end of the definition "faculties which make the graced soul able and inclined to." When we are given the gift of grace, these abilities and faculties come with it. But when do these gifts begin to explicitly leave their mark? Only when the soul, with the help of actual grace, has strived seriously for a longer period of time to attain the moral and theological virtues.

Here is where the difference between *living according to the virtues* and *living according to the gifts* becomes a bit clearer. Let me clarify this and then return to the question at hand. If the *virtues*—theological or moral, or both together—are at work in me, then my own activity is at the focus of my efforts and striving. During this retreat we have distinguished between *ego cum gratia* (I with the help of grace) and *gratia mecum* (grace with me). Speaking more as a psychologist and educator I can say that there are stages in our lives when we have to work as if we were Molinists (which is not to say we should be Molinists<sup>2</sup>) when we have to emphasize our own activity, although admittedly enriched by actual grace. Actual grace then helps us to judge things rationally and behave reasonably. When the *gifts of the Holy Spirit* are at work, the emphasis is not on our own activity, but on God's activity. It is a fact—speaking as a psychologist and educator—that all striving Christians come to a stage when they live as though they were Thomists. Let us leave the theory aside and not discuss which system is correct. Our interest here is in the development of the human soul.

### The Right Disposition for the Gifts

Now we must ask: Is the Holy Spirit so active in our lives at present that we can say he is the center, that God's activity is the main thing and not mine? This is how it should be in practice, but it is often not the way

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<sup>2</sup> An allusion to a famous theological controversy about grace and human action in man's sanctification. The "Molinists" (led by Spanish Jesuit L. de Molina, 1535-1600) stressed the importance of human action, while the "Thomists" (led by Spanish Dominican Domingo Bañez, 1528-1604) stressed the importance of grace.

things are because we have not worked hard enough to develop the moral and theological virtues with the help of actual grace. We must lead young people, too, and if I am working with boys I may not say immediately that the Holy Spirit will breathe into their souls and pull them along. No, the moral virtues must be just plain lived, a down-to-earth living of faith, hope and love, of the cardinal virtues! Young people must be educated to make a real effort!

There are three main groups of actions we can take in order to acquire the right disposition for the intensified activity of the Holy Spirit through his gifts. We can educate ourselves and others:

First: to a corresponding *spirit of recollection*. This means, we have to make an adequate personal effort—with the help of grace, of course—to be at peace. Our soul's strengths must be recollected in God. This recollection must be a God-filled solitude, not an unhealthy self-centeredness, which would not properly predispose us for the intensified action of the Holy Spirit. We have to educate and become people who can live in solitude with God. This sometimes means great effort, but we will not reach our aim without making the necessary exertion.

The second preparation is the education and practice of an adequate form of *constantly walking in the presence of God*. The word "constantly" is to be taken in a relative sense. Please recall everything we said about walking in the presence of God. We have mainly stressed the steps needed to achieve this. But we can never reach a constant walking in God's presence without the aid of the Holy Spirit. In the first stage of our lives the means in a relative sense. In that stage we must make a real effort to frequently look on God in faith, to frequently speak with God, and to frequently bring him little sacrifices. What sort of sacrifices? Sacrifices in the sphere of the virtues, be they theological or the moral virtues. The young person must be educated toward purity, humility, etc. We have to be reasonable and not expect God to do this on his own in our young people. We have to do the hard work of education. What you may have otherwise heard about a Jesuit and seemingly Molinist style of education (I do not mean the system, but the style of acting as if we were Molinists), is quite justified in the healthy development of the person. As an institute we will not resolve the theological dispute. Neither point of view fully solves the riddle, since each takes a different starting point and goes from there. What is important in education is to know how the soul develops from one accent to the other. Applied to myself, I ask: Which moral virtue do I need to stress more in my personal striving? Modesty? Brotherly love? I cannot

just wait until the Holy Spirit comes on his own. I must first create the right disposition.

Finally, I must prepare my soul for the intensified working of the Holy Spirit by fostering *truly deep sentiments of longing*. Don't forget that we must be people who long for the Holy Spirit! Lord, send out your Spirit and make all things new (cf Ps 104, 30)!

We want to examine our religious and moral development and see if it has grown to the extent that we can claim a certain proficiency, a certain consistency in practicing these three things. Let me repeat: given the usual norm, we are probably all so far along that the Holy Spirit could very well have been at work in us to an extraordinary degree for quite some time already.

## ii. A Gift of the Holy Spirit

What is the effect of the Holy Spirit when his gifts are at work in us? Theologians and philosophers have tried to help our inadequate understanding a little by using images.

### Images of What the Gifts Do

They tell us to imagine crossing a lake. I begin in a rowboat. A storm comes up. To reach the other side, I must row with all my might. Here the focus is on me. I have to row. That, the theologians tell us, is the soul under the influence of the virtues, both theological and moral. When do we have a soul under the influence of the Holy Spirit and his gifts? Change the first image somewhat. I am no longer in a rowboat, but a sailboat. *The sail* is comparable to the *gifts, the faculties, of the Holy Spirit*. When the Holy Spirit fills the sail with a favorable wind, the boat moves quickly and surely. This is the soul under the influence of the Holy Spirit and his gifts.

Another analogy is a child learning to walk. When the child wants to walk, the mother helps. There are different ways she can help. She can go ahead of her child and try to coax everything she can out of him. Or she can stand behind her child and let him walk, ready to help whenever the child might lose his balance. She may support the child a little, but what is important is the child's own effort. There we have the soul under the influence of the virtues. Now use another image. *The mother holds the child so firmly under the arms* that she is the one who does most of the work. There we have the soul under the influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Of course, each image is imperfect.

Or, think of a *stringed instrument*. I pluck the strings—that is like the



soul stressing its own activity. But when the Holy Spirit plucks the strings, his gifts are at work. In the first case: *ego cum gratia*; in the second: *gratia Dei mecum*. That is why I can say in the definition: The gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural, infused faculties which make the graced soul ready and able to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Then the soul takes its cue primarily from divine promptings, not human intellect.

### **Necessity of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

If the soul is thus influenced by the Holy Spirit, does it not follow that it can easily cope with the greatest of difficulties, that it can stride heroically along the way of holiness? That is why theologians tell us: *Genuine, heroic sanctity only begins from the moment that the Holy Spirit takes possession of and fills the soul*. We can never arrive at heroic love, purity, etc., unless the Holy Spirit is at work in an outstanding manner through the gifts. This explains the sad fact of why our generation has so little success in striving for sanctity: it is too weakly connected to the Holy Spirit. Of course, this connection does not always have to be explicit. But you will see that when the soul makes progress and is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, it receives a sixth sense for knowing when he is at work. Heroism is only possible if the Holy Spirit, through his gifts, has reached deep into the soul.

### **Mary Mediates the Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

I can also say that when, in the spirit of our community, we show our special fondness for Our Lady, we do so *because Mary has a strong influence on the Holy Spirit*. You venerate her under the titles "Queen of Apostles" and "Mother of Good Counsel." This indicates the atmosphere of the Cenacle—we ask Mary to dwell among us and rule over us. And just as she, through her prayers, implored the Holy Spirit for the early Church, she must also implore the Holy Spirit for our Family. You need the Holy Spirit! When I think of all the detailed questions you still need to deliberate in order to understand the aims of your community... Think about it: If you would tackle this only with human efficiency—even with the help of grace—it just won't get done quite correctly. But if Our Lady implores for you the [help of the] Holy Spirit, then you will notice the difference: your deliberations will come to just the right answers, your souls will be filled with light, it will seem as if the right intuitions constantly come our way, almost effortlessly. We are then carried by the Holy Spirit, the source of light and strength.

There is no community being led to sanctity in any shape or form that does not have an outstanding connection to the Holy Spirit. Hence, I repeat: We remain loyal to Mary! Not only for psychological reasons. They can play a role, too, for instance as the woman of total purity who constantly dwells in the midst of our celibate lives. But this cannot be the ultimate reason. The deepest reason is her position in the order of grace and her relationship with God. And one of the very deepest reasons is her relationship with the Holy Spirit. The image of the Cenacle must be recalled in our midst.

We must also keep in mind Mary's relationship to the Holy Spirit when we, as educators, are leading young people to the Mother of God. I don't need to talk about the Holy Spirit to the youth in so many words, but I give them to Mary, so that she can implore for them the Holy Spirit.

I need the Holy Spirit in order to gain clarity. *A young community needs a tenfold dose of the Holy Spirit!* It needs the strength to carry out what it sees it must do. We therefore keep in mind that wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and we therefore strive for these gifts.

As the crowning conclusion I might add: wisdom is a very special gift of the Holy Spirit. I still need to describe for you the things theologians and mystics say that wisdom helps us to do, perhaps later tonight; little more will need to be said. This may restore inner peace and recollection to your soul. If the longing for the Holy Spirit has been stirred again in your soul, if you see more clearly again that we will never grasp the spirit of our Family, the spirit of childlikeness without the Holy Spirit—then you will strive more deeply and seriously than ever for the Holy Spirit through the true sentiments of longing, through serious striving for clarity, and through constantly walking in the presence of God.

## TWENTY-FIRST CONFERENCE

**b. Wisdom, a Special Gift of the Holy Spirit**

The source of childlikeness is wisdom, especially the gift of wisdom. Wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit—a special, singular gift. Which function might the gift of wisdom fulfill in our soul? To tie everything together we can repeat all the characteristics we discussed about wisdom as a virtue, but now on a higher level. We must then recall that only the Holy Spirit can bestow these characteristics to such a high degree.

In this light let me begin by saying that the gift of wisdom is also a reverent, wonder-filled knowledge, but *an extraordinarily reverent, wonder-filled knowledge*. The mystics say in this context that the gift of wisdom means a light of extraordinary clarity for the soul, and also a light of extraordinary warmth. As is their wont, they describe this using images:

*Clarity.* Among other things, they invite us to imagine a man born blind who is told again and again about how marvelous nature is in her majesty. How gloriously he imagines the lights of the firmament, the beauty of nature, the forests, the trees, and all the plants! Now suppose that the man is suddenly and miraculously able to see. How feeble is what he imagined compared to nature as it really is! To the mystics this is an illustration of the soul who, at first, only sees and experiences God and the divine in the light of the virtue of wisdom and, then later, sees in the light of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is as if one were blind before—that is how transformed all knowing and being seems once the soul is filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of wisdom. Does this not motivate us to pray and beg especially that the Blessed Mother implore for us the Holy Spirit? How much more will the child then be able to look upon the Father! How much more will the child understand the Father in his light and in every blow of fate!

*Warmth.* The mystics add, however, that this extraordinary light not only gives an extraordinary clarity, but also an extraordinary warmth. The insight which the light and power of the gift of wisdom imparts to the soul also comes with a deep, all-tender intimacy and sweetness. This is plainly a reverent, wonder-filled knowledge such as the gift of wisdom imparts to us. Do we not want to ask more often for this gift? Do we not want to sense more keenly our smallness before God, to increase in us the necessary predisposition [for this gift] through a life of recollection, longing and self-denial?

Secondly, what applies to the virtue of wisdom as *qualitative knowledge* applies in an *endlessly higher way* to the gift of wisdom. Think, for instance, of St. John and see how brilliantly he summed up the essence of God in a single sentence: *Deus caritas est* (God is love; 1 Jn 4,8.16). This sums up everything. This clear summary—quite plainly an extraordinarily qualitative knowledge—can probably only be explained through the working of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of wisdom. Or, when Paul examines and sees the entire world from the one vantage point of "Christ in us and we in Christ," this totally profound insight, this tracing back of all knowledge to a common denominator is an effect of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we should pause here for a moment. Should we not reach out for such an all-embracing view of truth? If we understand our constitutions correctly, we need the Holy Spirit so that we see everything from a common vantage point. We must therefore pray that the Holy Spirit enlightens each one of us, especially our superiors.

The gift of wisdom means, thirdly, a *personal, experiential knowledge*, but again *on an endlessly higher level* than the virtue can impart. Here, too, the mystics remind us that the gift of the Holy Spirit does not just impart light to the soul, but also a delightful love. And the love which is enkindled by the Holy Spirit through the gift of wisdom has *two traits*: first an *extremely deep tenderness, warmth and sweetness*, and secondly an *extremely strong comprehension*. This is what our hearts so ardently long for. We want to see, encounter and love God everywhere: [as St. Ignatius taught] to seek God in all persons and things. When we have tried everything to live our lives in the constant presence of God, we realize how limited we are even with the help of the appropriate graces. A more or less constant walking in God's presence, a truly flourishing love of God in all things and above all things is conceivable only if the Holy Spirit interiorly fills our souls with the gift of wisdom.

How do we want to help ourselves if we still lack this constant contact and connection with God? On the one hand, we want to strive again more earnestly; on the other hand we pray that Mary sends us the Holy Spirit. Then we can taste the sweetness of God's love; then we can easily have God in us and with us.

Next, the gift of wisdom also means a *charismatic knowledge*. It is clear that this can only be communicated through God's extraordinary activity and effectiveness. I cannot strive for and conquer it on my own. God must give me all these great gifts and graces from his superabundant

richness and overflowing love.

Finally, the gift of wisdom communicates to us an *inexhaustible knowledge*. Here the mystics remind us that the gift of wisdom gives us the greatest and most profound gift of all: the *transformatio in Deum*, the transformation in God. We often pray as St. Paul does, "It is no longer I who live but Christ living in me" (Gal 2,20). But the soul can only pray this in the most eminent way if it has reached to a high degree this transformation in God. What does this entail? First of all, a deep, indeed almost extraordinarily deep, purification and clarification of the life of the drives. It is almost as if the powers of the soul would be bound, so deeply does God reach into our life. The purely natural powers are so tightly bound that they let God play them like one would play a stringed instrument. God abides so deeply in the soul; God uses the mind, will and heart so profoundly; the purely natural side in us is so moderated (especially that which is deficient); in fact, a certain part of our autonomy is so moderated, that by and large God is all in all for the soul and one in all.

Please think it out: Is this not when the child is first truly complete? When the soul has attained the transformation in God, then Christ reigns in the soul and we have the formation of the God-man into the child of God in an outstanding manner. Then we also understand and experience in the right way what it means that "the Holy Spirit is the one who speaks the spirit of childlikeness in us with unspeakable groans" (Rom 8,15.26). Then we are transformed in God. Then we are children *per eminentiam*. Then we must say "Our Father" (Mt 6,9). Then we understand the words, "Unless you become like children..." Then we are children of God's favor. Being children of God will have then become our great possession. Now we are in Christ, and in this way we go by leaps and bounds to the Father.

