

**Fr. Joseph Kentenich**  
Excerpts from

## **Desiderio desideravi (1963)**

**Volumes 5 to 8**

collected by Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, 2009  
(some items from translations by Mary Cole)

## **VOLUME 5**

**February 1, 1963 (Talk 52)**  
DD 5, 211-263

(See *Brushstrokes of a Father*, Vol. 3 for more short quotes about Dachau)

{222} The food was so scarce. It was so extreme; there were so few calories! If one would have had to survive on that alone, one would never have made it. Now behind this was naturally another brilliant act of Divine Providence because I could receive so much food while in prison [in Koblenz]. Otherwise I would have collapsed at once. If I had arrived undernourished, it would have been very difficult.

But now I followed the principle: *of all that I receive, I will always give some away*. That impressed the communists. They told me: No, no, whenever they met someone of sound character, they do everything they can to help him survive. We can see that there also much nobility on the other side, too. I don't know if I could say who put up the greater resistance – the Catholics or the communists. They, too, had persons of vigorous character among them.

Now it happened that they tried to [slip me extra bread]. After all, every bit of bread was a privilege there. It is only in such situations that one notices that bread is a *means of nourishment*. But I never accepted it, I always turned it down. “No, out of principle I don't accept a thing.” These are such little things. It is not as it {223} I did it intentionally; it was simply part of my nature.

Different people then heard of this, for instance the later “Dr. Marianus”<sup>1</sup> and the others who were part of the founding of the Family Work and the founding of the Brothers of Mary. They made their way to see me [in Block 13], and started to come almost every

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Edi Pesendorfer.

day, seeking instruction in the spiritual life. One of them<sup>2</sup> held a leading position in the infirmary, in the block where the sick were held. And from him I was able to get *medicine* in great amounts so that I could help many who were having problems.

(...)

{224} I can still remember it well. There was a very violent communist from the East<sup>3</sup>. He was once even a leading person. He came to me. Everyone else was afraid of him. But he ran after me like a little puppy. Now it was not that I did anything to win him over. I simply went my way. But as soon as we were both out of the [admissions] block and could go walking<sup>4</sup> (...) he made what we Catholics would call a *general confession*. He had no rest [until he did it]. But it was not as if I demanded all kinds of things of him. I only asked of him: I think, if you would...<sup>5</sup>

Not long after this he was taken away on a transport. And as we already saw, this story with the transports was always a dangerous one. Whoever was taken on a transport had to fear that he would not reach the destination – that he would suddenly become sick and die, or be helped to die.

(...)

{230} June 29 followed June 24. The work details were absolutely closed. But they<sup>6</sup> waited until I came to my decision – I have always been a spoiled favorite of Providence, could always have my own way. June 29. I was accepted into the commando at once. (...)

They had their own rituals. Whoever was new to a block had to be first, not a recruit, but an apprentice and then a journeyman and

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Edi Pesendorfer.

<sup>3</sup> Probably Lüder Winters (native of Bremen, at one time mayor of Limbach in Saxony). Cf. *Häftling Nr. 29392*, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> Presumably on the main street of the camp. For Fr. Kentenich this only happened after his transfer to Block 26 on October 13, 1942.

<sup>5</sup> Based on *Häftling Nr. 29392*, p. 117, this must be the prisoner that Fr. Kentenich asked to simply read the New Testament once he regained his freedom.

<sup>6</sup> Those such as Hugo Guttmann and Fr. Fischer who, after the dangerous events of June 24, urged Fr. Kentenich to accept a regular work assignment.

then a master. I was completely dispensed from this and was immediately welcomed as a master. Of course, this was not a pleasant thing for the others.

There were many old men who were also in the commando. Many of them died. You see, in retrospect it can all seem so cozy. But if you see the background – how much hunger was there, how much hardship! Even though in our [commando] Koch did everything he could to make things easier.

(...)

{239} Now the first food package arrived. It did not contain much. It was similar to the dove released by Noah to see if it could find a green branch. And the package made it; I was called to retrieve it! Four of us made a little meal community. It was very minimal, to be sure. {240} I can still remember it so well. Everything was divided into three or four parts. For instance, each one got a little piece of butter. And we had to try out if we could even still stand butter. In it goes! We tried it – and we could still stand it! We tried the things one after the other until there was nothing left. The other two who were doing better didn't really need it, but accepted it because it was something different.

In short order, the packages started to flow, and not only to me. At first we didn't dare to believe it, but there was really a change of policy. Package after package arrived. (...)

{249} What happened in the concentration camp one day would be broadcast on foreign transmitters the next. During those last years I think I was better informed about what was going on in the outside world than many of those who were outside the camp. They had a secret transmitter. And I had so many friends! From them I always knew what was going on outside.

{256} I was standing up front for roll call. What a mass of people! 40,000 people were in Dachau. It was no child's play. Many worked outside the camp, but they belonged to it. And now I

was standing – it must have been the fourth or fifth row – and [von Redwitz] began to play the philosopher regarding (...) the winter solstice. Then, suddenly, he shouted at me, in reality he was in rather a good mood: “You, you, you, you, there, you there, what are you? *Are you a spiritual advisor*<sup>7</sup>? There was no reason to ask this. But it must have been this way, {257} with the searchlight shining right in my face. “You, you, are you a spiritual advisor?” Well, that provoked me behind the ears, I’ll tell you. (...)

Now the answer I gave him was as bland as could be, “No, I am not a spiritual advisor, but from time to time I have given spiritual advice.” And he turned livid and jumped all over me. “This prisoner here, this prisoner here, he wants to give me spiritual advice! Over here! Where are his papers?” I had to come forward. But I stood quite calmly. And then he shouted, “Take your hat off! Hat off!” But I didn’t do that either.

(...)

{260} Suddenly the news went through the camp: the SS in Berlin will gradually release the priests and ministers. Of course, we were skeptical. But it really began!

Then one morning, it was exactly April 6, I woke up with the thought that I couldn’t give a good reason for: *Today you will be released*. I shaved – for the last time, because I had promised myself that they wouldn’t have the honor of taking away from me so much as a hair. I quickly shaved and everyone went out for roll call. The names were called, and mine was called too. Then we were taken to where the clothes were handed out. We received our clothes and were allowed to leave!

But then the battle started all over again. Immediately! I was outside; then came Fr. Dresbach. We went to the next monastery. Of course, they were not interested in us. We took care of each other, and then I noticed that we were not really welcome. So we traveled

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<sup>7</sup> German, *Geistlicher Rat*, a title which some diocesan priests had.

over to Munich. And then the battle {261} began at once all over again. (...) We were in Freising. I know that I landed there, along with Fr. Dresbach. And then we came to the conclusion: *now we must try to travel to Schoenstatt*. And there were so many low-flying planes<sup>8</sup>. We got into a train which took us safely to *Ulm*. And how dangerous it was in *Ulm*!

Before this we had received the news – in all of these dangers the Sisters still dared to travel back and forth – that the Americans had passed through Schoenstatt and were going through the Westerwald. The question [before they came through Schoenstatt] was: Should we flee? At that time the prayer was written, “Hold the Scepter in Your Hand”<sup>9</sup>. It was my deep conviction: “No, *now is when the victory begins*. Don’t panic! Everything will turn out alright.”

