



15. “Proclamation of the Inner Life”

Even as early as World War I (1914 - 1918) an “Outer Organization” had formed in connection with the Marian Sodality in the Pallottine College in Schoenstatt. Those who were interested – mostly seminarians and students who did not belong to the College in Schoenstatt – could join it. This more or less forced Fr Kentenich at the end of the war to contemplate an organization that was independent of the Pallottines and the Sodality, that is, some other way of belonging to “Schoenstatt”.

There were enough men who were interested in doing so. The first months after the war were spent in working out a concept and Statutes for such an organization. Fr Kentenich called it “the Federation”.

The founding conference was set for 20 August 1919 in Dortmund - Hörde. In order to encourage the autonomy and initiative of those who attended, Fr Kentenich did not attend. The 24 participants had to found “the Federation”, although Fr Kentenich would edit the Statutes. However, this did not mean that Fr Kentenich held back when it came to providing inspiration for the Federation.

This is borne out by a letter he wrote on 6 November 1919 to the group leaders. It made two things clear: Firstly, that Schoenstatt was not a mass movement. It made great demands – and was hence selective – in the education of Catholic laymen. It was only later that a pilgrimage movement was added to the “Federation” and “League” to take in the wider public, although this was always to be essentially secured by the Federation.

Secondly, from the first the thrust of the educational work was clear. As people became increasingly superficial and alienated in modern society, the most important thing was to cultivate the inner life: “Proclamation of the inner life”.

The letter to the group leaders of the Federation – at first this Federation was envisaged for students and teachers, later it developed into a number of Federations – follows without any omissions as it was published by the Schoenstatt Diocesan Council in the Archdiocese of Paderborn for the fiftieth anniversary of the “Hörde Conference”. It can be found in the “Hörder Dokumenten”, Paderborn 1969, 108 - 113.

Schoenstatt, 6 November 1919

My dear Group Leaders,

With only one exception you have all decided to study theology. With all my heart I wish you every success in this important step, if this is your response to God’s call of grace, and I am all the more happy to know that the weal or woe of our young Federation is in your hands. So far it has been difficult for you to settle

down in the strange surroundings at University, and the group work had to suffer as a result. Your uncertainty about the basis for our efforts has had an even more paralyzing effect. I think that both obstacles can now be seen as having been overcome. In the meantime you have learnt to organize your time; in future the leadership of the group will take up a definite place in your daily schedule without your other duties having to suffer as a result. The Sodality conference at Hörde has given us definite Statutes; we now know clearly what we want and ought to do. Allow me, therefore, to adopt the challenge Archbishop von Faulhaber recently placed before the *Katholikentag*⁹⁶ at Munich in his widely ranging speech: **“Wake up! Wake up! And wake each other!”**⁹⁷

I don’t know, my dear group leaders, whether you are aware of the whole import of our task and the difficulties we will have to overcome. Yet we have to see things clearly if we are to be able to carry out our responsible positions correctly and autonomously.

Through accepting the Hörde Statutes we have from the outset given up the idea of becoming a movement for the masses. We have to remember this, otherwise our small numbers could lead you to arrive at false and discouraging conclusions and decisions. The demands we make are so profound that relatively few people will decide to remain one of us. That is not a disadvantage; on the contrary, if we lead our groups with the right spirit, it will actually turn out to be our strength. There are plenty of mass organizations today. They are necessary in our democratic age even if only to influence public opinion effectively. However, they will soon peter out unless purposeful and detailed work ensures that they are constantly permeated by the religious and moral spirit. This is where we may and must start if we are to justify our existence, and exercise an enlightened influence on the tasks that have to be carried out in our times. This is also the opinion of our Klaus Scheuffgen, who wrote in his last group letter: “... but we can only carry out this tremendous work in individual points, and all generalizations are of little help.” Untiring, selfless attention to details – that is our task, and in this sense I repeat those words: Wake up! Wake up! And wake each other! In the organizations and associations for the different walks of life⁹⁸ we can march with our peers and engage in loud talk, and our stormy temperaments can find an outlet. As members of the Apostolic Federation we depend on and are obliged to carry out detailed work.