With that we have discussed the most important things about the source of childlikeness, namely wisdom. Whoever longs for childlikeness can certainly use all natural means to overcome what he lacks and can try his hardest to employ all the other means which we have mentioned, but we do not want to forget: We must pray much, much more, unite ourselves with Our Lady and, united with her, implore the Holy Spirit so that he gives our little family the spirit of childlikeness. Because of this you must see to it, for instance, when you are caring for your brothers or sisters, that you help them in some way to pray and sacrifice so that the family receives the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of childlikeness and childhood. This is such an extraordinary gift that it is worth mobilizing every means to bring it about. We also ought to pray and sacrifice for each other. Making sacrifices helps the

Blessed Mother to implore the Holy Spirit on the family more effectively. In this way we have a better understanding of the words, "We have not received a spirit of slavery, but of a spirit of childlikeness" (Rom 8,15). This is the Holy Spirit with his gifts, especially with his wisdom. And in this vein we now speak "Abba, Father!" (Rom 8,15). How rich it now sounds! Before it was just a shadowy outline, but now our whole soul is excited by these very words.

## TWENTY-SECOND CONFERENCE

We have established that there are two fundamental pillars, but they are still not enough to support the edifice of childlikeness. Today we must investigate two other pillars. There is not much time left, but perhaps that is not too serious a handicap. Everything we have said already will help us to come to a quicker mutual understanding. The things we have only touched on so far will now be looked at more systematically.

### THE THIRD FUNDAMENTAL PILLAR: THE ESSENCE OF CHILDLIKENESS

The third issue is the essence of childlikeness. Everything of substance has already been said and only needs to be brought into sharper focus through a shift of perspective. These include answers which were we have clearly and explicitly formulated, as well as others which came to us more from the unconscious depths of our soul.

#### Descriptive Definitions

To this latter kind belong a number of quotes from famous men which gain new meaning in this context. Schopenhauer said, for instance: "Childlikeness is genius"<sup>1</sup>. Is he right? If you followed last night's thoughts and have experienced what we said about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I think you could say yourself: to be under the influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the same as having a unique genius in the spiritual life; the Holy Spirit gives us a religious and moral genius. And is childlikeness not the greatest thing the Holy Spirit accomplishes through his gifts? And would we and must we not clearly understand that childlikeness is true genius or, if you will, heroic sanctity? In our language it is the same. Was it not something like this that reechoed in our hearts as we heard these talks?

Would you like some other quotes? Listen to Newman, who called childlikeness *the perfection of Christian life*<sup>2</sup>. This is the same thing. The more you collect such quotes, the more your family ideal will shine out to

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), German philosopher. See *The World as Will and Idea*, Volume 2, Supplements to Book 3, Chapter 31.

<sup>2</sup> John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890), leader of the Oxford Movement in England, famous Anglican convert to Catholicism.

you with radiance and light.

Or take Przywara<sup>3</sup>, who saw these things from atop Newman's shoulders. He says: Childlikeness is nothing less than *who we are*. Is he right? From what standpoint? In any case you will notice that if childlikeness is our family ideal, we must do everything we can to translate this ideal into a complex of ideas and values which permeates our entire lives. (....)

Recall some of the other answers we have given. The first was: childlikeness is not self-gratification, but *self-giving, self-surrender!* I could well imagine that this causes some of you to shudder: Yes, I want to be a child, but I also want some pleasure, some gratification in life. I have already mentioned to you several times that our young generation of priests, not only here but in other communities and in the dioceses, has an unusually strong, instinctive need for family. This is healthy, but it is often reduced onesidedly to a subtle search for pleasure. We would do well to make it clear from the outset that childlikeness is not primarily pleasure, but surrender. Just think of the child's instinctive trust in the opinion of others. As we said, childlikeness means mustering a maximum of love on the basis of a minimum of purely natural insight and a relatively low degree of the insight of faith. Is that not self-surrender? Absolutely! You see, if childlikeness is supposed to be genius, then it is clear that childlikeness cannot be self-gratification, for there is no genius in that; then everyone would be a greater genius than the saints. (....)

Next, childlikeness is *shelteredness on a higher level*. Childlikeness is not primarily financial or political security, at least not to the full extent we often imagine. You know what such a childlikeness on a higher level—in God—can mean! How much giving up of self! Childlikeness is therefore primarily giving up of self; only then comes security. What must I not give up!

In this context I can perhaps remind you of the classical expressions: I should *let the heavenly Father use me like a ball*, be it a ball he kicks or one he throws. Of course I accept this when my life is calm, but when God begins to play with me in every imaginable way, then I must not forget that I am only human [and will have a hard time]. And it is something humanly quite beautiful—at least it always impresses me—when we suffer greatly in such times. I always oppose the other view of suffering—that we should

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<sup>3</sup> Erich Przywara, SJ (1889-1972), German theologian and editor (1922-41) of the influential Catholic journal *Stimmen der Zeit*.

"grin and bear it." You see, if we did not feel God's rough treatment, we would not be children any more. We would only be recruits toughing out our drills.

What is childlikeness? Think of what we talked about in the context of the child as a unique revelation of God: that the child is a unique prophet of God, a unique reflection of God, and has a unique union with God. In short, we have already described childlikeness from many different angles and have done so in such a clear and unmistakable way that already we are sufficiently prepared for our everyday lives. But because the purpose of this course is to do everything to make sure that the central thought sits deeply and takes root in your souls, we want to return to this question from one more angle: the essence of childlikeness.

### The Definition of its Essence

Summarizing what we have said with a more *metaphysical* definition: The essence of childlikeness has three great components, three basic ingredients:

- childlike piety,
- childlike simplicity,
- childlike purity.

I believe that everything we have already said and will still say can be reduced to these components. Because of the pedagogical nature of our retreat I will consider them one more time. Some of what we hear will be familiar to you and need only to be deepened in some way. But other things will sound new in this context.

### 1. Childlike Piety

Beginning with childlike piety, I must start by clarifying the term, which is extremely important today. There are many in our ranks who use such terms imprecisely. It is therefore good to review and clarify the words we use. I don't mean that we shouldn't use new terms; in fact, we must use new terms because in so many regards life today feels very different from the way it felt in the past.

### The Meaning of Childlike Piety

What do we mean by "piety"? Piety can be interpreted both in a strict sense and in a broad sense. I will briefly summarize the way I see it without taking you through all the arguments leading to these conclusions.

*Childlike piety in the strict sense* is respect and reverence for one's

natural father and fatherland and for the supernatural Father and Fatherland. This is something that St. Thomas wrote about and gets much attention today<sup>4</sup>. Childlike piety is therefore respect and reverence for one's natural father and fatherland and, in a next step, respect and reverence for the supernatural Father and Fatherland.

By the way, may I point out here that love of country is a virtue? We do not want to forget that. Patriotism is similar to love of father and mother. The same is true when we direct our reverence to a higher plane. Love for the Church is also piety. And because your [religious] community is part of the Church, reverence for your community is also a form of piety.

*Piety*, however, can also be understood *in a broader sense*. In that case we understand piety as reverence for God and everything from God. This especially includes a reverence for all being and becoming, because and to the extent that all things are a "footprint" of God or a likeness of God. Here you should stop for a moment and think. You notice how, in the definition, we have ascended from the natural to the supernatural and then descended again to the natural. Piety is respect for God and everything from God in nature and culture. This should help you correctly grasp piety.

We ascend to God. What is *piety for God*? If I know that, I also know the nature of piety for man, for all being, for creation. If we examine the thinking of St. Augustine and stop to observe life, we find that piety has two components which need to be joined in a creative tension: they are a "glowing" and a "trembling."

First, let us apply this to God, because it is easiest to understand there. Piety is a "glowing." Why? God is love. Piety is "trembling." Why? Because God is also power, might, omnipotence. "*Et inardesco et exhorresco*" says Augustine<sup>5</sup>.

Let us pause and ask: Is my personal relationship with the heavenly Father permeated enough by these two features, or where do I fall short? You probably recall my many attempts to fend off a false concept of father. Fatherliness is not grandfatherliness, much less great-grandfatherliness! If we do not have a correct father image the two sides of true reverence—glowing and trembling—cannot be alive in us. Those of us who have

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* II-IIq 101, a 1, corp.; q 121, a 1, ad 3.

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 9. As translated by Edward Pusey (New York, 1952), p. 221: "What is that which gleams through me, and strikes my heart without hurting it; and I shudder and kindle? I shudder, inasmuch as I am unlike [Thy Power, Thy Wisdom, and Thy Truth]; I kindle, inasmuch as I am like it."

tasted all their limitations along the road to a deeper union with God and his glory should count themselves blessed. I ask myself: What do I lack most—the trembling or the glowing for God? I may even fall short in both.

Once we have established this, we can progress to the right view of *respect and reverence for each being*, for each creature. Suppose that I am a spiritual director or teacher in our boys school. If I have reverence for God and the divine, the "trembling" and "glowing" of this reverence must also be alive in my relationship with each boy whom I educate, indeed be alive in a certain sense for everything that exists, even a fly on a wall, though in a manner suited to a fly. (....)

### **The Effect of Childlike Piety**

This gives us a certain starting point for understanding childlike piety through childlike spirituality. How does a childlike spirituality—a childlike relationship with God—show itself? I imagine the answer is on the tip of our tongue: Childlike spirituality shows itself in childlike faith, hope and love.

Perhaps you remember what we said about the child as a unique revelation of God—more precisely about the unique union with God. I said that we would not discuss the point but come back to it later. Now is that time. Ahead of us is the broad horizon. I will mention only a few of the many possible thoughts, namely those of more practical importance for your lives right now.

#### **a. Childlike Faith**

What does childlike faith look like? We recall the old principle: What the child spontaneously calls his own we must acquire at the price of serious effort. Become what the child is! But what the child is imperfectly and in passing, we must acquire permanently and perfectly.

#### **Faith in the Natural Father; Faith in the Heavenly Father**

What does childlike faith look like? Let me appeal to your own life experience. One can distinguish between childlike faith on the purely natural level—toward one's earthly father—and childlike faith in the heavenly Father.

*A child will generally believe his father absolutely*, in every situation. If father says it, then it must be true, even if the whole world says the opposite! This gives you an idea of how traumatic it is for a child to later be disappointed by his or her father. Everything on earth and in heaven

seems to be uprooted.

By the way, what a serious and heavy responsibility we have when people cling to us with such a childlike faith! You may recall something a simple man supposedly said to St. Francis of Assisi: "Francis, you know how many people cling to you. See to it that you don't disappoint them!" For instance, if I notice that my boys or others entrusted to me are very fond of me in a childlike way I should take these words to heart: See to it that you don't disappoint them! See to it! The way things go, the disappointment will come sooner or later, for I am not God, only a little mirror of God. Anyone who gets to know me more closely will eventually be disappointed. It is a function of created persons and things to disappoint. "He must increase and I must decrease" (Jn 3,30). As a mature human being I must humbly admit this when I notice my many shortcomings. I humbly and gratefully accept the disillusionment of those who once nearly worshiped me. For my part I will try to live the high ideals they see embodied in me, even if in some things they are mistaken.

Why does the child believe his father? Piety. A deep respect. A total and deeply upwelling reverence for what a father is and says.

We now *transfer this childlike faith to the heavenly Father*. Let me express myself very simply. Here we see the unquenchable eagerness for God and the divine. Please add your own observations on this point. In books about children we see how they have many questions about God and who he is. It leaves adults speechless. What eagerness for theoretical and practical knowledge of religion! When, for example, the child sees father and mother going to communion—how they kneel reverently in front of the tabernacle—with what childlike tenderness they try to imitate it in their own childlike way! It is simply so: the child has a remarkable reverence and hence an eagerness for the divine. The more naive and down-to-earth the child, the more filled with zeal for divine knowledge.

Perhaps I can add: How does this look in my life? I don't know how it is for you, but I often experience us priests as terribly satiated and complacent. There is little desire to learn more about the faith. This raises the question: When was the last time we seriously worked through a religious book? We have nibbled a little here and there because we needed something for a sermon or religion class. I think we should learn from the children, from their eagerness for spiritual knowledge. We should seriously read and study one book a year; that ought to be our principle. We have so much freedom... I should read and study whether I feel like it or not. I want to become a child, a child in faith, and therefore eager to

continue to learn about my faith.

If you want to think about this in more detail, then keep this motto in mind: Become perfectly what the child is imperfectly!

### Characteristics of Childlike Faith

Let me tie some things together with the question: What should our childlike faith look like? I will present only a few broad strokes. Our childlike faith should be a firm, unshakable, living and victorious belief in what the Father tells us through his Church. This is nothing new. It is so naively and simply stated, but perhaps it does us good to refresh our memories. These are the traits we find in children. We have learned that the child believes unshakably in his earthly father; this is how we must be toward the heavenly Father. Our faith must be alive and victorious. (....)

#### *Firm and unshakable*

Why should my faith be firm and unshakable?

*First* for the same reason that a child's faith is firm. Why is a child's faith firm? *Because Father said so.* Why is our faith firm? Because the Father said so. Why is our faith firm? Because the tri-personal God has spoken, and what he says is always true, even if I cannot understand it. We therefore believe firmly and unshakably in God the Father.

Notice how Our Lord always praises the gift of faith. He tells us that it is an absolutely necessary gift (cf Mk 16,16; Lk 8,12; Jn 3,18.36). It is also a precious and valuable gift. Why? When Christ worked miracles, even raising the dead to life, he did not say much. But when he met someone with childlike faith, his words were solemn: "I have not found faith like this in all of Israel!" (Mt 8,10). "Blessed are those who have not seen but still believe!" (Jn 20,29). In the eyes of Our Lord a simple faith in God the Father is an extraordinarily valuable gift. You notice how Christ also desires that childlikeness expresses itself in piety.

*Second*, faith must also be firm and unshakable because of the function which it has in the spiritual life. We hear from the Council of Trent: Faith is the root, beginning and foundation of all justification.<sup>6</sup> If faith is the foundation of the entire building and if the building is to be sound, then the foundation must be sound. It is simply so: our entire spiritual life and loving and striving and hoping is built on the foundation of simple, child-

<sup>6</sup> Council of Trent (6th session), Decree on Justification, Chapter 8 (DS 801; Neuner-Roos 722).

like faith. Therefore it is clear that my faith must be firm and unshakable.