Then came the news: What should we do now in Berlin? The Russians were taking over Berlin. I always had the reins in the hand, and led the entire Work from the camp. These were naturally very difficult decisions. After all, the Russians were coming, and they had the freedom to violate the women. What should the Sisters do? Should they flee or stay? I said at once: they must stay right where they are at. And they did.

{262} And then the story really got tangled in *Ulm*. I was well known there, but everything was in chaos. Of course, everything went so incredibly fast. By the way, it was an amazing spectacle! For instance, when the Americans came in their great numbers, it always looked like a Christmas tree<sup>10</sup>. There was a first-class earthquake when they bombed Munich, as if it were the end of the world. Actually, we would have been the safest in Dachau. (...) Of course, it was still very dangerous for us there, for we had no bomb shelters. But they did not want to harm us. The worst would have been if they had been off-target. This happened once, but off to the side. They

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<sup>8</sup> Allied bombers and other airplanes that could attack persons, buildings, roads, trains, at a moment’s notice.

<sup>9</sup> *Heavenwards*, p. 130f.

<sup>10</sup> Probably referring to the night bombing to soften the resistance before the infantry moved in.

wanted to hit the SS, but not us.

And then I rode up to Fr. Kulmus. Then came the beautiful story with the two *ponies*. It went like this. Up [in Ennabeuren] I gave a mission, holding talks which have all been written down. And then one day I said, this is not the right thing – we cannot stay here. But it was impossible to travel any farther. There were no connections. And then I came up with the thought: there were two ponies up there, Russian ponies. Of course, I had never driven a buggy before. But that didn't matter. Then I thought: What do we do now? We will buy the ponies and an old buggy, just like the kind they use up [in the Swaebisch Alb] when someone gets married.

And then we began to experiment with driving such a buggy. We tried this road and that road. And soon I had figured out how to do it. They were a fine pair of ponies, but they had to go through many things. Whenever an obstacle turned up, one of the ponies always stopped, the other calmly kept going. So we experimented. The next day we wanted to dare it. Now, that would have been {263} a daring thing to try. After all, the Americans were racing all over and didn't pay much attention. And we would have been driving with our ponies!

Then I came to the next village to one of our Schoenstatt priests. It was to say good-bye. All at once there was a noise outside. It was Fr. Menningen with his brother! They had come with his brother's car and had finally found me. So on the next day we got in the car and first drove successfully to Koblenz. Then we finally arrived in Schoenstatt.

## VOLUME 6

**February 5, 1963 (Talk 56)**

DD 6, 52-78<sup>1</sup> (MC)

[52] My dear confreres,

[The goal of conversion]

... This morning we considered which rules we have to apply when we want to digest our experiences. Of course, this depends on the perspective from which we want to re-live our lives: Do we merely want to savour the first conversion in our lives? That is the state in which we turn to God after having turned away from him. Perhaps we never experienced this state. No, what we are aiming at here is what the ancient spiritual writers have called the second conversion. In what does it consist? Perhaps we could take an opportunity later to

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction by Fr. Hans-Werner Unkel for Father Seminar in Kentenich Vidhyaniketan, India (introduction and text translated by Mary Cole):

*The following talk was given in February 1963 during the Milwaukee Tertianship for seminarians of the 'Pars motrix et centralis', which still had to be founded. Fr Kentenich was speaking in general about the way we can deal with our weaknesses, without becoming discouraged or ill because of them.*

*The direct application of the talk to life during the Tertianship was their community life. There were tensions, such as always appear when people live closely together. Hence the reference to the 'correctio fraterna': an honest discussion for which each confrere prepared himself well. During the discussion each would tell a confrere how he saw his good qualities, as well as those parts of his personality that gave rise to difficulties in community life.*

*For our Father Seminar we want to place the subject of dealing with our weaknesses in another context. When Fr Kentenich spoke about our sexuality, he showed towering ideals that point out the direction to us, but he knew we would never be able to reach them in their fullness. We will repeatedly and painfully experience our limitations, faults and sins in the sexual sphere. For our father a realistic asceticism of sexuality always included both a pedagogy of ideals and a positive exploitation of our smallness.*

talk about this in greater detail. At the moment we only want to recall that we are dealing here with the ideal of holiness, in particular the ideal of our original form of holiness. Its aim is to remove our secret reservations from our hearts. The aim is to take up all our undigested impressions, which are living and working in our subconscious, and allow them to resonate into God's rhythm of life.

[Various areas involved in the purification of our subconscious]

This morning I mentioned inner bitterness very particularly. It is only one of many examples. However, it is quite possible that wounds from our early lives, probably something to do with the sixth commandment, still have to be inwardly digested. It does not matter in which direction the impressions go, I want to deal with them all together. We really need to consider what is wriggling around deep within us from one or the other direction. Afterwards we want to go into it once again, in order to show means and ways by which we could or should digest these impressions.

That is the third point we talked about this morning [=dealing with our weaknesses]. We have to see to it that we come to a better understanding of so much that we have not understood in our lives. What could that be? The weaknesses of our nature, and, connected with the weaknesses of nature, also so much naughtiness, so many bad habits. We may never overlook that we bear original sin within us, so we can take it for granted that here on earth we can never expect to be free from complications, or free from our wretchedness. Of course, we will include in our discussions the correct way of cultivating and answering our sense of guilt.

[Sense of guilt and feeling of guilt]

Let me pause here for a moment, because I think this has become very practical. Instead of discussing it later, let us do it immediately in this context. First of all, what must we remember? Let me repeat

what I said this morning: we may not kill our sense of guilt, and even less the feeling of guilt that has been awakened in us because of our various forms of wretchedness. I think you should take note of this for your own "housekeeping", but also for later when you have to guide souls, especially very sensitive souls: for this purpose you have to distinguish between an ascetical sense of guilt and a moral-theological sense of guilt.

[Ascetical sense of guilt – What is it? How am I to deal with it?]

You see, an *ascetical sense of guilt* is awakened in someone with a noble nature when more powerful temptations plough through body or soul. Of course, I know that from a theological, but also from a philosophical and psychological point of view, we can do nothing about this. Nevertheless, the feeling remains: A foreign object [like a virus or thorn] has entered into my human nature. Let me remind you of what I said a week ago on Sunday in the sermon<sup>2</sup>. I raised the following thoughts:

[A practical example: lies]

[54] How did we react, for example, when we first told a lie? At the time we naturally knew nothing about sin – we simply did not know the concept of sin. However, it automatically happens that our human nature – even if it has not been particularly cultivated, or, let us pit it this way, if it has not been coarsened – will still react. We may be able to remember when we were unfortunate, that is, when we first told a lie. It is possible that no one noticed it. Nevertheless, a strange blush rose in our face, we were gripped by a strange confusion. What is that? It is the feeling that a foreign object has entered our human nature. You must remember this experience. Noble-minded souls, especially the souls of women, feel this sort of experience particularly painfully.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf Sermon of 27.1.1963, in: *Aus dem Glauben leben*, vol 6, 9-12.