Detailed spiritual work is our pride and our greatness! The Social Democrats⁹⁹ consider that existing conditions are the cause of the dreadful suffering of the masses in our times; they look for liberation and redemption from a revolutionary change of outward circumstances. They won’t attain their aim. It is true that much in the life of society and the state has become rotten and cries out for reform. However, the profound source of our unhappiness lies in ourselves, in our unredeemed state and the enslavement of our own soul. It follows from this that we have to demand and strive for a radical moral and religious renewal of the individual person and human culture as a whole.¹⁰⁰ We share this task with all the Catholic organizations which are working at present, whether these are societies, confraternities, or sodalities.

⁹⁶ Since 1848 an annual meeting of Catholic laypeople has taken place at a variety of centres. These are not just a community experience of God’s faithful people, but at the same time a meeting point for the life of faith in the Church, and the cultural and political forces in society as a whole.

⁹⁷ Fr Kentenich was taking up a saying of Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber (1869 - 1952), at the time Archbishop of Munich - Freising (from 1921 Cardinal), and was to repeat it on many occasions until the end of his life.

⁹⁸ The reference here is to Church associations, such as, the Kolping Society, the associations for single men, music associations, as well as student associations.

⁹⁹ The background to this statement is Karl Marx’s critical vision of religion as the substructure of society and culture. Progress could only be expected from the class struggle and changes in the conditions of production. The early socialists and communists believed that changing sociological factors would of inner necessity change the moral situation (for the better).

¹⁰⁰ A critique of our culture. It is good to keep in mind how the Western nations saw themselves as educated and culturally superior to the people in their colonies. They considered that they were called and empowered to pass on their enlightened and superior culture to “primitive peoples”. World War II showed very clearly how little the “civilized peoples” were able to control their “primitive” instincts.

An essential difference is to be found in the form with which we make for our goal, and the degree to which we take hold of the soul and penetrate it.

My dear group leaders, don't you agree that even when people still think and live in a religious sense, especially in educated circles, their immunity to the worldly spirit is relatively small? They lack, or we would do better to say, Christianity as a whole today lacks an inner life. The inner life is dying! You are not keen on reading long quotations, but I have to quote one passage here to enable you to examine your own experiences. Long before the war Weiss¹⁰¹ wrote in his *Philosophy of Perfection*:¹⁰²

„Everyone complains, everyone criticizes, everyone has suggestions to make about how to avoid the catastrophe we fear, and bring about a better future. Excitement, restlessness, turmoil have taken hold of our minds, and this on its own makes us fearful. Nothing from the past applies any longer. Everything has to be new right to the foundations: Science, art, politics, social life, philosophy, law, morals, indeed religion itself, theology, faith and a Christian life. But everything has to be improved with merely outward means: with talking politics, with diplomacy, with oratory and soothing words.

The suggested remedies are worse than the illness itself. Although they clearly prove how deeply the evil is rooted, and how painfully it is felt, they are just the right way to make it worse and incurable.

No, the cause of the evil is to be found in the fact that humankind's inner life has become weak, indeed it is being extinguished. You don't heal such an evil with outward appearances, but solely by awakening the world again to the spiritual life.

So let us at least open our hearts to God's call, the call which alone points out the way to salvation: Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.¹⁰³ Our salvation does not lie in trusting in secular means, in the fragile support of popular favour and the expensive protection of earthly powers, in courting public opinion, in toying with the goings on in the world, in following the defining spirit of a period (*Zeitgeist*). This is what the world wants, and that is exactly why it gives us this advice. The only thing it fears is our loyalty in adhering to religion, our faith and the Church, and the really serious way in which we open up the way for the supernatural in faith and in life.

So everything now depends on our withdrawing into ourselves, becoming clearly aware of the supernatural forces God has placed in us, and making decisive use of them.

In opposition to the new art of making war through misusing science, the virginal fortress of faith has again to be defended and prove itself. We can only counter the concerted attack of all outward forces if we forget all party and school quarrels, and give up all our personal special objectives, as we unite under the eternally victorious flag of our common Church, and attach ourselves with greater loyalty and love than before to the focal point of unity, the unshakable rock of faith, the hearth of Christian life: the hierarchy and the See of Rome. Nothing will succeed in countering the terrible dangers of social need but the armour of Christian virtues – of denying self, of justice and love. There is only one retaining wall that can still save us from the destructive storm of immorality, which threatens to undermine all the foundations of public order, domestic discipline, education, and the faith and life of the Church, and that is holiness.