#### *Alive*

Another trait of faith is that it must be alive. This can mean various things: alive with regard to matters of faith, alive in its relationship with the Triune God, alive with regard to certain things profane or sacred, alive with regard to certain situations. I also see, in the light of faith, the hand of the Father behind the blows of fate. Faith should become the most living part of my life—just as it is for a child. The same goes for our hope and love. Because the child believes in the Father, he hopes in everything the Father says and loves him beyond all measure.

#### *Victorious*

Faith should also be as victorious as it is in the child. If the Father says it, it will happen, even if great obstacles stand in the way. "This is the victory which overcomes the world: our faith" (1 Jn 5,4). In this light it seems to me that, for instance, we could commit no greater error toward the community than not believing in God's Fatherly goodness and providence toward the community. We may make many, many mistakes, but one of the greatest would be a lack of trust in God's goodness. A similar thing could be said with regard to my own personal living and striving. Childlike piety must show itself in a simple childlike faith. Unless you become like children...! Continue these thoughts on your own and try to come to a clearer metaphysical grasp of faith.

### b. Childlike Trust (Hope)

Secondly, childlike piety reveals itself in childlike trust. Here, too, we will follow the same outline. Become what the child is! Become perfectly and permanently what the child is imperfectly and in passing! Let us examine the a child's trust for his father and mother. It is an unshakable trust in a strong and benevolent power.

#### *Description*

Take a moment to observe: How is it that children are so happy, that they are often so sure of themselves? It is because they have not yet experienced their limitations. As a result, children believe in a strong, benevolent power that pervades and surrounds them. The surrounding power is normally the power of the father or mother. The child experiences it a thousand times: even if one grows up in a very poor family, even if hunger is too often a guest, more often than not Father and Mother find a way to

put the needed food on the table, to come up with the needed clothing, etc. As a result, the child experiences again and again that he is surrounded by a strong and benevolent power.

In the religious child this experience transfers to the supernatural realm. Here, too, one could gather a great many simple, endearing features of unlimited childlike confidence. For example, if a child desires the conversion of his father or a brother or anything else, then the child normally pleads with the heavenly Father in a spirit of unshakable confidence.

What can this mean for my life and our life as a community? Become what the child is! I, too, must acquire an unshakable trust in God the Father—more specifically: trust in the Father's omnipotence, in the Father's goodness, in the Father's faithfulness. These are the three characteristics upon which the child builds such a powerful natural and supernatural trust. As a result, if I want to strengthen my childlike confidence, I must constantly live with the awareness of these three characteristics of God. I must remind myself again and again that the heavenly Father is almighty, all-good, and faithful.

#### *The Childlike Hope of the Blessed Mother*

If you wish to investigate the childlike trust of our Blessed Mother according to these three features, you only need to turn to the Magnificat (Lk 1,46-55). Just listen to the divine characteristics with which Mary alligns her trust.

She places her confidence in God's omnipotence. In the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, the omnipotence of God is often referred to symbolically as the "finger of God."<sup>7</sup> God touches the mountains with his fingers and they begin to smoke.<sup>8</sup> Note that the Blessed Mother is not satisfied with speaking of the finger of God—she speaks of the arm of God (Lk 1,51)! From this you can conclude how deep our own trust can be. The genuine child places his confidence in the most ultimate and all-embracing power: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Ps 124,8).

Those of us who live in neighboring countries can consider ourselves blessed to experience the greater and greater loss of all earthbound sources of trust. Justice, truth, tradition—all are eroding away. One can no longer exist, no longer find inner joy and peace unless one flies back to the final

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ex 8,15; Dt 9,10; Ps 8,4; Dn 5,5; Mk 7, 33; Lk 11,20.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ps 104,32; 144,5.

source of our trust: God. "In you, O Lord, I trust; I will never be put to shame!" (Ps 31,2; 71,1). How long will it take us—in this simple way—to awaken true childlike confidence in ourselves!

In Sanskrit there is a word which can be used for both father and mother. The word is "pitaru"<sup>9</sup>. To use the word, God is "pitaru," both Father and Mother. Children see and seek everything which somehow arouses greatness and confidence. This is what one finds in God the Father.

In the Magnificat the Blessed Mother later refers to God's goodness and finally to his faithfulness. Studying this on your own may help you renew your unconditional trust in God's fatherly goodness.

At this point please review all the serious expressions and illustrations which we have discussed during these days. For instance, recall the little verse:

"Though storm may rage and wind may howl  
and lightning strike again,  
I think as does the mariner's child:  
The Father is at the helm!"

Here is another catchphrase we have used: Our greatest care should be to be endlessly carefree! Not carefree in the sense of being negligent, but carefree because we trust God. Not carefree in the sense that we do nothing for ourselves; we should take moderate care, but in the background should be that unshakable trust: Mother takes care!

#### **c. Childlike Love**

Please pray your way into the third point: childlike love. What does childlike love for the father look like on the natural and the supernatural level?

#### *Description*

*First*, under normal circumstances it is clear that a child will develop a *childlike attachment to his father* and, because of the father and with the father, become attached to his brothers and sisters. True childlike love always grows to include sisterly and brotherly love. It would be worth your while to gather for yourselves as many examples of this as you can by observing in practical daily life how childlike love for father and mother

<sup>9</sup> Pitaru, the plural of pitá, is the word for "parents," i.e., both father and mother.



leads to love for one's brothers and sisters. We also know that it can lead to rivalry or intrigue, but we will pass these over for the moment to become more familiar with those features which are noble and good.

*Secondly*, think about what childlike, down-to-earth *supernatural love for the heavenly Father* looks like. I think we could state it as something like an axiom: it is a down-to-earth, intimate, tender dialogue of love with God. Here you would do well to study the piety of child saints, as is found in the book about Nelly Organ<sup>10</sup>. Her way of doing things is not up in the sky, but within our reach, such as the way she converses with the Child Jesus. Pondering these things does us a world of good: the naivety, the down-to-earthness, the natural unaffectedness.

To listen in on the last words of those who are dying, even of priests, is to discover how such childlike persons can speak with God! What a great man once said is true: The child in us reawakens when we die. I myself have often wondered whether I will have such an open childlike conversation with God when I die. How are we moderns in this regard to God? We know how to think thousands of things, but how will this naive, childlike dialogue reveal itself at the hour of our death?

Look at how little Nelly converses with God, how she takes everything for granted! She could trade anything with him: He could give her a ball and she would give him, for instance, her shoe—as naive as we could possibly imagine! What a child can't do! If we could only do it this way too! I say this because I wish the same thing for us. If we could just return to a plain and unaffected dialogue with God, it would be the epitome of wisdom. All the learning that we possess may be like a great ladder, but we need to take the ladder down again. We want to converse with God—simply, plainly, naively. We want to learn how to just hold a conversation with him. In the joyful things and the sad ones, too, I want to always go to him. You can see this attribute in the example of little Nelly.

To read something like this could be one of our resolutions. The oldest can read it the fastest. By the way, it would be of great help if for two, three, five years you would read only books which reinforce this trait, presuming of course that you agree with what I am saying. Otherwise we read something here and something there and the one negates the other, wasting our time. We must do everything we can to forge ourselves into

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<sup>10</sup> Bihlmeyer, *Klein Nelli vom heiligen Gott*. This book about Nelli Organ (1903-1908) documented the unaffected faith and prayer of a child.

a united front, the personality type desired of us by God. It would therefore be worthwhile if you would point out books like this to each other and say: this is what we are about, this supports this aspect and this clarifies that other aspect. Even our spiritual directors should not merely say things; they should assign books to be studied. Then you will see how we can be influenced in a respectful manner by others who share our point of view.

Just think: How can we learn from children to speak with God in a simple, tender, down-to-earth manner? Read the life of a St. John Berchmans or St. Stanislaus Kostka. Do it from this standpoint! Examine the simple and tender relationship of Stanislas Kostka with the Blessed Mother. As a boy Stanislas made a contract with Our Lady that he must die on the day of her Assumption—I don't know if he signed it with blood, but it wouldn't surprise me—and it was clear to him that it would happen that way. For a child that is simply taken for granted. We do not want to idly imitate such things, for that is not what makes true childlikeness, but I think we ought to be able to speak with one another simply about such things. We know how to pass judgment on such things from on high, but when we see such people who have this down-to-earth freshness, we should never drive them out. When we see or read how others have done this, the slumbering child within, fresh and healthy, begins to reawaken. We should then do in our way what the others did in their way.

If someone were to write a book about these things, he would really have to include a whole chapter of examples from the lives of children. We must see the whole world from the standpoint of our ideal. Again we come to our guiding thought: Become what the child is! What should I do? On my part I should strive in a plain and simple manner for this tender dialogue with God. How can I do it? I do not want to answer this for you. As St. Francis de Sales would say: I simply begin to love. Just as one learns to walk by walking, one learns to love by loving. Of knowledge there is enough.

### *Characteristics of Childlike Love*

What should our love for the heavenly Father be like? Let me quickly mention a few characteristics.

First, true love can be quite *jealous*—but in a positive way!

What characterizes such a jealous love? On the one hand, the child wants the father to love him most of all—this happens quite simply in family life. On the other hand, love can also be jealous in this way: There must be nothing in me which the father does not love; there cannot be any

love in me separated from my childlike love for the father.

Here you must be sure that these characteristics are truly observed from life. We must not go through life merely as philosophers, but also as keen observers. What I deduce as a philosopher must have a foundation in real life.

What must my love be like? Secondly, I almost want to say it should be *dissatisfied*. It is like this: When we observe persons who have a simple love of God, we find that they feel: I love God too little! They are dissatisfied. The reason for this is found in God. The closer we come to him, the more we notice how distant and limited is our ability to love. It is a bitter thing to be strongly aware of the limitations of our ability to love. When I become aware of this, it is extremely important that I turn to the Holy Spirit. Only he can expand my ability to love. The more I grow in simplicity, the greater my longing will become for the Holy Spirit. My dissatisfied love will struggle to gain more insight and ability to love.

Thirdly, my love must also be *crucified*. You know the reason for this—because love is an assimilating and unifying force and because Christ gave the Father the most joy when he delivered himself up in endless childlikeness in the Garden of Olives and on the Cross. Because of this, childlike love for the Father frequently feels the desire to be crucified love! In the language of a child such things sound so simple, but we must investigate the heroism that stands behind it.

Fourthly and finally, childlike love must be *victorious*. The God who gave me a part of his love wants this love to penetrate my entire being. In the end it will be his love which triumphs. "But the greatest of these is love!" (1 Cor 13,13).

Which brings us back to a thought I have already mentioned so many times. Let us take it home as the most practical consequence of this retreat: We want to learn how to love God as children!

Take a cue from Sacred Scripture. Or read *Everyday Sanctity*, where every page radiates the praise of love! All things, all acts must be traced back to their origins in love.

#### *Definitions of Childlike Love*

We must not overlook the fact that *love is the essence of sanctity*. Nor must you overlook that today's views go violently separate ways. Hatred whips our opponents into a frenzy. We must therefore be aware of the most basic power in Christianity—*love of God*. The more others pursue a course of hatred, the more that childlike love for the Father must be alive

and radiant, revealing the love he has for his children.

If you wish to penetrate more deeply into the statement "love is the essence of sanctity," then read the words of Christ: "You should love the Lord your God with all your mind and all your strength. This is the first commandment, and the other is the same" (Mt 22,37). When we listen to what biblical scholarship has to say about Paul, we hear again and again: Love is the compendium of everything God expects from his children (cf Rom 13,8-10; Gal 5,14).

*Love is a unitive and assimilative power.* This ought to be one of the main thoughts we keep in mind. If we want to become mature individuals who are penetrated by God and morally sound, we must begin to love at as young an age as possible and try to love as long as we live. "I reach out for that which is before me," says Paul (Phil 3,13). We, too, want to reach for God's love, because it is a unitive and assimilative power. The moral virtues form man to some extent, but on a deeper level man can only be formed by love.

Finally, you can say to yourselves that *love is the soul, the mother, and the queen of all virtues*. This is what Paul tells us in his great song of praise in honor of love (1 Cor 13). Love is—and then he begins to list a great number of moral virtues—patient, gentle, humble, etc. If we, in the spirit of our institute, want to become something coherent, we, both young and old, must know one thing: The greatest of all is love, especially childlike love. In this way we want to become children with a simple, unaffected love for the Father. Then a new day will dawn. The 20th Century must become the century of the child. Unless you become like children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven!

## TWENTY-THIRD CONFERENCE

Childlikeness has three components: piety, purity and simplicity. Our own life experience should confirm this truth. This is why, after all, such terms as childlike piety, childlike purity and unaffectedness, and childlike simplicity go practically hand in hand.

## 2. Childlike Purity

The topic of this talk is childlike purity. Think again about the close connection between childlikeness and purity. When we become nostalgic at the glance of a child, it is because we are spontaneously reminded of our own childhood, of the time in which our passions and drives were still silent. This is the underlying connection: childlike purity is when the passions and drives are silent.

For our purposes here, let me name three characteristics of childlike purity. Childlike purity is

- first, instinctive,
- second, rich and fruitful,
- third, enchanting and tranquil.

I will leave it to you to determine if I have accurately captured the essence. If you find yourself observing children, I recommend that you do so from the standpoint of these three features. Recall the great law which we have long contemplated: Become what the child is! What the child is in a limited way, and probably only for limited times, is what—with the help of grace and in the most perfect manner possible—you should become and beg and fight for as your permanent possession.

### a. Instinctive Purity

Perhaps we should first briefly ask ourselves what we mean by instinctive purity and then answer the question by making a stark contrast with what it is not, followed by a discussion of its ramifications.

### i. Contrast: Instinctive vs. Voluntaristic Purity

What stands in stark contrast to instinctive purity? Purity secured only by the will. I think we know immediately what is at stake here. When everything in us is overrun by inner turmoil and storms, when all our emotions are pulled downward and the only "no" comes from the will, then our purity is merely voluntaristic. It is the will alone which still says "no"

while all the drives try to drag us down.