[Don't kill your feeling of guilt]

Let us leave aside the subject of telling lies. [I am speaking in general terms about the feeling that a foreign object has entered my human nature.] Then the question naturally arises: What should I do with this feeling? Should I simply say: It is not a sin, so I shall overlook it? It harms our character-formation greatly if we do so. I think that from a moral-theological standpoint I have to tell myself: I can't do anything about it! If a foreign body of some sort has entered into my human nature, I have to call it a foreign body. So, to start with, I have to protect my soul from acquiring a false feeling of guilt, or a false sense of guilt. On the other hand, I may not simply shove this feeling aside heavy-handedly by telling myself: The feeling that has been awakened in my nature is nonsense. There are so many noble, fine things that we hardly acknowledge any more today, and so we don't even give them a name. We need to remember: We may not kill such a sense of guilt.

Now, of course – and this is most important, particularly for us priests – we have to remember that we cannot exist in the long run without such feelings of guilt. Today a foreign object will break into my nature from this angle, tomorrow from that. We also notice it. Of course, I could now use my intellect to clarify my feelings, and so tell my feelings: It was a surprise fault, it was not a sin. But if I then go on to tell myself: Nothing will change, everything will remain as it was – that is, simply to go on as before – it means that I am actually killing an extremely fine feeling in my nature.

[55] If I may now speak in more practical terms, I would like to ask: How should we react to such inner movements and feelings? It doesn't matter whether an ascetical or a moral-theological sense of guilt is involved, I must tell myself the following: First of all, I must be aware that when a feeling of guilt is aroused by weaknesses, it has nothing to do with sin. So I have to acknowledge: such miseries are simply part of my daily bread as long as I am burdened with original

sin. I will not need to enjoy this bread when I have attained the *visio beata*. But as long as I am here on earth, I simply have to reckon with it that weakness after weakness will break through in my nature. You may not think that such refined feelings are reserved to the souls of women. When you know yourselves better, that is, when you see yourselves more deeply in God's light, and when you experience yourselves in this way, you can take it for granted that you will also feel such movements within ourselves, even if they have nothing to do with sin.

[A comparison to illustrate the above: a dusty room in the early morning]

May I use a comparison? I presuppose that my room is very dusty. If I look into my room early in the morning, I will not notice the dust. However, at midday, when the midday sun is shining brightly into the room, warming everything – how often have we not noticed that we then see every speck of dust. It is much the same with the soul. The closer we come to God, the more clearly we will see every speck of dust.

You may not think: Why should I worry about such things? If the soul wants to be formed, the little things matter. Of course, I know that it will be just the same tomorrow, and possibly even worse the following day. So I have to learn the art of dealing with such things. What does that mean? I must learn to cope with the experiences of my weaknesses in such a way that they bring me to God. That is always the most important thing for us. You must make use of everything to become distinctively supernatural people. Unless we become supernatural people '*per eminentiam*' [in a most eminent way], we will soon become enslaved to this world. At least we will lose our élan. So what must I do? Let me repeat: It doesn't matter whether an ascetical or moral-theological sense of guilt is concerned. What is necessary is that we think clearly, so that we do not constantly confuse this twofold awareness of guilt, otherwise we will

lose ourselves.

This raises two questions: What must I do in a negative sense? Secondly: What must I do in a positive sense? I would like to give you four answers to each question. You will probably know them. Now that we are living in a special atmosphere and are so much borne by grace, they will sound different from a merely theoretical answer.

**[Four negative answers about how to deal with our weaknesses]**

[First answer: Don't be surprised!]

Firstly, the most important thing is *not to be surprised!* That is so important for us human beings who want to remain healthy despite our weaknesses, indeed, because of our weaknesses. So, don't be surprised!

[Possible application: Shadows in my personal family history]

Of course, we know what theology tells us about the general validity of original sin. When we see ourselves as we are, with all the discord in our nature, and then look back over the history of our personal family, we will also see the character of that family marked by our parents and grandparents. When we see the natural tendencies in our family, we may not be shy about admitting, or at least admitting to ourselves: How can I be surprised that so many weeds are growing in my garden? The ground has been contaminated by original sin, and I have planted into it everything God wanted to give me. So I really may not be surprised! Let me repeat: At most I may be surprised that things aren't worse than they are! It will probably not be too difficult for us to do this if we have sound self-knowledge. I should rather be surprised that I am not worse off!

So if I am really convinced about the reality within myself, if I am convinced that I have a broken nature, I think we will find countless

occasions on which we can make this observation. There may be a vast, gaping void within us; inwardly everything could be seething as violently as possible; as many miseries could break through as possible – when I look back on my life until now, when I look into myself, I will usually have enough reason to say: I am surprised that things aren't far worse! You must only consider whether your experiences correspond with the truth [the facts]. However, we have also to presuppose that there is a tendency in our soul to reach out to our Infinite God. If that tendency is not there, if I have become inwardly coarse, I could tell myself: The weakness is simply there, there is nothing I can do about it. Naturally we may not do this. We may not become coarse and unfeeling. We may also not allow our feelings to be corrupted or confused. So, the first thing is: Don't be surprised!

[Look into your own life. The way to inner freedom]

You need to pause here. It is not enough if we hold onto this just with our intellects and repeat what has been said. The most important thing now is to look back into our lives, and to pause as we encounter individual points in our past, perhaps the most painful ones, possibly also the points about which we want to say: For heaven's sake, if only that hadn't happened! You really must do this. I have already advised you a number of times, that if you look into the future and find something about which you have to say: Lord God, you can send me everything, but please not that! then I would not give myself rest until I can say with conviction: Lord God, if you have foreseen that for me, I even ask you to send it!

Behind this there is always the thought that if we want to walk the path of freedom – real, inner freedom – we will not be able to avoid such an attitude or action. It is simply a fact that if we want to learn to make the right use of our miseries in order to come to God, we must remain with those points that we feel are the most difficult ones in our lives. Even if you have to tell yourself that there are still other

black marks there, you should again say: I am not surprised; I really don't need to be surprised. Of course, this does not mean that our sense of responsibility should be destroyed. Not at all! Nevertheless, don't be surprised! [58]

### [2 Answer: Don't be confused!]

Secondly, *don't be confused!* What does that mean? You immediately feel that confusion could easily be a natural reaction to experiences of our weaknesses. Why shouldn't we become confused? If I may not be surprised, I may also not be confused! I take my weaknesses for granted; I am far more inclined to be surprised that things aren't worse. There is no reason to become confused.

[Touching our weaknesses as a source of strength]

You know the Greek myths. They tell us that there was a man who was invincible, the giant [Antaeos] who was invincible as long as he touched the earth. When I look at myself it means: As long as I touch the earth. What does it mean to touch the earth? It means that touching my weaknesses, savouring my weaknesses once more, savouring them and experiencing them as foreign bodies [will increase my inner strength]. That should actually be the atmosphere in which we live and from which we draw new strength. The more we have failed, the more lovingly we should touch the ground, the earth, these weaknesses.

