



66. The „New Person“ against the Background of our Times

This text has been taken from two sources: The “Maibrief 1948” (1948 May Letter) in: “Sie kam, sie sah sie siegte” (She came, she saw, she conquered) [ed. Heinrich M. Hug, 1997] pp. 54-60, and “Afrika-Bericht 48” (1948 Africa Report) in: “Anfänge Schönstatts in Südafrika” (Schoenstatt’s Beginnings in South Africa) [ed. Heinrich M. Hug, 1999] pp. 145f.

It is decisive for our Reader that Fr Kentenich’s definition of the “new person” is given here. Now, since definitions are very compact, they have to be decoded so that their content is better understood. This can be done by means of a careful textual exegesis, or by explaining the “Sitz im Leben”, that is, the historical context of such a definition. The latter is offered in our selection of texts. Both texts originated in 1948, hence at a time immediately after the Second World War and Fr Kentenich’s incarceration in the concentration camp at Dachau. They are also influenced by the overseas trips Fr Kentenich undertook after his liberation from the concentration camp, the end of the war and the collapse of National Socialism (Nazi regime). Schoenstatt’s development and maturation from the Pre- Founding Document until the “Third Founding Document”, the rapid development of technology and the economy with the corresponding turning-points in world events, which already marked the first half of the 20th century, made it possible for him to recognise in an almost exaggerated way that the main threat to people and their religious sense, as well as to the sound processes of life in society, is to be found in all forms of collectivism, as well as the secularisation of public life. To provide a counterbalance, and to overcome the manifestations of disintegration, Fr Kentenich tried through his foundation to form “new people”. In 1948 he finally hit upon a definition, which is given here.

Since 1942 and 1944 the great, Catholic vision of the future, with its original and practical character, has lived in our ranks with overpowering vitality and victoriousness.

It had already been captured with unambiguous clarity and light in the Pre-Founding Document.

All the periods that followed revealed it with great clarity, until it was fully revealed in all its dimensions in the Dachau prayers, that is, in the prayerful expression of the Third Founding Document, and breathes and awakens blissful victoriousness. Whoever does not know this vision, whoever does not draw from it or live it with loving self-surrender, can’t do much with the apho-

ristic prayer texts. Their deliberately imageless form and intentionally bald, unmediated and emotionally toned synopsis, contradict the tastes of the people of today, and goad those who are of yesterday to protest. They only speak out of and to those whose gaze has been schooled by the present and past, but who at the same time live in the future, and see it as their task to form the formless, future chaos into a new, Christian cosmos.

Only those who travel through the world with observant eyes will know how great the chaos already is today, and the extent to which the re-evaluation of all values has progressed. The intellectual and spiritual revolution has already become so universal and radical that hardly any vital structure has been spared.

Modern technology brings people so close that their interweaving of destinies has become visible in a way that has never happened in world history. Everything rushes towards unprecedented monotony and stereotyping, and through its customs and way of thinking, its understanding of life and habits, it brings the Africans in their remote huts almost overnight onto the same level as the spoilt people of the West. We are approaching a unified civilisation and culture with tremendous speed. A completely new image of the world and its peoples is developing. The great question that leaves the people with knowledge and responsibility no peace is always the same: Will this image be marked by demonic or divine forces?

Collectivism appears on the scene in the most varied forms and draws attention to itself. It is preparing to leap into the whole world. To a large extent Europe already lies at its feet; in other parts of the world it tries, despite all prohibitions and counter-measures, to press victoriously onwards.

A great vision of the future is also alive in it. That is its secret, which is obviously constantly fed by diabolical influences and satanic forces. We often treat it like a system, and therefore bypass the crux of the matter. We tell it its errors, but it smiles and goes back to business as usual.

With its whole soul it clings to its new image of the world and society, which it sees as a totality and embraces with fervent love and admirable readiness for sacrifice. It is not deterred when its errors and blunders are proven. It sees, promotes and demands a new sociological stratification of the world and humanity.

Under its influence modern problems converge with incredible force and devastating density, as a result of the rapid intellectual and economic development that centre on the convulsed relationship

between the personality and community,
between the personality and economy,
between the personality and technology,
between the personality and social advancement.

Its vision excludes a personal God; instead it deifies itself.

However, this does not prevent us from discovering the features of divine revelation in it, no matter how much it rejects the whole of Christianity. ...

Vision can only be overcome by vision. All other attempts will not attain their goal, least of all rational arguments. This is shown by the history of Christianity, especially in its early period.

In the Magnificat the Blessed Mother clothed the great and visionary Christian vision of the future in the memorable words, *Et exaltavit humiles ...* He exalts the humble.²²³

The Book of Revelation takes it up in its own way and completes it in brilliant images.

²²³ Lk 1,52.

Consciously or unconsciously, even though it is distorted and like a small and insignificant ray, this vision lives in the image of the world and the human person promoted by all sorts of collectivistic trends, which struggle to provide a place in the sun for the disinherited, the fourth class, and want them to benefit from the undreamt of progress in the economy and technology today.