In contrast, what is *instinctive* purity? The contrast immediately sends the signal to you that it is something very high and noble—it is when our drives remain silent, when our drives are imbued with a holy untouchedness. You also immediately sense that instinctive purity is truly the purity for which we so ardently long.

Perhaps you can insert other expressions *in place of "instinctive,"* so that the meaning begins to sink into our souls. You could call it purity *on the level of the drives, unconscious* purity, and—if you allow me to put it this way—a certain *impeccability*, though this must be taken in a very relative sense. Perhaps you remember that this was the human condition in Paradise when we had the twofold gift of *donum gratiae* [the gift of grace] and *donum integritatis* [the gift of integrity]<sup>1</sup>. Instinctive purity is somewhat akin to the gift of integrity, a gift which we lost through original sin. In the present order, the gift of grace which Christ won back for us through his suffering and death, gradually wins back for us the gift of integrity. Of course, we will only permanently reach its heights in the Beatific Vision. We will only attain the final fullness of instinctive purity when our soul sees and loves God in the bliss and happiness of eternity. When we therefore speak of instinctive purity as something to strive for here on earth—somehow in analogy to the purity of a child—then we know that this can only be meant in a relative manner.

### ii. Looking at the Child

Of course we also know, from looking at the child, that the [inordinate] drives are also not far below the surface. This is the very reason for our nostalgia when we look at a child and wonder what will become of him or her. For now the drives are silent, but they are near at hand and can be aroused with extraordinary rapidity. Yes, the unaffectedness of a child is an instinctive purity, but it is not a perfect or permanent possession.

Observe children. They view life so uniquely in this regard, making us laugh at the precious things they say in their simplicity! When you study child psychology, you can bring together a great number of the most minute observations of life. How unencumbered children can be in dealing with things, even things bordering on the sexual! But when they are ex-

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<sup>1</sup>The gift of integrity refers to the preternatural harmony of the different aspects of the human person (body, emotions, mind, will, soul) before original sin.

posed to suggestive parading and posturing, you will notice the fineness of their instinct. When children, girls for instance, are introduced to society for the first time and their father and mother force them to take part in things that are morally ambiguous, then you can tell how everything in them resists. They can fulfill the parental wish only with great effort. They notice: "I don't belong here!" Think of the example of St. Stanislaus Kostka. As a boy—please weigh every word—he had such a strong instinct for purity that an incident of suggestive parading in his father's house caused him to faint.

All in all, we see how true the expression is: "childlike purity is instinctive purity."

### iii. Reclaiming Instinctive Purity

Now the first question: What can we do to at least partially win back this instinctive purity? First of all, I think we ought to warm ourselves again to the true loftiness and beauty of this ideal. It is not enough to merely say: I will not sin in this area! You see, those who only want to avoid sin will fall into it. This is the exact opposite of the new person you have set out to become. Your being must be magnanimity. And you must apply this magnanimity to living the sixth commandment. You must fire up yourselves and your youth for this tender purity, for this highest degree of purity. We must therefore see to it that *first* we use every means to maintain the purity which is obligatory to our state in life, and *second*, to the extent that this is possible, to safeguard in us the highest degree of [magnanimous] purity.

### Obligatory Purity

What is obligatory purity? Not *committing any sins against holy purity*. How grave are sins against purity? According to moral theology, *all voluntary impurity is grave sin*. And "voluntary" is not just restricted to what I actively seek. If impure lusts come over me and I freely accept them, this is also grave sin.

It is often said that in matters of the sixth commandment there is *no parvity of matter* [i.e., the matter is always morally grave]. Moral theologians support their position by drawing a parallel to the drive for self-survival<sup>2</sup>. When we act on that drive, the matter is normally *parvitas* [i.e.,

<sup>2</sup> Namely, the drive that urges us to eat, drink, sleep, defend ourselves, etc.

not grave]—for instance, by being immoderate in eating or drinking. Why should there be no parvity of matter in the realm of purity? The more psychologically-minded moral theologians say: if we would teach differently, the danger of self-deception would be too great.

"No parvity of matter" does not mean, however (if you allow me to speak as a pastor), that our potential failings against holy purity are normally grave. From practical life I can say that if we are serious about our spiritual life and generally do what our community and constitutions ask of us, there is no commandment against which so many sins are venial or not sins at all as against the sixth commandment. I think you understand what I am saying. I am presupposing that one is serious about the spiritual life. As grave is as the law which moral theologians have spelled out, our transgressions are probably venial or not sins at all—not because the matter is not grave, but because we can and must acknowledge that, in one way or another, something is lacking in our knowing and wanting what is morally wrong<sup>3</sup>. We must have the courage to apply to the sixth commandment the general law of moral theology: *non nocet sensus dummodo absit consensus*<sup>4</sup>. If we are truly serious about the spiritual life, we should never succumb to anxiety about these things. Stand your ground and remain calm! Love instead of brooding, and leave all else to God.

Let us now examine this law in detail. All voluntary impurity is grave sin in the illustrated sense. This law permits three applications:

First, to voluntarily induce a sexual release is always a grave sin—except, of course, in the context of what is permitted in marriage (an exception which also applies to points 2 and 3). Secondly, to voluntarily lust after someone sexually is a grave sin. Thirdly, the same applies to anything I do with the explicit intention of arousing in myself or others sexual pleasure or a sexual release.

With regard to *sexual pleasure*, please allow me to briefly give a definition in the spirit of St. Augustine. We must not equate sexual pleasure with, say, the satisfying feeling that goes through our body when we stretch

<sup>3</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (No. 1857) reiterates the age-old criteria for mortal sin: "For a *sin* to be *mortal*, three conditions must together be met: 'Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.'" The key sentence is quoted from St. Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae* I-II, 88, 2, *corp. art.*

<sup>4</sup> There is no sin of the senses if consent is lacking.

in the morning, nor with the tingly-nice-but-annoying feeling that one can have after scratching an itch. Augustine says that sexual pleasure is a feeling pertaining to the sexual organs. This pleasure occurs when they are strongly aroused. Now we know from experience that from time to time nature wants to arouse and relax itself in this area. When we therefore wake up in the middle of the night and find our nature in revolt, moral theologians remind us that we are not obligated to suppress what the body is feeling. In fact, in youthful years we must be especially careful about not suppressing too much, for experience shows that it can lead many times to psychological compulsion. Instead of suppressing the feelings, one should engage the soul and mind [in superillumination] and remain calm. I believe that I can repeat a word here which I have already explained: *the first preference is superillumination!* If we only take the love of God (about which we hear so much) a little more seriously and just try to plainly and simply give God our power to love each morning when we awake, we will have done all we can.

I am discussing these things with broad strokes because our main concern here is gaining clarity for practical everyday life; all the shameful things which we may have done or have had happen to us are usually only venial sins, and in some cases were no sins at all, though they can become grave sin if one accepts something or actively seeks something with the intention of arousing sexual pleasure.

### Magnanimous Purity

It is therefore clear: if we want to nurture and cultivate instinctive purity, we must first strive for the purity demanded of us by our state in life. But, over and above that, we must protect and safeguard the heights of purity in all directions. And this is where we really ought to excel.

So that we do not need to overemphasize the obligation [and are freer to strive for a higher purity], we would do well to set up a group of towers to protect our holy purity. Think of it as a castle. If a castle's towers are always protected and guarded, then the castle itself will be safe.

Let me give some general insights into how to guard the towers. A healthy spirituality offers three types of means. One can speak of means of prevention, protection and fortification. But do not forget that all of these means must be an expression of love. That is *the* great means by which purity can be most delicately and profoundly guarded in us. If we give our love to God without reserve, our love will be less prone to seeking other compensations. As St. Augustine says, "Love God and do what you

will!"<sup>5</sup> It also applies here. If I now mention to you other auxiliary means, then do not forget: such means must always stand in connection with the ultimate end, namely love. In that way I can show you how precisely from this vantage point a profound, healthy love of God can be especially effective in preserving holy purity.

### Means of Prevention

Love is therefore our primary motivation for using the means of prevention. These means can be summed up with one general term: *a love-inspired and enlightened flight from dangerous situations.*

I deliberately include the word "love-inspired." Such a flight must be inspired by love! I hope you take that home with you from the retreat, also for your later study of *Everyday Sanctity*. Then you will have a sure footing and not be so easily swayed by peripheral factors.

Why should this flight be "enlightened"? When we face dangers connected to the duties of our vocation—and you must count on such situations in the missions—you must not flee, of course; love will know how to find the right way. When the work of our vocation asks something of us, an enlightened love will probably dictate that we keep a certain reserve, a certain "flight."

How does flight express itself as a preventative means motivated by love? I think I need to mention three points.

#### *Flight from the Spirit of the World*

First: flight from the spirit of the world.

This is something you must take seriously—and don't suppose that I am thinking of sin. After all, we are speaking of an outstanding degree of purity, of the gentle glow and magic of purity. How can I preserve and reconquer the magic of purity and the glow of untouchedness? We are not talking on the level of "you must," but of "you may." If I have a strong love, this love will urge me to this or that means—hence to flee from the spirit of the world. I must remind you again of what the saints tell us in such strong terms: the world is a spider web. How can I protect myself from it? By fleeing when I do not need to enter it.

What does that mean for me in practical terms? For instance, what does it mean during vacation? What does it mean when I am listening to the radio or leafing through a magazine? It is clear: as a mature person I

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<sup>5</sup> Commentary on 1 Jn 7,8 (PL 35,2033): "Ama, et fac quod vis."

can see certain things. We do not want to be glass figurines. In fact, if we are [prone to anxiety], we should apply *agere contra*<sup>6</sup>, though always respecting the delicate glow of purity. To the extent that the soul is healthy and normal, love must urge us to flee wherever possible from such occasions. Please understand me correctly: I am not speaking about prudery. But we have other things to do: we have great tasks and our dear Lord to come to grips with. We therefore have no use for things which are not really needed, which are useless distractions.

#### *A Proper Distance from the Opposite Sex*

(Secondly,) a cautious flight—here too in a love-inspired and enlightened manner—from the other sex.

Now you must use a lot of common sense. In the world you deal with many women. Christ did not just die for the men! The right response is to educate ourselves to be deeply, inwardly free in all our dealings with the opposite sex and all creatures. This unaffectedness is a most effective means of protection. Because of this we cannot do enough to flee again and again into the supernatural world. We must *see each person as a child of God and member of Christ*. We should and must also view the body and soul of the opposite sex as a vessel, as a home of the Triune God, or, as *Everyday Sanctity* puts it: as a "little church of the Blessed Trinity."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, to gain a greater unaffectedness toward the opposite sex we should acquire *a deep love of Mary*. One experiences it this way: If I have a healthy attachment to Our Lady, I discover a secret Marian crown on the brow of each girl and woman. Because of this I should educate myself and my followers to have a deep Marian devotion. As future missionaries who are exposed to particular dangers, you should be especially deliberate about introducing your youth to the world of Mary.

All of this is true. Of course, it is also true that we must *exercise caution—though not out of fear, but out of love*. This is the reason for the law I already mentioned: interior unaffectedness in tandem with exterior untouchedness (and in our state in life this demands a certain absolute untouchedness). We could say: We touch others only as courtesy and custom demand it, poised and without making a big deal.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, try to counteract the anxiety by working against (the literal meaning of *agere contra*) the first anxious reaction when one sees an immodest picture.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. M.A. Nailis, *Everyday Sanctity* (1998), p. 23.

Perhaps I can give a few rules for our practical behavior in this area. They come in the form of *two practical pastoral rules*.

First, whatever I write—and here I am naturally thinking of [when you write to] women—must be formed in such a way that it could be printed an hour from now in any enemy newspaper.

Second, whatever I do must be done in such a way that anyone could photograph me without embarrassment.

I think if you keep these two practical rules, you will save yourselves and your community much grief. I think you know me well enough to realize that I do not immediately brand everything a sin; but it seems to me that you should recognize something of the personality type of your community in this regard: looking downward, do not be so quick to call something a sin, but, looking upward, be all the more intent on striving for the highest magnanimity. Applied to purity: *we strive for the highest out of love—not fear*. One of St. Francis de Sales favorite sayings was: Do not fear sin more than you love virtue! Our spirituality must be positive!

Here are two practical rules which could be of importance in this area. What I have mentioned to you about written spiritual direction could be interjected here.

*To make this psychologically more understandable* let me give you the *broader context* that can greatly shape our practical behavior. It is based on an insight attributed to St. Augustine: *amor spiritualis generat amorem affectuosum* [spiritual love generates affective love]. Take our relationship to the opposite sex. When I am hearing a woman's confession or am dealing with a woman in any other context and am exercising a certain fatherliness befitting my vocation—and this is the way it should be—then it is the most natural thing in the world to experience a stirring of our spiritual love. In fact, if such a spiritual love is never stirred, we lack the creative power to become permanently attached to someone. But it is just as self-understood that spiritual love generates affective love. We are creatures of both body and soul, and spiritual love can awaken a certain emotional resonance, especially when we are dealing with the opposite sex. As I have said, this too is something we must see as the most natural thing in the world. It often makes younger priests uneasy because they think it is abnormal and the devil is loose because one experiences a feeling—let us call it the feeling of attraction—for someone of the opposite sex. We must tell ourselves: our spiritual and emotional reaction to the opposite sex is normally more differentiated than to persons of our own sex. At first it is such an unfamiliar feeling—especially if one has grown up in a boarding

school! When this happens, we must firmly tell ourselves, "This is normal!" and then move on. If we do so, everything will be just fine. And if you did not experience this, you would probably be lacking something.

St. Augustine continues: *amor affectuosus generat amorem oboedientialem* [affective love generates obedient love]. Women have a need for someone to rely on, a need for shelter, and in moments of helplessness are easily inclined to give us their entire will and often to even make a vow of some sort. This is a normal response of the feminine soul. As a confessor you must not think it something extraordinary when a woman wants to give herself entirely to you and totally depend on you. To my knowledge Jesuits are not allowed to accept the vow of obedience from a woman. There is much wisdom in this. If I am not formally appointed to the pastoral care of women, I would be very careful about accepting such vows. You understand why. The vow of obedience presupposes a great number of bonds and writings and relationships, and we should not be too quick to do that. We have greater tasks, and you must not think it is a surefire indicator of outstanding sanctity. After all, it is something quite natural for women. I must remain calm. Even if a woman's devotion turns into infatuation, I would consider it normal. You must not think that the devil is loose, or even that it shows what a marvelous spiritual director or confessor you are. In fact, you would be abnormally useless if no one becomes infatuated. As I like to remind our diocesan priests: This is the most normal thing in the world; it only begins to be problematic if *we* begin to get swept off our feet. I think that you ought to make a mental note of this: others can become infatuated, but I will not respond in kind! If fire meets fire, then the situation changes; but if a flame burns alone, it soon burns out.