This may sound a bit odd at the moment, but when I have rounded-off my thoughts and completed them, you will be able to understand better what that means in practice for everyday life. Human beings, as they usually are, naturally flee from such knowledge, they defend themselves against them. [They long for the innocence of children.] If only we were like little children! Unless you become like little children ... (cf Mt 18,10)! That is why we so often flee from our own human nature; that is why there is this endless restlessness. It is

because I cannot look into myself. That is why everything moves again and again. Come what may, something will always be moving within me, I want to suffocate it within myself.

### [3 Answer: Don't be discouraged!]

Thirdly, something that is even more important, we may *never become discouraged!* If I can't get a grip on the first link in the chain, so that I am surprised and unhappy that something has happened to me, it is natural that the next danger is that I will become discouraged. We need to pause here for a time.

[Is discouragement worse than a serious sin?]

The soul that is discouraged – what I want to say again sounds rather odd – is living in a state that is far more dangerous from a psychological point of view than serious sin. We may not misunderstand that. Of course, a serious sin is certainly shocking, and being discouraged is actually not a serious sin. Yet the effect of discouragement is that it can be the mother, it can give birth to any number of serious sins. This is expressed in the well-known saying: the devil fishes in troubled waters.

[Awaken joy]

If I am able to influence people one day, I must take it for granted at all times that I have to educate joyful children. Nothing at all may be allowed to disturb our spiritual joy. So don't just pretend. Everything that happens in us and to us must simply feed our inner happiness. Of course, we also have to learn the art of making use of our miseries in order to arrive at a deeper relationship with God. But for the moment I want to remain with the negative aspect.

[Discouragement and its consequences – an example from life]



Let me give you one example from many. It is not an example I have constructed, a story, it has been taken from the midst of life; it is not fiction, it is the truth. A young man came to the seminary and studied very hard. His superiors had a high opinion of him. He went home on holiday – and human beings simply remain human – and suddenly set aside the spiritual toga he had adopted when he went to the seminary. He behaved very badly towards his parents, [60] we could say he behaved like a teenager. What were his parents to do? They threatened: We will tell the Rector! His parents were not just threatening, they really meant to do it. Suddenly the young seminarian became aware of how horrible his behaviour had been, and he became discouraged. Of course, what he had done to his parents was very ham-fisted. But we are human and nothing human is foreign to us! [Homo sum, nihil humanum a me alienum.] From that moment he became despondent. He was depressed, although he was normally a person with a happy nature. His studies became a burden. I don't want to describe his state further. It finally ended with his wanting to leave the seminary. He took off his soutane. Once we start to give in to the laws of gravity in our development, it is natural that we will rapidly fall still lower sooner or later. In the end he landed in the gutter, he was a total failure. When he was dying, a former classmate came to him and wanted to lead him back to God.

What am I trying to say through this example? It is only a tiny example. I wanted to show that faults are simply faults. What is worse than faults or sins is becoming disheartened afterwards. It is obvious that discouragement as such is not a sin, or at least it is not a serious sin, but the effects can be tremendous. So we must protect ourselves in every possible way from becoming discouraged, and we must see this a life-task. [61].

Allow me to repeat what I have said until now – they are only the negative answers. Naturally I cannot give them to you without showing the positive point-of-view later.

#### [4 Answer: Don't feel at home!]

The fourth answer is also very important: we may *not feel at home in our miseries!* Don't simply acknowledge our weaknesses and say: Oh well, that's how it is, I am human, I am just a poor human being!

What is meant with feeling at home? We take our weaknesses for granted and don't try to oppose them in any way. It is obvious, we will repeatedly experience our miseries in spite of all we do. We have to reckon with that. We will never ever be able to go through life immaculate. We have just not been conceived immaculate like the Blessed Mother. *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi.* As people burdened with original sin we will always have our faults. We can't do a thing about it. I must acknowledge it. Of course, I must only be careful not to say to myself as a result: Well, since that is how things are, I will swallow these weaknesses and miseries like water, and that will be the end of it. No, I must at least try to oppose them.

Can you understand what I was saying this morning when I talked about it briefly? It is as though someone were to say: I will swallow serious sin, I will swallow imperfections. [62] I can swallow imperfections like water, that is, I don't try to oppose them. However, I must at least arouse the motivation in myself to work in the opposite direction. Naturally this is very difficult, especially in certain stages of our lives. Perhaps we have got beyond this. However, on the whole it is true to say that at a certain stage in our lives it is extremely difficult to start again each time, and then repeatedly land on our noses once more. Yet we have to get used to coping with such imperfections. As a spiritual director I can help someone for a time to bear with them, but I must teach everyone the art of taking responsibility for themselves. Whether we are young or old, none of us can get around the fact that we will have to reckon with such states until the end of our lives. That is the negative point-of-view.

Now comes the more important, or at least, equally important

approach. What must I do in a positive sense? I would like to typify somewhat and talk about a *fourfold miracle*. I am justified in doing so, because we want to make use of our weaknesses in order to arrive at a certain climax of the religious life. We can never reach this peak on our own – no matter how much natural strength we employ – God has to help us. This is what we have repeatedly spoken about. What does the Blessed Mother want to give us? The grace of transformation, the grace of spiritual transformation! We have to be transformed. We also have to be transformed through our weaknesses. That is terribly important.

What must we become?

**Firstly, a miracle of humility;  
secondly, a miracle of trust;  
thirdly, a miracle of patience;  
and fourthly, a miracle of love.** [63]

[Four positive rules of behaviour]

[1. Become a miracle of sound humility]

What is the inner connection? In this context we should tell ourselves clearly how true it is that without humility we will never be able to cope with our weaknesses. However, it has to be sound humility, otherwise our inferiority complex will be nourished. If we cultivate a feeling of inferiority, it means allowing discouragement to win. You notice how important this way of thinking, which we take for granted, really is for life today. We often have no idea of how many people sit beside us who are plagued with the most terrible inferiority complexes.

[The first degree of humility: to like myself with my weaknesses]

So, become a miracle of humility! Let me quote an example that often appears in aesthetical literature. It is an example and process that very

ordinary, simple people have often worked out for themselves, without knowing what is really at stake. I would like to put it in the way St Bernard of Clairvaux explained it from his own experience. He was a man with many great and exalted ideas, but as a Cistercian he was also obliged to work in the fields. I cannot imagine that he did it very well, or that he coped with dung very well.

[St Bernard's image: Dung as compost]

I want to use the same expressions he did – dung. He obviously took his images from the world in which he lived. You will immediately guess where the idea is leading. He explained very beautifully: Well, dung is dung, isn't it? It rots. Perhaps you can guess how the image develops. What dung and decay mean to farming, my weaknesses mean to my religious life, my inner, moral life. Weaknesses can be compared with decaying matter, we have gone astray. What is that? There is a fault, it may even be a sin. But, says St Bernard, in the spirit of those times: What could we do as farmers without dung?

You can interpret the image still further, but you must make it very practical and apply it to your life. It is not good enough if we only take an image as a pretty picture, we have to apply it to ourselves, so that we begin to understand what aspects of our life are meant. In addition, we need to pray for these truths to become part of us, our flesh and blood, the world in which we live. We just cannot exist without faults [64], it is simply not possible. What would farmers do without dung? Today they have all sorts of substitutes, so today we would have to say: What would farmers do without chemical fertilisers? It has the same meaning, we are centring all the time on the same thoughts.