Just as the moon is most quickly removed from view by the rising sun, so the vision of collectivism, with its scanty content, will be overcome when we allow the sun of Christianity's vision of the future to rise in its full beauty and glory, as the Scriptures show it to us.

The Christian West²²⁴ owes its structure and form, and hence its happiness and advancement in every sphere, to this vision.

[The task today within the framework of Christianity's opposing vision]

We now have to free it from time-bound forms, understand its essential elements, proclaim it with warmth, and allow its whole dynamism to operate creatively in the new circumstances.

We could often be depressed when we see how the tenuous and pallid ray has developed an irresistible formative force and determines world events, while we, who have the full and radiant light of the sun, face the problems of our times despondently and helplessly, almost exclusively directing our gaze to the past, avoid looking into the future, or answering the problems with oppressive pessimism.

From the beginning Manresa²²⁵ has taken great pains to try to assimilate the whole Christian vision of the future, and through its "secret"²²⁶ to express it in an original and effective form. With a side-glance at collectivism, and in distinction and opposition to it, its inner and outer structure have to be understood as

a. a universal vision that embraces time and eternity, this world and the next, the economic, social, political, moral and religious needs of all people, also the disinherited, the millions of the masses;

b. with the spirit of faith, especially belief in Divine Providence, it acts on the authority of **an acquired vision**, so it lays claim to no extraordinary, infused light, or, for example like Don Bosco, to divine dreams.

c. Like the Church itself, whose member it is and whose flower it tries to become, it has a distinctively **messianic character**, that is, it wants to help to redeem the world, not only from earthly needs, but also from sin and remoteness from God, by trying to solve the relationship between the personality and community, between the personality and the economy, the personality and technology, the personality and upward social mobility, through using the original principles of Christianity in the school and under the guidance of the MTA.

d. It strides with a great and **mysterious sense of victory** into the new era;

– not, for example, like collectivism, which bases itself on materialistically coloured convictions from an evolutionary point-of-view, and which sees the replacing of the ancient order by a new paradise as a natural and absolutely effective natural law, and which therefore allows itself to be confused by no setbacks;

– but simply trusting in the breakthrough of divine forces into the Family, which we have been aware of through faith in Divine Providence since 1914, and have in the meantime experienced

²²⁴ See Text 67 for a fuller explanation of the original mission of the West.

²²⁵ Manresa is the place in Spain where St Ignatius Loyola developed his spirituality. Fr Kantenich used this name as a camouflage for Schoenstatt during the time of persecution by the Nazis, and it can also be found in his writings in the years that immediately followed.

²²⁶ Cf. Text 18. The reference here is to "Schoenstatt's secret", that is the belief and conviction that our founder's work is divine in origin.

many times with unimagined fullness since January 1942, and the Third Founding Document that followed upon it.

Those who have immersed themselves in the spirit of “*Heavenwards*” will not find it difficult to recognise on all its pages the fundamental features of this universal, acquired, messianic and mysteriously victorious vision of the future.

The image of God and the human person, the image of history, society and the Church, as it is described there, all points emphatically to it, and offers plenty of material for meditation and study. It can become an effective source for training the mind, will and heart of the people who want to preserve a clear head and sure hand in a chaotic situation.

All the present-day currents that can lay claim to international standing are struggling at present not only to transform circumstances, but also, and to an outstanding degree, to create a new image of the human person and the community. They see this new person as a guarantor for new circumstances and a comprehensive, relaxed and secure international situation. In his kindness and wisdom God has led us the same way.

Until now we have not been readily able to give a polished **definition of the new person**; we can only do it now after we have spent three months amassing the building blocks through serious examination and thoughtful prayer.

During this richly blessed time we tried to uncover its essence, and to understand its value and importance, while getting to know the prospects for carrying it out.

It gave us great joy to observe that the Pre-Founding Document already contained and clearly expressed its essential elements, and that each new period in our Family history showed it to us from another angle.

Our investigations were crowned and completed by a deeper insight into the meaning and purpose, the value and significance of the *Constitutio Apostolica Provida Mater Ecclesia*.²²⁷ We now see and consciously revere in our *Nova Creatura*

the people who, because they are underpinned by the perfect covenant of love with the MTA, are willing and able to consecrate themselves and their vital energy generously and continually to the Triune God and his favourite creation, Manresa, without many or strong obligatory, outward ties, and without comprehensive and outwardly secured protection.

[...]

(Brief definition of the image of the person)

Here and now it is sufficient if we become aware that we are always dealing with the person

who masters life, and unites with others to form communities out of a profound, inner sense of responsibility for the people around him/ her, without many, strong and obligatory outward ties, and without comprehensive and secured outward protection, through indivisible attachment to an ideal.

²²⁷ On 2 February 1947 Pope Pius XII published the Apostolic Constitution “*Provida Mater Ecclesia*”, which provided a juridical framework for the Secular Institutes. During the 1947 Covenant Week, Fr Kentenich formulated his view of the Apostolic Constitution, “In this Constitution I see an official authentication of the type of person and the type of human society that we have envisaged from the beginning.”