Augustine continues: *amor oboedientialis generat amorem familiarem, et amor familiaris amorem carnalem* [obedient love generates familiar love and familiar love generates carnal love]. There is a familiarity which is proper to our vocation, for instance, if I am the director of a community of sisters. This is not your usual assignment. In any case, here is where we must begin to exercise caution. If a familiarity gradually begins to develop, we should examine ourselves and discuss it openly with our confessor. After all, we human beings are never so easily deceived as in this area. Why? Because for one thing it flatters our nature. God set up a magnetic field between the sexes. This should not make us anxious, but realistic. We want to be on guard in this area and always allow our behavior to be checked by a healthy confessor with a lot of common sense.

It seems to me that this gives you a clear idea. Exercise caution! In

some cases you may need to exercise this caution toward persons of your own sex. In your country you don't have too worry much, but in Germany right now one must be more cautious. (...) When we are in such an atmosphere, we must exercise more caution, but not out of inner anxiety.

#### *Caution in What I Read*

Perhaps I may still add: "flight" from corresponding kinds of literature.

I have already told you that when our soul becomes tired and burnt out, when it does not feel any consolation or joy in God, then it easily turns to dangerous compensations. I think that such a dangerous compensation can be the reading of novels. It is like this: Whatever one is not allowed to enjoy in practice, one likes to savor in the imagination. It is hard to draw an exact line, for part of one's general education to read this or that novel. But we do not want to do it as a dangerous compensation. Our conscience must guide us. Some priests, interiorly burned out and not finding true joy in God, devour one novel after the other, which is naturally totally different from reading a novel for the sake of further education. In these things we should find the golden mean.

We should develop a certain *family pride* in showing the world that we, with our juridical bond, can live holy purity as well as all others. Although you already have Rome's approval, in your place I would tell myself that this is a point where we must show our worth as a new type of community. I am personally convinced that if you coherently live what your community stands for, you will get many, many vocations. What you stand for has a strong correspondence to the freedom-loving, democratic nature of your people. Our striving should be motivated by freely reaching for the highest goals, not by fear. Hence: juridical bonds only as much as necessary, but also as much as necessary!

You must tell this to your youth, too. I could imagine that serious young men between the age of 15 and 20 years might ask themselves: Why no vows? To read the ascetical handbooks is to believe that vows are the only way to go! Here you must always be ready to say with real conviction: We want to strive for exactly the same goals as members of religious orders, but along a different route. This immediately puts it in a different light. You must govern your institute and your young people more through ideas than organization. Of course, we need both.

That would be the first thing: the means of prevention. But regardless of the preventative means you use, never overhear those important words: out of love! When you separate the means of prevention from love, they

make one tired and pave the way to the anxieties of a compulsive nature.

### Means of Protection

Second come the means of protection. Here, too, you must always add: "out of love"! The means of protection include: industriousness, modesty and moderation.

#### i. Industriousness (Work and Purity)

We begin with industriousness. You must remember its psychological context. When you later read *Everyday Sanctity* pay close attention to how work is defined in the section on "attachment to work." It is one of the most important parts of the book. Here *work* is scientifically defined as *a participation in the creative and self-giving activity of God*<sup>8</sup>. I do not want to unfold this in detail here, for you can read it yourselves. But please keep this definition in mind, for it immediately draws the inner connecting line between a good work ethic and purity—participation in the creative and self-giving activity of God.

Is this not something you know from experience? God conceived of man as a creator, not an "agent of production"! This is part of the great social tragedy today—most people today are condemned to being mere "agents of production." If you have even a little feeling for what this means, you will have a boundless compassion for humanity today. Then you will understand why modern man suffers so much from sexual difficulties and compulsion. If man cannot unfold his creative powers in a God-willed manner through meaningful labor, he feels urged to unfold his creative energies on a lower level. You get what I am driving at.

Study this for yourselves. In times when your work is fruitful, for instance, when you are able to creatively engage in pastoral work, how quickly this silences many temptations! Or passing through a big city: If you have a task to fulfill, I guarantee that you will hardly be aroused even if all the women and girls would come your way; but if you pass through without any particular purpose, you will notice how quickly nature reacts. Or you become a secretary and you don't like the job at all. You have the feeling that your creativity is being stifled. I guarantee that you will soon be wrestling with serious temptation. Nature simply starts looking for a compensation on a lower level. What does this mean if I am a superior?

<sup>8</sup> *Everyday Sanctity* (1998), p. 103f.

I can exact obedience, but in the back of my mind I must constantly ask, "Have I found this confrere a task in which he can be creative?"

I must immediately add one more thing. We could say, perhaps, "There you have it; now I know why I have so many troubles, why I have so many temptations. I just don't understand why my superior pays so little attention to my wishes and needs." To this I give two answers:

You must always distinguish the two sides—on the one hand the superiors, on the other the subordinates. As a subordinate I must educate myself in a way that my life can go on even if I am assigned a task I do not like. In my view this is really something I should be able to do out of a *solidarity for our times*; millions of people today must live like this!

Now the second and even more important answer: If in a given stage of my life I do not have a task that stirs my creativity on the natural level, I must take it to a higher level. We must find a way to make it creative.

When you are hearing the confessions of the unemployed or of persons unhappy with their work, you must try to appeal to their creativity. When preaching you should also frequently appeal to this need. The powers of creativity must be elevated to a higher level. The loss of a satisfying job can be an opportunity to help Christ in the creative task of redeeming the world. This is, psychologically speaking, both legitimate and correct. You must not think that this is just some psychological trick. If you pay attention to life, you will find that many people choose to go this route. This cuts some slack for my superiors—it is not possible for a community to have superiors who can take absolutely *everything* into account.

For the good of the community some members *must* sacrifice satisfying work—for a time or permanently—out of love for the community. But now I want to stress the point which I hope is coming through: if you have a fervent *love for your community* then you will be able to engage yourself creatively even when you give up something; out of love for the family as well as out of love for Christ. Please refer to the corresponding chapter in *Everyday Sanctity* and give it some thorough study. There you will find everything that can be said on the topic, though applied to the laity in the world. We will have to apply it to our own lifestyle.

You now have a better grasp of the first point. In the forefront of his mind your superior will say, "As your superior I order you to do such and such." But in the back of his mind he will constantly be thinking: "Did I make the right decision?" Here and there something will trickle from the back of the mind to the front, but that does not always have to be the case.

With this you have an understanding of the inner connections between



purity and industriousness, and between purity, industriousness and the common good of the family.

It seems to me that this concept ought to be quite exciting for those of you with an interest in social justice. The world of today cries out and suffers and is in constant agony because work is either dissatisfying or not available at all. In such a situation, those of us who live in community should give the modern world a good example of how such a situation can be elevated to a higher level. But at the same time, you must also understand that we cannot help today's world overcome its sexual difficulties if mind, heart and will are not given a more creative activity or are not led to highest sanctity. You will feel it yourself: If someone must live a whole lifetime without satisfying work, it can only be done if he or she strives for the highest sanctity.

If you want to see the inner connection between industriousness and purity even more clearly, then let me put it this way: If I have a task to which I can devote my creative powers, it will give me—psychologically and humanly—so much joy that other kinds of gratification will not lay hold of me as strongly or at least not be constantly on my mind. What consequence should we draw from this? We should cultivate true joy in work, if for no other reason than to develop a healthy sexual attitude. In fact, we should make *the conscious cultivation of joy* a general practice, including joy in all the little steps of moral growth that we experience. Here is something we should do when we work with youth! We should not be overly quick to lay down the law and say: You must make lots of sacrifices! We should say that too, but then foster joy in each little victory. Whoever lacks joy in being noble and good will reach out his hand for the pleasures which are not good.

When we are creatively engaged—to mention a third connection—then we have no strength for false pleasures. To be sure, this is stated ideally, but you see the connection.

We therefore ask: *How must one's work be in detail* to fulfill this purpose? Allow me to draw on your power of observation again and draw your attention to what children do. Is it not true that *play* is the child's work? For our mission and for all education it is important to know that children really work and take their work seriously. Find what work is in the child—the child at play.

Why is play work for a child? Because it is the unfolding of the innate drive to be active. It follows that we must help children to learn how to play, because it is really their work.

I too must seek *real work*, but not in play, of course, for that qualifies as serious work only for children. I do not think it is my task to describe to you the fascinating features of the child at play.

Even if children are close to their parents, when they play they expect father and mother to either join the game or get out of the way; they are not allowed to disturb the game.

When do we work *this seriously*? As long as we are in the seminary we have no choice. But later? There we must sometimes override our own nature. Begin by saying: How do I use my leisure time? An institute like yours, more than other communities, is dependent on the free response of the individual members. I sometimes admire the Jesuits, like the elderly spiritual director you have here. What he hasn't studied as an old man! We must work. This is why we chose this vocation. We did not come here just to study the necessary minimum as quickly as possible and then—I will do what I must so I'm not thrown out, but that is all! We must really take our work seriously, the work of our chosen way in life. Do it for the sake of holy purity or any other motive, but the deepest reason must be this: because it is my way of making the Father happy! The Father is always at work, even today. Therefore I must also be active in my way. The bliss of heaven is not a matter of resting.

As a young community you should even have a certain pride in making a creative contribution, let's say as a professor. Don't just give lectures, but always make them something solid and worthwhile! We must enrich scholarship, even try to radiate something into the public. We must do that. Of course we do it to the extent our talents allow; not everyone will be a public figure. But in one way or another our industriousness must be of the first rank. We must not say: Unless you become like children...—and for the child play is work—therefore I will only play. How childish! For us play is no longer our work. Relaxation has its place, but otherwise we must engage in serious work. Life is too short and our enemies do not rest! Not to mention the devil who is always hard at work! I am reminded of what St. John Bosco once said, though I don't remember it verbatim. It went like this: "The devil works for a hundred; for how many must we work!" Something like this ought to penetrate the flesh and blood of the community. One cannot make such things a law. A superior must always reckon with a certain amount of half-heartedness, but I must not make half-heartedness my standard. I must strive for the highest!

This would also apply to a certain ongoing education, be it in philosophy (though this is not for everyone) or dogmatics or whatever. St.

Francis de Sales liked to say: Study is the eighth sacrament for a priest. If you take your cue from St. Francis de Sales, you must not only accept what is appealing, but the whole Francis. He is cut from whole cloth. On another occasion he expressed the opinion: A priest must have two eyes—one is piety and the other is science. Apply these words to yourself. Perhaps some of you must say: I don't have any eyes left, or perhaps you must say, "I need glasses..."

Many apostolic communities have even made it part of their constitutions that their priests must always be occupied with tasks pertinent to their ministry. I think we should make a note of such things. Give some thought to what you could do. There are many, of course, who must first acquire a taste for such things. As a result, we must see to it in our youth work that the young candidates acquire a taste for hard work. Nor would I ever consider it a good idea to harp against people having *pet tasks*! Just think of what happens when we get older—we always remain motivated for our favorite task. Of course I must never cultivate such a favorite task to an extreme. It takes a skilled pedagogical hand to make sure a pet task is always placed in the service of the whole. It must not become a passion which absorbs the whole person. Take, for instance, someone who collects insects. I can collect insects because I like to and because it is later in the service of science; but the collecting must remain in healthy bounds; after all, it is not my main vocation. You notice the way it is with these things—they can be looked at first one way and then another.

I don't know what more I should say in this direction. Perhaps you should think of how you spend your summer vacations. How do you spend them? *Relaxation* is important, of course. But if I relax for two straight months every year—"unless you become like children...", but here in quotation marks!—how much energy is lost for work! I am also convinced that one's strength is not revitalized by doing nothing. Even modern doctors say that. Our vacations should not consist of doing nothing, but involve a healthy change of work.

Creative activity is a hallmark of man. If we observe the child's work, namely play, then we find a third characteristic: the child at play is always a *focused* worker. A child devotes himself to play as if this were the only game in the whole world.

We, too, should fulfill our tasks calmly and resolutely. Those of us who are still younger should try to get a broad education in multiple fields. Suppose you are active in a school. When you have done that for five or ten years, you should try your hand at preaching. Will you be able to do

that? You must always think rationally—I want to prepare for old age. What will I be able to do when I get older? "I can't preach, I'm not good at hearing confessions; I've never had the practice..."

And when we are superiors, we should see the future of our confreres somewhat in this light. Not everyone will be a workhorse, but you can make sure that all are able and willing to work. I should always try to make a contribution wherever I am and in the areas where I still can. I must be so qualified that I can always do something to help build the kingdom of God. As long as I can, I want to put my strength to good use. Not everything needs to be planned [by the community], but this asks of me all the more self-initiative.

Or I have a nice relationship with my confreres. What kind of initiative can I awaken in the others? What is dormant in them, if only the hidden talents were stirred a bit! I sometimes think that if [older] diocesan priests had someone who would encourage them in this or that direction, what good things they still could do! This is one of the advantages of a community. There are associations which have something like the charism of *inspiring the talents* of those around them. You see, if I have a confrere who has a talent in this or that area—for instance, as a speaker—then I should encourage him; that should make me happy! At first we may feel inferior [when we see the talents of others], but we should get over that. We must find opportunities to develop talents and courageously promote them! Don't say things like: What a dumb mistake; he'll just do it again! We all learn by making mistakes. This is especially true for a community which still lacks a tradition. Everyone needs to carve his own niche. And we can do that if we help each other out. When we want only the best for souls, for God, and for the community, everything will turn out well. We all want to be a prairie fire and be grateful for those who have blazed the trail before us. Again and again, new paths need to be cut on the trail to heaven.

If we want to protect our purity, we should invest in relentless, total and true industriousness. And now it is lunchtime; I have kept you at "work" for quite a while!

## TWENTY-FOURTH CONFERENCE

We have shown that the second essential element of genuine childlikeness is childlike purity. Our longing grows the more we recognize and acknowledge childlike purity as something instinctive and second-nature, though always relatively speaking. Within the realm of the possible, we too wish to be pure even to the depths of our subconscious life—pure, in harmony with self, animated in spirit, morally sound, penetrated by God. This is also the reason for the secret nostalgia and longing which stirs within when we see the pure eyes of a child.