[The meaning of the Tertianship – forming our own lives]

Can you understand how important that is? The question is: How can we use these things – our faults, confusions and sins – in a positive

sense? Actually I would not need to dwell on this further. I have already talked about it in these days. You will notice that I take up all the important vital questions that touch us personally, and repeatedly shed light on them from various points of view. In the Tertianship the point is not to stuff our heads with ideas, but to be formed. The Tertianship is meant to be a school of life, a practical school of life for us.

The best thing would be if you could again study the three stages, or steps of humility as taught by Olier<sup>3</sup>. According to him, what must I learn? Once again it sounds very strange:

To like myself with my weaknesses – please listen carefully – not with the sins connected with them. You have to make a distinction here. Each sinful thing in my nature – and this also applies to the weaknesses about which I can do nothing – means I have strayed from the order of being, from the ideal. This applies in particular to real sins. Through my sin I can become aware of the fact that I have strayed from God's will – seeing it from the point of view of sin – but I can also see it from the point of view of my weakness. The latter situation is meant. I have to like myself with my weaknesses. This awakens in me the awareness that I am a created being, the feeling that I am a created being.

Why can I like myself? If I only like myself when I am weak, it means that I am ill, or I will become ill. So what echo has to be awakened – and it absolutely has to be awakened? I think I have told you this in these days: No virtue – least of all humility – can live without being connected with God, or with love. If I separate something from love, it is a sign of immaturity, or it will even make me ill. This also applies here. I don't know if I can describe this to you simply. When I feel that I am helpless and then ask: How can I

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<sup>3</sup> J.J. Olier (1608-1657), founder of the Society of Saint Suplice. Cf. Tanquerey, *Outline of ascetical and mystical theology*, nr. 1134: USA Tertianship (July 1952) I, 279.

like myself? The answer is to be found in assimilating the experience till it becomes part of me: Look at what you can manage on your own; unless you can manage to cling to God, and give your heart to God, you may never expect to be freed from your miseries, or at least to become more free from them. Can you understand what that means? Unless such experiences drive me forcefully into God's heart – more deeply and fervently into God's heart – than is usually the case with me, I will never be set free from my selfish self; I will even have to reckon with becoming ill.

From this you can understand why a fault, indeed I may even dare to say, a sin, perhaps even a serious sin, can often be a greater grace for me than, let us say, Holy Communion. I know that this is a statement a preacher often made when he talked to Sisters, or in other talks. Of course they were quite unable to understand it. He also told them: Yes, a serious sin can often be a far greater grace for you than daily Communion. Of course, this is an exaggeration. He was presupposing something that should not happen in practice. He was presupposing that daily Communion [66] is received mechanically. Then, from the point of view of our moral transformation, it doesn't mean much. However, if we make proper use of a serious sin, it can become a tremendous motivation that drives us into God's heart. We will then tell ourselves: Now I must espouse my miseries to divine strength, my helplessness must cling to divine strength!

[St Paul's way of saying it]

I think that this should become second nature to you as time goes by. You should allow St Paul to instruct you in these matters. He formulated these truths so brilliantly – but always within the context of the great organism of the religious-ethical life. Listen to what he said: I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses ... [2 Cor 12,5-9]. Is it possible to put it in more classic terms? We say: I am happy, indeed I even boast. Why? I boast about my weaknesses. I do not boast about the serious sin, but about the weakness behind it. It

is a state of weakness. That is the point. These states of weakness are simply connected with my human nature burdened with original sin. I boast. So if I have any reason to boast, it is about my weaknesses. Of course, it does sound odd. On the other hand, St Paul said: I boast about my cross, my suffering [cf. Gal 6,14]. He is very ready to boast, isn't he? Well, he felt he could and should boast, but he read the actions about which he boasted from things that we usually interpret very differently.

If you now ask: Why? He tells us: Because, as a result, Christ's power is revealed in me [2 Cor 12,9]. If I interpret this statement and read its meaning out of the words, what echoes unconsciously or subconsciously from them is the thought I have just emphasized: Since I really experience my weaknesses, something urges me towards and into God. I know that God's power has to espouse itself to my lack of strength, my weakness. I boast about my weaknesses, because as a result Christ's power is revealed in me. That is to say, if something good is to come of me, with all my weaknesses, it presupposes that I must cling to God and Christ because of those weaknesses. In this way I will ultimately reach my ideal of being an image and likeness of God, or, if you like, an image and likeness of God the Father. So we are well advised to strive for the virtue of humility. Usually I call it smallness, littleness. However, this smallness must be a means to become great. If this is the case, we cannot do enough to acquire this virtue.

You will see, this brings about a greater re-orientation, or a stronger formulation of the ideal of childlikeness: "Because small" we are told about the Blessed Mother. That is a classic statement: Because Mary experienced that she was small, she pleased God the most [cf. Lk 1,48f]. We would really have to add that we may not suppose that this smallness, or humility, was based on the experience of sin and the normal weaknesses we have. No. The mere awareness that she had been created was the deepest reason why she experienced that she was small before God. God's infinity is meant to awaken in us the

profound experience that we are limited, that we are creatures - creatures burdened with original sin, creatures who have been dirtied by personal sin. For us this means: *Ordo essendi est ordo agendi* - it is simply a fact, I live in this reality, this is my world. However, I must accept it as a whole. What happens if I simply get stuck here and remain stuck? If you see it organically, or in a psychological context, you need to remember that sound life always develops organically, slowly, from within; from one totality - organic totality - into another.

["Change stilts"]

Let me quote an example. You probably know it in Germany. It is not as though the Rhineland has a monopoly in this matter. In the Rhineland we like to walk on stilts. It will probably be the same today as it was at my time, that boys like to walk on stilts. I tell myself something like this - it is rather a drastic example - because of the way I grew up, I was quite safe on my stilts. What sort of stilts are meant? I was quite independent and made my way on my own. What did I want? I wanted to educate myself, I wanted to govern myself and form myself according to my ideal. These were my stilts. Now, however, I experience that I fall off my stilts repeatedly. I need other stilts. What sort of stilts are meant? Of course, it is an image, and every image is limited. I must get off my stilts and get up onto God's stilts. How am I to do this? If you look at it realistically - first I have to get down from my stilts. Of course, it will take some time before I will be able to walk properly with the other stilts.

What am I trying to say? The experience that I can manage will not grow in me overnight. Of course, God can give it to me in a moment. However, the way God normally leads a soul, he usually allows us to experience our weaknesses for a long time. That is the real meaning of the first week of the Ignatian retreat. It leads us to experience our miseries almost exclusively. Depending on which sort of people are making the retreat, the retreat master would have to ensure that this

does not become too one-sided, that is, that they only experience their weaknesses. It must always lead into the other experience. So, I must at least try to get a foot onto the other stilt. Usually we experience our weaknesses almost exclusively for quite a long time. I could tell myself theoretically: But I can do everything in him who strengthens me [Phil 4,13]. I boast about my weaknesses, because as a result ... [2 Cor 12,9]. Or, when I am weak, then I am strong [2 Cor 12,10]. Notice how Paul emphasizes this life-process with his wonderful formulations. When I am weak, then I am strong. Usually it happens that we experience our weaknesses in a one-sided way for a long time. Then, in all probability, as time goes by I will experience in a one-sided way how much I am sheltered in God, that I am espoused to divine power, until the two experiences harmonize. Of course, God can do whatever he wills. It is not the case that people always develop in this way. However, it is understandable that it will take some time before this organism lives in us and we experience: I am strong in my weakness and weak in my strength. That is actually our Catholic feeling for life in this matter.