What our time mainly needs, if not to say its only need, is new saints, great, convincing, attractive saints; and if not saints, then at least new people, whole people, new Christians, genuine, perfect Christians with a profound inner life.

However, as we say this we cannot help feeling painful regret.

What matters today is to make the world so aware of its most timely task – striving for perfection – that it

¹⁰¹ Albert Maria Weiss OP (1844 - 1925), theologian, taught in Graz, Vienna and Freiburg (Switzerland). His main work, *Apologie des Christentums vom Standpunkt der Sittenlehre* (Defence of Christianity from the Standpoint of Moral Teaching), 5 Vols., Freiburg 1878 - 1889. The title of Vol I was, "First a human being, then a Christian, and then a whole human being." Fr Kentenich often quoted these three concepts.

¹⁰² I have not found an English version, so this is my translation.

¹⁰³ Eph. 4, 23 - 24. New American Bible translation. The footnote states: Paul begins to indicate how the new life in Christ contrasts with the Gentile's old way of existence. Literally, *the old self* (2) and *the new self* (24) are "the old man" and "the new man" (*anthropos*, person).

again sees how meaningful it is, and becomes enthusiastic about it. Yet who can dare to do this? Only a new John can talk with such force. Oh, if only our merciful God would arouse servants who are filled with the lofty calling of the preacher in the desert: the holiness of a Jeremiah, a Baptist, a Paul!”

Then came the war and the revolution.¹⁰⁴ Both have increased the superficiality and alienation to an extreme. We know this from our own observations and experience.

In the thick of this chaos we set up a programme that is synonymous with the solemn proclamation of the inner life. As far as I know there is no lay organization that so directly and so plainly, and, I would even like to say, so mercilessly pursues the worldly spirit into its ultimate hiding place. Now you will gradually begin to guess the profound significance of our movement. Aren't you afraid of the dizzy heights we want to climb together? Does the mammoth task awaiting you depress you?

In our days it is extremely difficult to lead a powerfully motivating inner life even behind the protective walls of a cloister. It is even more difficult for mature people who live in the world outside. We are neither members of a religious Order nor mature characters; the storms of puberty have not yet died down; we are forcefully driven into the way of life of the majority. Doesn't our membership in our Federation sound like a generous and ringing battlecry, which – to quote Nietzsche – calls up “all our warlike and victorious instincts”? You don't want to carry out the Hörde Programme for yourselves alone. You want to be trailblazers, leaders, for the younger Sodalists and Confrères in the Federation. After all, the whole movement is your work and has to remain so. I can and will only support you with my advice and help. That is why I have held back so much until now. I didn't even attend the Sodality Day at Hörde. If you were so filled with a feeling of responsibility for your group as the leaders of our *congregatio militaris*¹⁰⁵ were, I would be able to get more involved in the work without having to fear that I would paralyze your autonomy and sense of responsibility. Let us hope that this point in time will soon arrive.

I have honestly to admit to you that in quiet moments I at times tremble at the thought of the work we have undertaken. However, the thought of our heavenly Mother, and my unconditional trust in her, quickly and thoroughly drive away all dark clouds. Calm consideration of the development until now justifies our coming to the conclusion that our MTA wants to use us as her instrument in renewing the world. My trust in the help of our fallen hero sodalists is also great. I am sure that in heaven they will not leave in the lurch what they have founded and striven for so heroically.

There is only one thing I am not absolutely certain about: Can I trust our leaders implicitly? Are they prepared to go through fire for the Federation in a way that is fitting when the stakes are so high? Only then will we attain what we are striving for so ardently. So let me repeat: Wake up! Wake up! And wake each other! Next week I will make a few practical suggestions. ...

¹⁰⁴ The communist revolution in Russia under the leadership of Lenin, and the attempts by the German communists to overthrow the government in Germany.

¹⁰⁵ This is what the enlarged Sodality was called that developed on the battlefields of the war. Another name for it was the “Outer Organization”.