We discussed what we could do to maintain, moderately preserve and reconquer this instinctive purity. We gave two answers: We must maintain the purity obligatory to our state in life and we must strive to secure a high degree of magnanimous purity, that is, to maintain or reconquer the delicate glow of purity.

Three kinds of means aid us in this. First come the means of prevention which we never want to use apart from love. (By the way, it is totally against my usual approach to go into these things in such detail, but it is important to show how a healthy love can express itself practically and how the ultimate motive [of love] can inspire the secondary motives [of self-control].) Then come the means of protection: industriousness, modesty, moderation.

## ii. Modesty

In this second area one often speaks of *modesty* and *sense of shame*. How can we define these two things? The first is a virtue and the other is a drive. One can differentiate between modesty and a sense of shame, though we do not have the time to do that here. Under *modesty* we can understand *nature's instinctive reaction to veil that which is bad or less good in the interest of the dignity of the person*. I think this gives us a definition which mentions everything which resonates and must resonate in the soul.

The *feeling of shame* (or *sense of shame*) is a consequence of original sin. It is part of the burden on our nature caused by original sin. The feeling of shame did not exist before the fall because nothing was bad or less good. We can therefore say: the feeling of shame is not only a consequence of original sin, but a consequence reminding us of things which embarrass our nature. As St. Augustine puts it, before the fall Adam and

Eve were clothed with the robe of sanctifying grace. This is an image, of course. He means that nothing in them was in disharmony. But after they sinned concupiscence was awakened and the drives became rebellious. Ever since, the human person feels shame when concupiscence stirs. A noble person always has a certain longing for the lost harmony when he feels the drives beginning to rage within. Both theology and psychology tell us that the life of the drives is most rebellious in the sexual sphere. Because of this the general feeling of shame which we feel whenever the drives are agitated is especially keen in connection with sexual matters. St. Augustine points out in his own way how the sex drive can often become so strong that a person loses good judgment. Because of this he generally calls the sex organs the "shame parts" because the arousal of these organs normally awakens the feeling of shame.

We have heard and said that the feeling of shame is a regrettable consequence of original sin. But here is a classical example of how God can make all things work out for the best. I can therefore say that the *feeling of shame is also a consequence of original sin for which we can be grateful*. If God knows how to make all things work out for the best, even sin, how much more will this apply to the consequences of sin! What are the advantages of having a feeling of shame? First of all, this uneasiness always reminds us of our original condition, awakening our longing for paradise and perhaps even increasing our humility. This is a more theological perspective. Secondly, psychologically speaking, our experience and observation tell us how strong the sex drive can sometimes become. In his wisdom God placed a counterbalance in the same zone. If our only defense were the will to withstand sexual lust, we would fail many times. But he has, as I said, placed a counterbalance in the same zone. What am I trying to say? Feelings of shame—sexual feelings: one feeling pairs up with another. What does this mean? The feeling of shame is a natural-irrational counterbalance in the same zone, i.e. of the same type that corresponds to the outbursts of the sex drive. From this you can conclude: the more sensitive our feeling of shame is, the more our sexuality will be on solid ground. From this you can conclude: If we want to be magnanimous and live our personality type as coherently as possible, we must also give more careful attention to cultivating the feeling of shame [i.e., modesty]—even when we are alone!—just as others do, for instance, when they are trying to avoid serious sin. When we cultivate our sense of shame in this area, it is likewise a very strong way to safeguard our sexual life.

Let me immediately add that a healthy feeling of shame is a strong protection. But there is also such a thing as an *unhealthy feeling of shame*. I think I ought to come back to my favorite thought at this point, a thought which I would guess you have made your own by now: If we want to be a healthy community, if we want to stand for a new type of person who gives the answer to the modern crises of our times, then we must see to it that our sexual life is healthy, to the extent that this is possible in a nature burdened by original sin. Take care, therefore, that your young people retain a healthy feeling of shame.

When is the feeling of shame unhealthy? Let me briefly go into this, even if for the moment it does not apply to us. *The feeling of shame is unhealthy first, when someone has lost all sense of shame*. This is clear. Secondly, the feeling of shame is unhealthy *when our native unaffectedness becomes too rigid and fearful*<sup>1</sup>. Lack of unaffectedness signals the lack of a healthy feeling of shame.

You might examine more closely why so many priests suffer so much from this lack of unaffectedness. Why is it that we are more prone to losing our unaffected spontaneity, including in the sexual sphere? I can give two answers: the one we know, the other is perhaps less clear.

First of all, a lack of unaffectedness can have its roots in a lack of purity. Let me remind you that persons whose interior life is sexually contaminated will hear and see everything sexually. Anyone with an unhealthy attitude to sex will lack the proper unaffectedness.

Secondly, a lack of unaffectedness can also have its source in the lack of a supernatural attitude toward sexuality. It is clear: If I do not know the great *law of making sexuality transparent to God*, the only way I can see sexuality [is physically], and I will lack the proper unaffectedness. A new perspective must therefore be created in the light of faith. Then I will see through to the foundation of the soul of man and the soul of woman as through a window, perceiving the vibrant divine life therein. With this I have a new view on life which restores much calm to my sex drive.

Now as I observe life, I see that there are persons who can think supernaturally about sexuality but still lack the proper unaffectedness. I must therefore add a second word. There is a *faithfilled idea-centered* and a

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<sup>1</sup> Unaffectedness (German: *Unbefangenheit*) refers to the soul's ability to encounter persons of the opposite sex and grasp the ordinary sexual realities of life without awkwardness, fear or exaggerated shame.

*faithfilled life-centered view of sexuality*. Let me give you some examples.

If I grew up from childhood on with an emotional life which lacked unaffected spontaneity, or to put it somewhat differently: If the mystery of life was first taught to me in a back alley and I emotionally associate God only knows what kind of images with sex, it is later very difficult to gain the proper unaffectedness. Here the psychologist in you must see the whole person. The mind can absorb a transfigured viewpoint relatively quickly, but the emotions must work at it more. If my feelings have absorbed an emotional orientation in this area totally contrary [to what the mind has learned], you will see how extraordinarily difficult it is for mature priests to gain a view which is also transfigured on the emotional level.

If you, as psychologists and theologians, would ask me what can be done to free such feelings again, at least a little, and give them something more of the proper unaffectedness, I would give you several answers. For now let me just touch on the main thoughts.

Purely psychologically speaking, it can be very helpful for someone whose emotions lack this unaffectedness to meet a noble priest whose nature is simply plain and unaffected and inspires the confidence to share his emotional difficulties. I am speaking strictly from the psychological viewpoint; it almost sounds as if it were coming from individual psychoanalysis, but no; these are all general and healthy observations of life. If someone whose emotions are too inhibited and he experiences the presence of someone who is totally calm and unaffected, then what is transmitted is a very great gift: the apprehensive person gradually absorbs, on the emotional level, the unaffected calm of the other person.

The supernatural approach is to take more advantage of calling on the Holy Spirit again.

It is not our intent to give a course on forming the sexual life. But for a community aiming for greatness it is extremely important that you as educators form your youth from the very outset in a way which is sexually sound. In my opinion, if you receive young men with too many problems in this area you will not be able to keep them. They may mind their manners, but whoever is too anxious and too strongly and constantly plagued by psychic sexual compulsion is not, I think, someone you can keep. We apply our selection principle, including the criterion of a certain native healthiness which can be formed in an organic context. I don't think it is bad if someone suffers from this or that problem, after all: "I am human and nothing human is far from me." But I must have the interior strength to bear and endure [my flaws] without too much evident suffering. This is

important, for experience shows that upon reaching full maturity it is not uncommon for priests to become libertinists who suffer too much from such compulsions; and when the compulsion becomes too strong and lasts too long, the danger looms again and again to weaken and say: "Forget it! Just throw the whole thing overboard!" We want to try to cultivate a delicate sense of shame in this area of life.

If you want *concrete suggestions*, let me put it them in the form of questions: Should not the way I go to bed and lie in bed reflect how I would approach and behave at the altar? Of course this is always meant with the proper adaptations to the context. I am intentionally putting this rather bluntly because I must always be noble in my entire being.

The same applies to when I go to the gym or to the doctor or need measures to maintain my health which involve removing my clothes. Such things are justified if they serve a definite purpose. But do I not gradually lose something of the delicate glow of purity if I am too free with such things? For the sake of my spiritual health it may be better to not do certain things.

We must ask ourselves if we should not reform our thinking and feeling in this area. In general, modern Catholicism is too strongly focused on the moral theological side of the question: "Is it a sin...?" This is not our foremost question. We should ask: What is more appropriate in keeping with the finest laws of who we are? Out of interior freedom—not out of fear—I must make demands of myself. If I do it out of fear I will become sick. If there is too much fear in me, then I must strive for a certain health and well-being through an application of *agere contra*.

### iii. Moderation

A third means is *moderation*. Ask yourselves what moderation is and think about the possible inner connection between moderation and purity. Moderation involves *disciplining the drive to eat*. Souls who take the spiritual life seriously, especially women, experience great difficulty if they yield too much to their drive to eat. It does injury to their noble feeling of life, is perceived to be a defeat of their better self. If we strive to discipline our drive to eat as a pleasure drive, we indirectly build a protective wall around purity. That much is obvious.

We can pose the practical question: How should we practice moderation in eating and drinking? Ascetical masters tell us that by and large we should prescribe an amount: I will eat that this and that much of this and that food. This—not fasting—is the key to the mastery of the drive; we do

not want to fall prey to arbitrariness.

Something similar can be said about *sleeping*. When I am alone it does not matter exactly when I get up, but it must not be left to what we feel like in the morning. If I can sleep longer during vacation I will tell myself, "That is legitimate, but I will decide when I rise now, not in the morning!" If I leave it for the morning, you know the result! A noble and morally upstanding person works to counteract the arbitrariness of the drives. This is the main thing. A little more or a little less is not the main concern.

There are people who can fast to an extreme, but afterwards they eat and drink to make up for it! One sometimes hears of Africans who could eat an elephant and afterwards fast for a long time. Moral excellence comes from mastery of the drives. And there is a kind of mortification which cuts into the flesh by faithfulness to a regular routine.

### Means of Fortification

Would you like to know the last group of means? These are the *means of fortification*. They include the reception of the sacraments, prayer and general mortification. If you like, you can precisely examine the inner connection on your own. Just let me remind you to never see these means in isolation from but always in connection with love. Love is the ultimate motive and most basic protection for our purity. The meaning of our virginal purity is unconditional love—we want to give God the strength of our love without reserve. This means that the more I give my love to God without reserve, the more naturally I can live my purity.

### b. Rich and Fruitful Purity

[As we stated earlier (p. 233), there are three characteristics of childlike purity: instinctive, rich and fruitful, enchanting and tranquil.]

If we want to observe the child again and ask about the second characteristic of childlike purity, then we will find that it is *rich and fruitful*. Close observers of life should study children from this standpoint.

Let me state this metaphysically. Why do the drives of a child normally remain in harmony for so many years? The psychological answer is this: Because the child lives in a spiritual, otherworldly world. The child feels at home in the world of the angels, playing with the angels or with the Child Jesus. What am I driving at? The purity of a child is *a rich purity*. The child lives in a supernatural or at least an otherworldly world, keeping its concupiscence in check.

This allows one to observe the very great law of the positive content of

purity. If I keep focused on the positive meaning of purity, my purity will be a rich one. If I do not, it will be a tortured purity. And we do not want to be pure and virginal in a tortured way; no, our purity must be rich!

What consequence does this have? It is the same one that our community points out to us with such vigor. We want to strive for magnanimity as a natural safeguard for our purity.

In educating your youth you should not talk a lot about purity. I was also active in a school at one time. It was at the time of the [First] World War. I never talked about purity until they were sent off to war. I always showed positive goals. It is clear: this is what safeguards purity. Talking a lot about it does not do much. Here and there you may need to do it on the private level, but if you have created an atmosphere of magnanimous striving, your difficulties will not be too great. And the more I try to give to God the power of my love, the more self-understood it will be that I am on the best path to a healthy formation of sexuality.

Childlike purity is also *extremely fruitful*. Why? First of all it has an impact because of its richness. It is extremely important to pay attention to how the imagination of your young people is formed. If we could cultivate it more, including in our boarding schools, then purity would be more secure. If the imagination is poisoned, you will see that the fruitfulness which comes from purity has no chance.

What is the source of my purity's fruitfulness? We could mention a number of things.

Purity fosters an extremely deep knowledge of God. "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God!" (Mt 5,8). You could even study the psychological reasons for this. Purity has an incredibly powerful effect on the growth of love of God. Furthermore, purity—especially virginal purity—is fruitful because it shows married people how the drive can be mastered in a heroic way with the help of grace. This can and will and must inspire married people to remain faithful to their marital chastity and purity with the help of grace. The positive meaning of purity is being totally given to the things of God. There are women who, as they become older, direct the power of their love to love to a dog or cat; in that case it would have been better if they had gotten married.

Let me return to industriousness. We must work for the kingdom of God. That is the meaning of the virginal life. We must be fruitful. If we are not, we are running away from real life. Married men have it harder than we do. How must they work and worry for a wife and children! And we, we do a little something and then never finish it.

It is important that we have a better understanding of the inner connections, the psychology of nature and supernature. This is something we should stress a great deal in our sermons and other presentations. In these days I have sometimes had the thought: if someone other than I had said this to you, you might have been offended by it. But when you see all these things in their context you accept it as a matter of course. The objective truth, the objective context is that law which I personally hold in such high esteem: *ordo essendi est ordo agendi* [the order of being is the norm for the order of action]. When we live this way, we will be interiorly clear and be more energetic in all that we do.

### c. Enchanting and Tranquil Purity

The third characteristic of childlike purity is its *charm and tranquility*. These expressions barely need to be explained.

Why are children so *charming*? Because they are so spontaneously unaffected and pure, and because this unaffectedness and purity reminds us spontaneously of the beauty, glory and happiness of paradise. Is not a genuinely pure person whose being radiates the glow of unaffectedness truly enchanting? You may find great beauty in nature—viewing a forest, losing yourself in the stars, taking in the majesty of the sea—but if you are a true educator, nothing will be more beautiful to you than a person who belongs to God. In a way, a true educator delights in it almost to a fault. We should make it our habit to observe people in the beauty of their belonging to God. On the outside they may be unattractive and ugly, but this will not matter, for the beauty meant here is the one which shines forth from the soul. Try it! Observe truly pure, noble persons. The child is a powerful *sursum corda* [lift up your hearts]. Become what you are!