My dear confreres, when you come across so many souls that are ill today – setting aside the fact that we are all ill; I mean souls that are abnormally ill – you will see that you will be able to heal many souls with what I have said, especially if they are religious souls. All the other methods – whether you work with psychoanalysis or anything else – will not achieve what such meaningful self-education, in the sense of education towards humility, can achieve. Humility is sound when it is always connected with God. As soon as it is not connected with God – consciously connected with God – humility is an illness. I cannot heal one illness with another illness. I need some other serum. What serum is meant? It is always self-surrender to God, it is love for God.

[Should we imitate people who exemplify humility?]

I have only described the first degree of humility briefly. You will

have to ask yourselves: How are things in my soul with regard to humility? Of course, the usual way is to tell people: Look at this person, or that, what an expression of humility, or act of humility you will find in them! Such outward acts of expression are often suspect. There is always the danger that they are an expression of pride. The main thing is always the fundamental attitude - the fundamental attitude of soul towards weakness and strength, towards our personal miseries and divine, infinite mercy.

[Oblation to God's mercy]

It is a most beautiful thought. I have already touched upon it in these days. Since it is such a central idea, I am sure you will allow me to raise it again briefly. It is what St Therese of the Child Jesus meant when she said: I want to be "*an oblation to God's mercy*". This hits the nail on the head. What does it mean to be an oblation to God's mercy? It does not mean that we don't try. It means the same as the "little virtues". They are actually tremendous virtues. Why are they called little? Because in my estimation all that I am, or all I have acquired through striving, is really not worth much. What do I consider great? God's activity in all that he has given me, or for which he has used me. Oblation to God's mercy? What do I now offer him? What do I sacrifice to God? All my rights to his mercy. We may not overlook that according moral and theological teaching we have a certain right to be rewarded, if we have been noble-minded and good, if we have performed supernatural and morally noble works. We may have the right, but we don't count on it. What do I offer God? I sacrifice all my rights to God's justice. On what do I then depend? Simply on my right to his mercy!

[One pole – trust in God's mercy – the Book of Life has been lost]

At times I have put it jokingly. Let us suppose – this is expressed in such a human way – that God has lost the Book of Life. Of course, it is difficult to imagine this – the devil has stolen it. You can imagine

all sorts of things in this way. So, let us suppose that the Book of Life has got lost. Now I have been counting upon God's justice – this is an accusation made against the capital of grace – I have always contributed to the capital of grace! I would then be a poor human being, wouldn't I? The book has got lost! God no longer knows, and I no longer know what I have done. When I tell him all that I have done, he doesn't need to believe me. However, if my hope is: "*in te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in aeternum*" [Tedeum] – if I trust in God's mercy, I can enter into eternity with sovereign clam. Why? God's mercy! If you meditate on the Psalms, you will find that they express it most beautifully. "*Misericordia Domini super omnes alias virtutes, super omnia [opera eius]*" [cf. Ps 35,5; Sir 18,12f]. God's mercy! It is essential for us, and meaningful, to constantly invoke God's mercy. The more helpless we are, the more we invoke not God's just love, but his merciful love. Merciful love always presupposes that I have not merited anything, I don't deserve it. God's merciful love is my source of food, my source of nourishment for my entire religious life.

[The opposite pole – my own misery]

Vice versa – now comes the second element. You will notice how the two poles constantly interact and come into a relationship, in order to arrive at an ordered unity. The second right I can call upon is my own misery. It is always the same – our own misery is espoused to divine mercy. The things that can and do make me afraid – let us call them my weaknesses, my sins; they could be the greatest sins, if I include them – will always give rise to a certain anxiety [if I count on God's just love], because I don't know whether I deserve God's hatred or love. We don't have absolute certainty in these matters. However, if my right is my own misery, I can always remain calm.

What does that mean in practice? It is always the same idea: I will not become confused, because I can trust in something that will always be there – my miseries will always be there, so will God's mercy. We

can find this in the Bible. My misery will always be there. I only need to interpret it correctly.

[Reference to Everyday Sanctity]

How must I interpret it? Please read "Everyday Sanctity" again. It is stated so clearly right at the beginning: God the Father cannot withstand his children when they see and acknowledge their weaknesses. That is the organic context. So I have to treat my weaknesses in the right way and admit to them. This is just what we don't do sufficiently. We don't admit to them any more. They oppress us in some way, but we don't know what to do with them. If we admit this, it will move God to pour all the riches of his mercy, all the riches of his glory, to an extraordinary extent into these empty vessels.

What you have to do now is to listen carefully and notice how beautiful all this is! It is a brilliant solution to all our problems, isn't it? If only I could explain it more simply; let me try to put it into the language of little children. There is absolutely nothing else that can lead me more deeply to God. Either – I am now using the language of children – I have been good, or I have been naughty. When I have been good, God looks down on me with great pleasure and draws me to himself. But if I have been naughty, I think he looks with even greater pleasure on me. The only thing is that I have to admit to my weaknesses and trust in his mercy: "*In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in aeternum.*" So there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that cannot draw down God's good pleasure to an outstanding degree upon me.

[I can only pass on convincingly what I have personally experienced]

My dear confreres, if we want to make use of a pedagogy of love, if we want to live our covenant spirituality, we have a practical instance here that we can use to describe their essential points. It is lovely to describe them in this way. However, later on, when you have to guide

human souls while remaining in the background, and you experience how a completely new feeling for life is awakened, how that person remains realistic but makes use of everything in order to cast himself or herself into God's arms, you will see how much creative, fatherly joy you will then experience. Of course, we have to live it ourselves. If we just rattle it off: I learnt this sometime, I can remember, it was once said ... Whatever we just repeat in theory will not have an effect, especially today. It has to be an expression of our own convictions. We have to live it. Otherwise it will not have a profound effect. Actually we could say: In a certain sense I have to be grateful – let me put it very bluntly – if I have spent part of my life in the gutter. [73] This doesn't mean we have to try to land in the gutter. But when I have sullied myself, if I have fallen deeply, I will know how to get out of the gutter again. I will have experienced it personally! Perhaps it needs to be said here that God allows us to experience very many things. I think we have to take that for granted. God has included everything in his plan. We have to distinguish ourselves very particularly in this regard. It is normally the case that if God has given us certain weaknesses, it is because he wants to strengthen the virtues in us in a special way. He wants to strengthen them, but also enable us to lead others through all these difficulties – I don't know which one I should mention – to victory.