Ask yourselves why it is that the spontaneity of children has a *calming* effect, especially giving tranquility to those who are suffering difficulties in purity.

Here too I do not think I should go into detail; observe life for yourselves! How much tranquility radiates from those whose purity is inspired by love! How much calm is in those whose subconscious life of the soul is totally penetrated by genuine love of God! And how many people today need this simple tranquility! They do not need a lot of words, they need living examples of divine life and of plain, unaffected purity.

You must not fear that you will not be ready for life if you educate yourselves and those entrusted to your care in this simple way. Here I could give you many examples from my own pastoral experience. Persons

who have grown into God in such a down-to-earth manner can later go through the greatest filth without suffering serious damage. Now the secret is not that one must first accustom oneself to filth! This is not true! *I must accustom myself to the sun*, must become the sun myself, then the rays that go through me will later go through the filth as well, without the soul being contaminated. Our entire education must have a similar orientation. Then we will do the right thing, including in the missions; we will not be prudish but have a firm grasp of when something is fitting or in keeping with the good morals of a foreign culture. It will never make us uneasy. In this context we can interpret the words, "If your eye is pure, your entire body is pure as well" (Mt 6,22; Lk 11,34) to mean (even if their original meaning is different): Our purity is best protected when our heart belongs to God.

This is the tragedy of our education: we place too much stock in duty and not enough in magnanimity. We forget that man is an organism and that we must take into account the finest details of who he is and how they interrelate. Every educator must therefore be a psychologist immersed in God's grace. He does not need to have studied psychology, but he must always see the entire organic reality which is man. For instance, think of how many people face acute temptations against purity. Upon closer examination I often find that the reason lies in having become careless about modesty in minor matters. We must remind ourselves about such things. Carelessness in these lesser matters is naturally not a sin, but the Christian life is not only about avoiding sin: it is about *seeing how one thing affects another*. I cannot say: I will go to the edge of the abyss and then stop. Then it is too late. At the edge of the abyss it is too easy to suddenly fall over. I cannot tell myself that I can do everything just because it is not a sin. Those seeking the highest ideals are best protected against disaster. With this I have presented the most important things to be said about purity.

### 3. Childlike Simplicity

There is still a third element which is essential to genuine childlikeness—simplicity. It will be enough for you if I simply refer back to what I said earlier about simplicity, adding a few further comments to round out the picture. During our days together I have been thinking that perhaps I should write a little book about childlikeness. Everything about it would then need to be presented in greater detail.

I have discussed simplicity with you in its highest form. I now compare simplicity or even the entire edifice of childlikeness with a tree and

see simplicity as a certain fruit. I don't know if I make the right comparison when I say that the root of this tree must be humility. True simplicity is unthinkable without true humility. Furthermore, the trunk of this tree must be truthfulness. This gives us two important elements to round out the picture of genuine childlikeness. If there were time, I would be obliged to give you a talk about humility and honesty.

#### *False understanding of humility*

Humility is one of the least understood virtues in the Church and religious life today. If we had a clear concept of humility, we would save ourselves many grim experiences. If we work in boarding schools or are responsible for forming our vocations, we must properly stress this central virtue. Purity is safeguarded naturally if you form your young people with a healthy humility and total love of God. I only mention this in passing. If I would decide to write a book about childlikeness and had the time, I would add many important things about humility at this point. You would then notice how our way of thinking truly rests on age-old foundations. These are ancient truths; they just sound totally different when they are applied to modern life.

This is also the purpose of pedagogy. An educator must present the perennial truths as befits modern man. Modern thinking is so mechanistic. Today's educators who teach humility without love are creating sick people. I mean this! No moral virtue is so incapable of existence without love as humility. If you separate it from love, you make the soul sick. Instead of becoming humble through the religious life, many have been made sick. We must be careful. There are enough spiritual cripples without this! There are enough inferiority complexes to drag around without this! It doesn't have to be this way. We must see to it that inferiority complexes are overcome.

#### *Healthy humility*

Healthy humility is the remedy for morbid inferiority and attention-seeking complexes. The way humility is cultivated and taught often backfires. It makes inferiority and attention-seeking complexes worse. Inferiority and humility are completely different. *Everyday Sanctity* briefly notes in a number of places that healthy humility—always united with love—helps sick nerves to deal with life<sup>2</sup>. I am convinced that functional

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<sup>2</sup> *Everyday Sanctity* (Waukesha, 1998), p. 124. See also p. 44f, 173-179.

nervous maladies can only be healed through humility imbued with love.

I am reminded of an example that took place not long ago. A sister was so jittery that she not only jumped but also let out a shout at the slightest noise. She has been completely freed from this condition. How? When her nerves begin to fray, she tries to awaken joy in her heart by reminding herself that the bad things she does deserve a little punishment and she gladly suffers it together with God. How many other things did she try before this! Of course this is not always the answer. But when we want to become a healthy community, we must stress the importance of having a great love and healthy humility. It does not mean just giving in.

If I have the chance to present this in more detail later on, you will find that what I say is an exact fit to what the spiritual masters of the Middle Ages taught, though in a different framework. People in the Middle Ages could look at one thing separated from another, but modern man must see the total picture. Our spiritual director (who is wagging his finger at me for mentioning his name!) also says that our spirituality must be more psychological. To use an image, our spirituality focuses too one-sidedly on the vertical connections to the exclusion of the horizontal ones. A young man once entered a novitiate and learned that he should be humble. So he learned the 12 steps of humility of St. Bernard. Soon he had climbed all the steps and reached the top. My, was he proud of himself! How typical... I go from step to step but overlook the other virtues. We must see the total picture of our spiritual life.

In fact, this is something typical of everyday sanctity. It carefully tries to bring nature and grace into harmony. Think of it as a river with two banks. One bank is grace and the other is nature. The river touches all the essential elements of the supernatural shore, and touches all the essential elements of the natural shore, but its originality is the unique integration of nature and grace. Of course, if I am just a psychologist and not a philosopher and dogmatist, I can easily go astray. Everything must be seen in connection with an organic total picture.

With that we have covered the most important things about the essence of childlikeness. If we now take a moment to review, we see that we have raised three fundamental pillars and still need one more. The first pillar: the value of childlikeness. The second pillar: the root of childlikeness. The third pillar: the essence of childlikeness.

## THE FOURTH FUNDAMENTAL PILLAR: WAYS TO CHILDLIKENESS

I promised that you would hear all the main points relevant to our topic. I must therefore still briefly outline for you the *ways to childlikeness*, even if it makes tonight's talk somewhat longer.

Our desire is to get to know the ways of wisdom. Which ways do we know? I will give you one kind of answer and then spend more time giving another kind of answer.

The first kind of answer as we look for ways to childlikeness means looking for ways to wisdom.

We should remember everything we discussed about childlikeness as a natural drive and as a drive to God. If we want to know the ways of childlikeness, this is one answer. I must do *everything I can to strengthen the drive in me to know, love and serve God*, bringing to life in me the gift of wisdom. This means I must *become a master of humility, a master of trust, a master of prayer, and a master of self-denial*. These are the means which help make wisdom an effective part of my life; they must also be the means to a genuine childlikeness that comes from wisdom, enhancing my natural drive for childlikeness.

What can I do to attain this? The answers are things I have already discussed: I can and must either try to make up for what I lack (by trying to find a living 'You' with whom I can be a child), or rejuvenate what I already have, or communicate more with children or childlike people. We have already discussed the philosophical foundations of this premise.

This is one kind of answer. I repeat it only to make sure that we keep it clearly in mind.

The second kind of answer—referring again to something we have discussed—involves *three ways to childlikeness*. They are:

1. the ecclesial way,
2. the liturgical way, and
3. the Marian way.

Here I am separating things which naturally belong together. The separation is only for the sake of highlighting the distinct accents. In the end we must try to go all three ways.

### 1. The Ecclesial Way

What do I mean by "ecclesial way"? Let me remind you of a typical statement of that strong proponent of papal infallibility, [Matthias]



Scheeben. He was a speculative dogmatic scholar, but also a man with a keen psychological sense. With a few strokes he made it clear that this dogma is not just about infallibility as an abstract concept but the infallibility of a concrete, living person. It was not just about the papacy being infallible, but about the infallibility of the pope.

What I am calling the ecclesial way is what classical asceticism (for instance, St. Augustine) called ecclesial spirit. Please apply this specifically to childlikeness: I should be childlike in my attitude to the Holy Father; this is apparently what the Holy Spirit wants through the infallibility of the pope. It is about one person being a child vis-a-vis another person. Is this not a way to childlikeness? I have told you about the importance of childlikeness as something we experience in a relationship with another person, either for the first time or in a new way; but you can take it a step further and apply it in an immediate way (with the necessary adaptations) to the authority of the Church. With this I do not negate what I said about obedience. I can also be frank toward Church authority. This is not a lack of childlikeness.

## 2. The Liturgical Way

You must hear how important healthily understood liturgy can be for childlikeness, simply because the *ad Patrem*<sup>3</sup> is so much *at the heart of the liturgy*.

If you want to teach childlikeness, both theoretically and practically, you must celebrate the Mass with deep reverence and in keeping with its spirit. Because the Mass is so central today, I will focus on it rather one-sidedly, but similar things apply to the entire liturgy. The attitude, prayer and sacrifice of the liturgy are always directed to the Father. By being a simple child I can contribute to the spirit of the liturgical movement.

There are two currents in the liturgical movement. The first is too idea-centered. When one focuses too exclusively on being a member of Christ and fails to see the *ad Patrem*, the Mass will never lead to an interior transformation. If you meet people who are too liturgically overt, it is often a front for an overly idea-centered religiosity; for them belonging to Christ is merely an idea. Only those who become simple children can eventually correctly understand Holy Mass. We want to become children

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<sup>3</sup> Literally: "to the Father," namely the father-centeredness of the liturgy whose prayers are primarily directed to the Father.

so that we become liturgical and vice versa!

Please consider how the *ad Patrem* demonstrates itself in Holy Mass and in the entire liturgy. After all, the law governing the style, organization and thrust of the liturgy is: *per Christum in Spiritu Sancto ad Patrem* [through Christ in the Holy Spirit to the Father]. What is the Mass? I will give you only one answer: it is a means of paying homage. What do I mean? In Holy Mass Christ pays childlike homage to the Father; through Holy Mass we should similarly learn, in Christ, to pay childlike homage to the Father.

Perhaps these few strokes are enough to show you that the liturgy is a remarkable school of childlikeness. We must find our way only to its essence, never confusing liturgy with liturgical form. And what is its essence? Through Christ in the Holy Spirit to the Father.

Here you would do well to look into the Benedictine spirit which you have in your community. As an aside, your institute is in some way Jesuit and Benedictine and Franciscan. This would make interesting material for a doctoral thesis! If it is healthy, a new direction and personality type such as yours will integrate all existing currents into a unique mixture. This alone is ample justification for existing as a community, even if we ignore the supernatural side. Every great new movement is constructed in a similar manner. To be sure, there are movements which answer extremes. But such extreme movements awaken other extremes. Your identity is a healthy one for a spiritual movement. I think we could prove that the spiritual life of your community contains everything that existed previously and yet is something new because you take it one step further in a unique way. From the perspective of cultural philosophy this would be proof enough that you are right in giving your life for such an ideal. You must only see the idea clearly. But this is enough. We are looking at the liturgical way. It is a way to childlikeness.

A third way is the Marian way. Perhaps I should save these thoughts for tonight so that we do not look at everything at once. Good things should be absorbed a little at a time.

## TWENTY-FIFTH CONFERENCE

**3. The Marian Way**

The third way we mentioned as a source and way to childlikeness is the Marian way. This is not surprising. When we look back on our lives, many of us will be able to say that we owe our childlike attitude toward God to a simple, childlike relationship with the Mother of God. I am reminded of Scheeben again. In his great confrontation with his opponents, especially the opponents of the Vatican Council<sup>1</sup> and, at least in his view, of the Immaculata, he emphatically stressed that God in his wondrous wisdom adapts supernature to nature. And just as God gave man the *need for a mother* and gives him a mother, God also adapts the supernatural order to such interior attitudes and needs. In the supernatural order God has taken into account man's need for a mother and given him a Mother. And just as in the natural order the mother has the task to awaken the child's love, to bind it to herself and then to direct it to the father of the family, it is likewise Mary's task in the kingdom of heaven and here on earth to awaken childlike love and direct this love to the Father.

We do well to always keep ultimate principles in mind, including in Marian devotion. It always takes time to experience particular truths. But we must know the truth and in the proper time pass it on to others. This may help you understand why the reigning Holy Father, in his encyclical about the priesthood<sup>2</sup>, expresses the wish that we priests develop a simple childlike relationship not only with our heavenly Father, but also with our heavenly Mother.

In fact you should always draw the connecting lines which pass through the kingdom of God. We look back once more on the world we left behind. With Langbehn we can say that childlikeness is best learned from the Blessed Mother.

I think that all of this, like the experiences we have ourselves, proves that the Marian way is truly a highly useful way to genuine childlikeness.

I am sure that we did not speak fancy theories about this when we were young; on the contrary, our childlikeness simply grew—into a childlike relationship with Mary as our Mother and our Queen. By leading the youth in our own care to Mary, I think we ought to support their devotion and

<sup>1</sup> Vatican Council I, 1869-1870.

<sup>2</sup> Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, December 20, 1935.

satisfy their need to find a sheltering heart. But all the same, genuine childlikeness must not limit itself to shelter-seeking, but further grow into *being a knight of Mary*. This explains the simple way children often learn this: they turn to the Blessed Mother in their needs and helplessness, and from her learn how to fight for the kingdom of God, learning to selflessly surrender themselves to the interests of Christ and the Triune God. Do you notice how these simple expressions "Blessed Mother," "our Mother" and "Queen" contain everything which we have discussed during these days?

Now, I don't think you should go and tell all this to your youth. You must be wise educators who know how to make the right choice and repeat over and over a few select thoughts. There is always a difference between what I know for myself and what I pass on to my own.