#### [The second degree of humility – others see my weaknesses]

Then come the second and third degrees of humility. Let us at least mention them. What is the second degree? We may know the answer, and still not know it. I want to remain with the expression “like”; or St Paul's “pride” – I boast. Of course, this now becomes more difficult. What I am now describing could solve many difficulties, for example, when it is difficult for us to exercise the “*correctio fraterna*” with one another. I should like it when others recognize my weaknesses. Of course, this reaches another dimension, one that is higher and deeper. It is quite possible that I can bear with my weaknesses very privately, or even tell someone I trust about them,

perhaps my confessor or spiritual director.

[The way to greater inner freedom]

Yet it goes still further: I like myself when others see my weaknesses! Think about it. If I were to manage that, I would be on the way to becoming inwardly free. What disturbs us most? The fear that we will be pulled down from our little thrones; the fear that others will see us as we really are! Take down your masks! If you get to know people who are really sound in this regard, who are not constantly looking for some sort of fig leaf to hide their nakedness, and who allow their masks to be removed, you will see how quickly you will begin to like them. Of course, this does not mean that I should run around all the time saying: Look, I have done this and that – now give me a push, maltreat me!

[What matters are not outward practices of humility, but our attitude]

[74] Naturally these are all tiny, insignificant things, aren't they? There are individual people who will use such formulations and forms, but we must first of all look at what is going on deep down in the soul. That is what matters! God may inspire us to use outward forms and formulations, but this is not up to us<sup>4</sup>.

I believe that for real men it is always the best if we can overcome our inner fears in this regard [that others see my weaknesses]. What is meant by inner fears? How often it happens that we say: Let's hope no one finds out about that! That alone causes us to feel terrible anxiety. Today the danger is great that everything will be discovered, if not by us or our neighbours, then it will be by newspaper reporters – they find out everything today. That may be correct. The main

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<sup>4</sup> Fr Kentenich mentions other “forms and formulations” by which humility can express itself. One of these unusual forms of revealing one's faults is practiced by Russian “fools”, who consciously behave as though they are mad, so that no one who sees them might think that they are great.

thing, however, is our inner attitude. Is it there? This does not mean that I must run around telling everyone about my weaknesses. What matters is the fundamental attitude! Examine it to see how much freedom it will give you! That is genuine humility.

[The importance of symbols]

So humility does not consist in performing all sorts of outward acts. Perhaps I should retrace my steps briefly. Look at the experience of our smallness. Our nature feels the need, especially if these things are deeply anchored in us – if the experience of our weakness is really alive in us – we then have the feeling that we cannot express it in words. If we say it - how shall I put it? – it is often as though we are groping around in the fog. We say something, but it is like the fog, and then the fog suddenly lifts.

Especially when you are dealing with the souls of very sensitive women, you must understand that they feel the strong urge to express such things symbolically. Do you know why symbols are so important in this regard? Let us set aside the fact that people today, at least when they have been inwardly distorted, have hardly any understanding for symbols. They only see things as they are in themselves. They ask what they cost, or what they can do with them. They have no understanding at all for their symbolic value. That is why they are unable to find God through things. However, a symbol always includes something mysterious – there is a [mysterious] world behind them – and something that is brightly lit. Something expresses symbolically: What am I? [Something that I am clearly aware of, and something mysterious that I can only feel or guess.] This is a tremendously important subject.

[Reference to traditional expressions of humility in the Church]

I thought a lot about it while I was in Dachau. The oriental people have a tremendous number of symbols. Some of them are really

gruesome. And Catholic monks - think of all they do to cause themselves pain. They adopt certain postures that express humility. For example, they stand for any length of time on one foot. The things that happen are often cruel and dreadful. However, also in the Western Church – think of all Ignatius had to say about acts of humility. Or think of the customs practiced by religious communities. Of course, there is always the danger that if a thing becomes a custom, it will soon be an expression of formalism. However, we have to understand the symbolism. For example, bowing low until the forehead touches the floor, or kissing the floor. These are things that are often customs in communities for women, but also in communities for men. Or, kneeling when one speaks to a superior. I am not saying we should introduce it as an obligation; I am against that, we should not introduce it.

I only want to explain to you that a healthy soul has a tendency in this direction. How often we find that souls that are deeply anchored in religion, spontaneously make use of such forms without having heard about them. There is simply an awareness that body and soul are one, there is a connection between body and soul. Sooner or later this must urge us to express what is alive in the soul in outward forms that involve the body.

I think you need to see these things. You also need to tell yourselves: if we do this, it could be really effective. Perhaps I will return to this subject another time, when we once again discuss all the practical questions that should actually have become part of us, with regard to the spiritual daily schedule, or which penances we should give ourselves. These are really down-to-earth matters, aren't they? But unless we are down-to-earth and take it seriously, we can never be formed in the long run. We may not dispense ourselves too quickly from these things; we also need to hold onto certain forms for ourselves.

[Summary]



[76] So, very briefly, this is the second degree to humility – to like ourselves when others see us as we really are. Let me repeat – once this has become part of me, I will really be free in the fullest sense of the word. Nothing will be able to hurt me, or – perhaps that is putting it too strongly – it will not oppress me so much. Of course, it can always hurt me. However, I can obviously only do this when I discover my greatness in being myself in the sight of God. If I really am as weak as all that, the community can also know it.

**[The third degree of humility: be happy when others treat you accordingly]**

The third stage climbs a degree higher – to like ourselves and boast when others treat us accordingly. Think what that means: I am treated accordingly by others! So what does it mean? You are nothing! Shoved into the corner! “Yesterday on your high horse, today shot through the heart, tomorrow in the cold grave!” Consider how difficult it must be if you have exercised an office fruitfully, and are then suddenly whipped away and shoved into the corner, thrown on the scrapheap. Of course, I could say: Well, I have done my share, so that’s the end of it. Someone else has to get a chance. However, human nature doesn’t change.

[To be treated by God as we deserve because of our sins – in reparation]

Now let me add a second thought – to be treated this way not just by others, but also by God! God treats me the way I have deserved. [77] Please reflect again on what I said on Sunday in the sermon, when I told you that Jewish legend<sup>5</sup>. [Like the Jewish wise man ...] I have

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Sermon of 3.2.1963, in AGI VI, 34. Fr Kentenich was referring to a Jewish legend in: Micha Josef Bin Gorion, *Der Born Judas, Legenden, Maerchen und Ersaehlungen*, (Judas’ Wellspring, Legends, Fairy Tales and Stories) neu hrsg. V. E. Bin Gurion, uebers. V. R. Bin Gorion, Wiesbaden 1959, S. 197ff [Nr. 74. Die Leidengeschichte Nahums.]:

“A pious Jew – a saintly and learned man – was considered a really wise

also failed – so the punishment for sin remains. So you think: if I may now do penance, if I may live and love my way into the supernatural world – what will that mean to me? My whole nature will be healed – despite, even because of the burden of original sin.

[Mary’s smallness]

“The Lord has done great things to me, holy is his name. My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour. He has looked upon the lowliness of his handmaid” (Lk 1,49. 46-48). I bow down, accept my weaknesses, and then God looks down with great pleasure upon me. Yes, he looks upon the lowliness of his handmaid. Notice how one phrase is piled on another. It would have been sufficient if our Lady had said: on his handmaid. No, she stresses it in a special way: he has looked upon the lowliness of his handmaid. So her creaturely state is emphasized; there is an infinite

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person by his friends. However, he dragged around an extremely decrepit body. When he was asked how this had happened, he answered, “If am called wise, I don’t owe it to myself. God gave it to me. However, when I think of my decrepit body, I have to admit that I begged God for it. Look, what is my body like? I am blind, my hands are lame, my feet broken, my whole body covered with leprosy – truly a fearful picture, truly a man of suffering, truly a broken picture of a human being! I begged for this. Why?”