Once more: such thinking immediately creates an atmosphere, the Marian atmosphere, and convinces us from the start that *the Marian way* is not just one way among many, but is *a preferred way to childlikeness in the presence of God the Father*.

If I may, let me present a few thoughts systematically, although more in outline form. It presents enough material to be a whole course on its own. I can tell you that Mary *demand*s and *fosters* childlikeness toward the heavenly Father.

**a. Mary Demands Childlikeness toward the Father**

Our Lady demands childlikeness:

1. through her words,
2. through her being, and
3. through her actions.

*Through her Words*

The Blessed Mother demands childlikeness *through her words*. I will mention one to you that sounds forth so strongly from the Gospel: "Do whatever he tells you!" (Jn 2,5). It points us to Christ—the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14,6). What does he tell us? "Unless you become like children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." I consider it Mary's favorite task as the official Christ-bearer to point us to Christ so that his word takes life in us and becomes effective.

*Through her Being*

The Blessed Mother also demands childlikeness *through her being*. Here too you clearly see the great connecting themes of the kingdom of God. Mary became our Mother through her free will and conscious Yes.

That happened the moment she became the Mother of Our Lord. And from the cross she was solemnly declared our Mother once more: "Behold your Mother!" "Behold your Son!" (Jn 19,26f).

Let me remind you of what we said about the being and attitude of a father. As you know, "father" and "fatherliness" are relational-correlative terms. You know that fatherliness, father-being, and father-attitude do not exist unless the child exists—the child in being and attitude. Does this not apply exactly to Mary's motherhood, though on a lower level [than toward God's fatherhood]? She has accepted motherliness and the duties and rights of a mother; hence in her very being is the need that we be her children, both in being and attitude.

Hear once more the words of Pestalozzi and apply it to Our Lady (on a lower level, of course): The greatest misfortune of mankind today is the lost sense of childlikeness toward God. May I not say in adaptation: *A very great misfortune for Christianity today is the weakened, perhaps even lost sense of childlikeness toward the Blessed Mother?! This may not be true of you, but in the Catholic world of today, especially among young priests, there is a notable rejection of the motherhood of our dear Blessed Mother. They are willing to see her as the ideal image of the soul united with God, but they hesitate to present her in everyday life as Mother of the people (even though they do not reject this statement in theory) and fail to make this a vibrant part of the awareness of the faithful. Does this not do great damage to Christianity today?*

Why should this be? Pestalozzi's reason applies in this case too. Why is the greatest misfortune lost sense of childlikeness toward God? Because it prevents God from unfolding his fatherly-educational activity. Is it not also so with Mary, even if on a different level? Like the heavenly Father she needs our childlike willingness to be formed if, as our educator, she is to effectively mold us.

I don't know if you will agree with me if I, extending the thought, even dare to say: As mother, Our Lady must have an extraordinarily strong drive to educate; that is simply part of the essence of motherhood. She could barely unfold this motherly-educational activity with Our Lord, her first-born. Would we not expect that in her motherly-educational activity she almost *needs* laterborn children who are willing to be formed by her? Be that as it may, in the context of the entire retreat we understand how one can correctly say that Mary demands childlikeness of us not only through her work, but also through her maternal being.

### *Through her Actions*

Am I also correct in saying that she demands this attitude of childlikeness through *her activity*, through her effectiveness? From the very start I must mention that Our Lady has exercised her motherly authority in an abundant, even lavish measure in each of us and in the entire family. I do not know to what extent you are or can be convinced by the facts that the Blessed Mother has constantly ruled and watched over your family with her prayer and protection. Nonetheless, you would be well advised to instill a deep and tender Marian devotion in your upcoming generations and in your own hearts. Do you really want to neglect a means of cultivating childlikeness as important as Marian devotion?

Would it be indiscreet for me to say: If God blesses my activity in your midst, then view at least this fact as a gift of our dear Blessed Mother? Even if I have barely broached the subject during these days, I am not ashamed to profess that I always view my entire priestly activity as a work and instrument in her hands. If I have been able to do you a small service during these days, then the gratitude should be directed to our dear Blessed Mother, for I always attribute it consciously to her. This is also why I am always so calm in my work: I see myself as a work and instrument dependent totally on her.

You may have many more and even better proofs that Our Lady is behind your work. If this is true, I think that you will see that all the good she does for your family implies a practical demand: We must respond with the spirit of childlikeness.

In fact, a quite remarkable reality is how your institute has been able to remain true to itself. It would be worthwhile to study your history and describe the forces that were at work, because despite all struggles, your community is still so faithful to its original spirit. Did the work come about independently from her? I don't know the answer to this question. I only pose it so that you look into it yourself. But even without the answer to the question I think I can say that we have experienced enough of her motherly activity to conclude that all of it is a call to simple childlikeness which we should not ignore. Mary demands our childlikeness. As a result, when I lead my youth to her and when our family finds the way to her, then the degree of her acceptance implies the degree of her constant appeal to us to be her children.

To my knowledge, Mary is your patroness under two titles<sup>3</sup>. What does it mean that she is your patroness? Was this always so? Did you take her as your patroness from the very beginning? This would be proof that Our Lady had her hand over you in a special way. If she is your patroness, she plainly has the rights of a patroness over you and your entire family.

### **b. Mary Fosters Childlikeness toward the Father**

Secondly, I may point out that the Blessed Mother *fosters our childlikeness*. How? First, by giving us a classical example of childlikeness through the way she lived. Secondly, because she shapes and forms childlikeness in us and among us in a classical way.

#### *Through Her Example*

In a classical and captivating way, *Mary is an example of the ideal of childlikeness*. This would give us more than enough material for an entire course! Now you must try to demonstrate everything I told you about childlikeness in the life of Our Lady.

To flesh out this last thought a little: What did her childlike piety look like? What did her childlike faith, hope, and love look like? There is quite enough material if we just open the pages of Sacred Scripture. Then you can turn to the harmony of the dogmas. What does her childlike purity look like? Both the Bible and dogmatic teaching give us much to go on. What about her childlike simplicity, humility, honesty? Topics without end! Yes, you could repeat this entire retreat, letting everything shine in the mirror of the Blessed among women.

We must see once more how great would be the educational value in showing the image of Mary this way to coming generations. The Catholic faithful, our Catholic youth are truly fond of the Blessed Mother. A tender love for her sits deep in the blood of every Catholic. Do you see what a valuable ally we have! For instance, in May and October we see Mary surrounded by the glory of her rays. What radiates to us? The embodiment of childlikeness. Then we can speak much more simply about these things.

#### *Through Her Educational Activity*

*The Blessed Mother* is an example of childlikeness, but she also *shapes and forms our childlikeness*. You know the reason for this.

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<sup>3</sup> The Bethlehem Fathers have Mary as their patroness under the titles of Queen of Apostles and Mother of Good Counsel (Constitutions, No. 8).

First, she does so *through her intercession*. This goes without saying for someone who cherishes childlikeness as much as she does. We have already heard the quote from Father Weiss: She is the greatest in heaven because she was the smallest on earth. He tried to prove that in his own way. If she herself cherished childlikeness is it not clear that she will fold her hands to pray for it for me? Is it not self-understood that she wants to and must be active, especially in our family, by imploring for us the Holy Spirit? After all, without the Holy Spirit we can never become children *per eminentiam*. Without the Holy Spirit the family will never receive the spirit of childlikeness in the deepest way, must less as its tradition and legacy. As a result, it goes without saying that when we give ourselves to her, both as individuals and as a family, Our Lady implores the Holy Spirit for the entire family in a singular manner. This way we can receive the spirit of sonship, this spirit of childhood (Rom 8,15) and never lose it again.

Moreover, looking at the entire life-process from the psychological point of view, what does it mean to try to give my soul and the soul of my followers to the Blessed Mother and to bind them to Mary? Have we not heard that love is an assimilating and unifying power? I cannot have a tender love for Our Lady without becoming more like her. This is the psychology of love, in this case, love of Mary. *To love the Blessed Mother ultimately means to become like her*. Through her intercession and through the growth of childlike love she forms in us a childlikeness that reaches into the deepest recesses of who we are.

### **CONCLUSION: A FINAL PETITION**

This concludes our retreat. You can say, "What a flood of material," and rightly so! I know as well as you do that it is impossible to digest it all in just a few days. We have dispensed each other from maintaining the traditional organization of retreat material, although what we have discussed is remarkably in tune with the traditional criteria. It contains everything required of a rigorously structured retreat, only in greater volume.

What do we take home from this long retreat? What should I say? Perhaps I may express my last thought in the form of a petition. Perhaps this petition, correctly understood, recaptures everything which has begun to stir in your soul. And this petition is: *Lord, bind me and have mercy on me!*

Lord, bind me! To what should you bind me? In childlike love *to yourself, the Father-God*. You must bind me; I cannot do it alone. And

when you have bound me to yourself, then you will have had mercy on me. Then I will have integrated the soul of our family into my soul. And this is what matters: that I truly experience inside of myself the soul of the family.

Lord, bind me to yourself, for then you will have had mercy on me. And beyond that, bind me *to the family* which you have founded in a new way and apparently have placed on this earth for new times and tasks. Lord, bind me to the family. See to it that I receive a childlike, warm, captivating, sacrificial love for our family. When you have given me this love, you will have had mercy on me. Then I will overlook so many of the shadows and difficulties, or rather, see them in their great context.

Lord, bind me, yes, bind me *to the Blessed among women, to Mary!* I don't know if you mind me saying it, but wherever I am particularly responsible as a priest in higher office, my greatest joy and satisfaction is to know that those whom God has sent to me on their journey in life have consecrated themselves to our dear Blessed Mother. This was already true when I was a young priest in education. Once the "big picture" of the economy of salvation became clear to me, my greatest joy was to lead my young people to Our Lady. I did so thinking: I cannot be with them forever. And even if we could [be together forever], in most cases this depth of the fatherly-priestly relationship comes to an end. But if I entrust my youth to Mary, then I know that she will always hold her hand over them. She is interceding omnipotence! She is the Virgin most faithful! I therefore wonder if you, too, should not pray (and wonder if I should not really pray on your behalf): Lord, bind us to Our Lady, and then you will have had mercy on us!

It is true that your constitutions give you a great structural outline, but these also include many great tasks. You may be saying to yourselves, "What now? The retreat has really just begun!" How right you are! I therefore think that you should pray: Lord, bind me to the Blessed Mother! Give me and the entire family a deep, tender love of Mary, then you will have had mercy; then this bond of love of Mary will lead us together and bind us together; then Our Lady will and must see to it that our family becomes what God the Father has foreseen from all eternity.

We live in serious times. And they are becoming more and more serious. The Church must come to grips with this and tomorrow and the next day will have to confront, even more than today, extremely diabolical trends of thinking and living. In my mind's eye I see the Woman of the Apocalypse (Rev 12). I see before me Our Lady of the Protogospel (Gen

3). *Cunctas haereses tu sola interemisti in universo mundo*—the Church prays: "You alone have overcome all the heresies of the world!" Or at the very least, they are impossible to overcome without Mary.

The conviction that your mission is unique must gradually become strong enough for you to simply believe: God has introduced us into the Church as a new regiment and even—how shall I put it?—as an *elite regiment*. When the battle was at its climax and all seemed lost, then the ancient Romans called out: *Res ad triarios venit*—the battle now goes to the tertiaries!<sup>4</sup> Can we not believe that we have been foreseen by God as such a new regiment for the Church in her time of greatest need? I believe this because I am convinced that the struggle for the soul of our times is decisive. I could prove it to you. You notice that these are thoughts which I live from myself; these are not thoughts which I am just making up as I go along—they inspire everything I do.

If you want to be such a crack troop, such an elite battle group, it seems to me that you would do well to rally perhaps even more than you have in the past around the banner of our dear Blessed Mother. She shall then become your personal leader and the leader of your family. In this you will be doing nothing less than following your constitutions; you must only let the seeds planted there begin to come to life.

How does Our Lady stand before us? Beautiful as the moon, elect as the sun, terrible as an army in battle array (Song 6,10). If you do what I have told you, then your family will be able to apply this threefold epithet more and more to itself. *Then your family will be, like Our Lady, beautiful as the moon, elect as the sun, terrible as an army in battle array.*

Therefore, please rally more than ever—though I do not know how much you have already done in this regard; I forgot to ask, but I can say it at least theoretically—around the banner of the Mother of God, and tell yourselves more consciously: She is our patroness and we want to accept and recognize her as such! She is our Queen, our leader, our field marshall. This is what she should be. Then we can rightly assume that Mary will care for the family better than anyone else. Suppose you knew a genius and placed him at the head of your family. How such a genius would pale before the might of our dear Blessed Mother!

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<sup>4</sup> The tertiaries (*triarios*) were the veteran warriors who remained on standby until it was clear the first and second battle groups were insufficient; then they were called to save the day. See Titus Livius, *Roman History* VIII, 8, 11.

I, as well as those who work with me, are constantly inspired by two sayings of Vincent Pallotti.

*Mater habebit curam!* [Mother takes care!]. When they are sent into the missions, our [Schoenstatt] Sisters must label everything they own. They label each piece that goes on the ship with "M.h.c."—Mother takes care. On one recent expedition the ship was caught in a terrible storm and violent seas; the young Sisters were afraid the ship would go down, but these three letters gave them the necessary calm, and they came through safely. Mother takes care! You should have something like that for yourselves.

A second saying: *Mary is the Great Missionary; she will work miracles.* Do not ask me to prove this to you dogmatically. Let me tell you that if you are children you will hear it as a child does. You should ask yourselves if you would not like to choose the Blessed among women as the support and safeguard of your new work, as the shaper and educator of your new type of personality.

You renew your consecration tomorrow. This is good. The day may also come when you reconsecrate your entire family to our dear Blessed Mother, but with the awareness: She must be our educator and our Mother, for what we want is too new and our preparation is so inadequate. It would be something different if you were a community like so many others, if you could just look to them and say: If they do it that way, we do the same! But let me repeat: What you want is too new. For this you need an "interceding omnipotence" who possesses more than human strength, more than human educational skill and wisdom. It is therefore in the interest of your institute to ask yourselves if you should not really reconsecrate yourselves to Mary—with all that you have and are, with your abilities, with your present, past, and future. Then Our Lady will work miracles for you and make the saying come true: Mother will take, does take, has taken care! And: She is and will always be the Great Missionary who works miracles in the entire family!

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