“Once, when I was going to a meeting of learned men, I took three donkeys with me. I sat on one donkey and used the other two to take food to the gathering. Suddenly I met a man who was ill, who begged me to give him something to eat and drink. I was immediately ready to do so and got down from my donkey. But instead of giving them to the poor man immediately, I worked for a time on the saddles, getting everything in order. When I turned round to help the poor man, I saw that he had collapsed and died! I threw myself down beside him, my eyes touched his eyes, my hands and feet his hands and feet, and at that moment I was gripped with such a sense of guilt that I prayed to God: Now give me, please, such a decrepit body as I see here before me! Since then I look like the man I have just described to you.

“Then his friends said, ‘We are so sorry to see you in such a state!’ And he? ‘You should be really happy to see me in such a condition. Now I can make reparation for my fault; through my life of sacrifice I can now free my soul inwardly from guilt; I can have my purgatory now’.”

distance between the Blessed Mother and Almighty God. It pleases her to acknowledge these weaknesses; she rejoices, she is happy to acknowledge these limitations vis a vis Almighty God.

*Nos cum prole pia benedicat virgo Maria.*

## **[2. Become a miracle of trust]**

Let me now mention the second, third and fourth answers very briefly. In a similar way we must become miracles of trust. I have already stressed the idea sufficiently: humility cannot exist without trust. So we need to become miracles of trust. God loves me, not although I am as I am, but because I am the way I am. That little word “because” is so important.

## **[3. Become a miracle of patience]**

Thirdly, a miracle of patience. Not just patient with myself, but with others as well.

## **[4. Become a miracle of love]**

Finally, a miracle of love. I don't think I need discuss this further. If you like, I can go into it another time. However, the subject is now so immediate that it will be easier for you to put it into context.

Each of us needs to use the time [of the Tertianship] to dig deeper now that we have a few months together. We must churn up the field, open it up, the plough must again go through it, so that the seeds of genuine humility, or, if you like, the seeds of making the right use of my miseries, or the art of exploiting my miseries and weaknesses correctly, can become second nature to me.

*Agimus tibi gratias...*

*Ave Maria, gratia plena ...*

*Mater ter admirabilis; ora pro nobis.*

*Sancte Patre Vincenti Pallotti; ora pro nobis.*

## February 8, 1963 (Talk 61)

DD 6, 163-184

{167} We start by wanting to clarify some things about *religious exercises*, to which we have already noted four essential principles<sup>1</sup>. You may repeat them for yourselves.

What is at issue now is: How can we *secure* these exercises which we have chosen or {168} resolved? I did not make any choices for you. Later on I hope to say a word about this.

Yes, *how do we want to secure them?* Here we must distinguish: I as a secular priest [and I as a community priest]. What applies to a secular priest will apply, *mutatis mutandis*<sup>2</sup> to us, especially since we must be such vagabonds out in the world. Yes, how can I make sure that the exercises which secure my well-being are secure?

[Looked at individually,] I could say that I must first study: Where is my weakness? Or, the other way around: What point, if I secure it, allows me to say that the whole cosmos or organism of my religious exercises is essentially secure? This can be very, very different [from person to person]. We have mentioned some of them. Now we must – especially in the case of our priests who are already working in outside pastoral duties – make experiences and see if they can move securely in this area. (...)

Of course, what we must add another dimension inasmuch as we are *Schoenstatt priests* on the level of or in the organizational form of [at least] the Federation and inasmuch as we are a secular institute with a *vita communis mixta*<sup>3</sup>. This is a technical term from which we must come back down to practical life. You see, inasmuch as we live and love and act as Schoenstatt priests on at least the level of the Federation, it is our practice to use our *control apparatus*, namely the

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<sup>1</sup> In Talk 59 (the previous day) Fr. Kentenich discussed the four principles regarding religious exercises: 1) *prima imprimis* (first place in what we value), 2) *quam plurimum* (as many as possible, within the given framework), 3) *quam optime* (as well as possible), 4) *usque ad mortem* (until death).

<sup>2</sup> Latin: with the necessary adaptations.

<sup>3</sup> Latin for mixed community life, namely a community that cultivates both community life and is active in the apostolate.

written self-control [the SDO] and the outside control [of the monthly report]. I'm not saying that everyone must do this<sup>4</sup>. It is only that when we form a community – for now let me stay with the example of the Federation priests – if we form a true community, then we have the right and perhaps even under certain conditions have the duty to make certain methods obligatory.

Here, too, we speak of {169} *safeguards*. With this we do not say that one needs such things to exist. I have already given an answer to the question of how it should be done in more or less normal circumstances. Now we want a stronger safeguard, if for no other reason than this: If our religious life is secured – and not only as religious attitude, but also as a *safeguard* of the religious attitude – then it is evident that we will be more strongly open for grace later on and can be even more totally engaged in the apostolate.

These things sound so very sober. The other things that we constantly repeat – our ideals – are naturally an inspiration and draw everything in our lives upward. But then comes the quite sober asceticism: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*<sup>5</sup> You must see that you do not become a dreamer. You must see that you always keep your feet on the ground. You claim to be an eagle, but an eagle must – what is distinctive about the eagle? – range from a solid perch on earth below to the heights of heaven. These are the things one must see. Then you will notice how soberly one must view the whole religious life, and that includes us, especially by us as men. (...)

{170} Just yesterday I was telling our Günther [Boll] how it often is with me. Now I need to really tell you: The things I teach, I also do. Even if I could say to myself that I would do just fine without it. We could also manage without the controls, of course; after all, others manage without them. It is not a matter [of dogmatic necessity]; one should not exaggerate. [I told Günther,] how often, late at night, the lights would go out and I would say: *Deo gratias* [thanks be to God],

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, the controls are not required in the League.

<sup>5</sup> Latin: “Here is Rhodes, now jump!” in the sense that someone has long claimed they could jump the river at Rhodes, and now are told: Okay, this *is* Rhodes, let's see you put in practice what you boast! (cf. Aesop's fables, No. 203).

Now you don't need to write your control. We know that it is a burden to sit down late at night and still fill out the written control.

But I think that precisely because of all our lofty goals, we must in some way always think concretely again and again. I do not need to remind you of this; you know it already. (...)

*What are the deeper reasons for this?* I already said that they are not dogmatic, not even philosophical; they are purely psychological and pedagogical reasons. As modern people we must simply admit that we are very susceptible to *the dangers of forgetfulness and changing moods*. These might be the two expressions that you need to remember. Just plain forgetfulness! I know that it happens to *me* and [will happen] even if I get to be as old as Methuselah! It simply goes with being human; it will happen to you just the same. You see, what is the goal? By securing {171} a certain *exercise* – let me put it quite soberly – I want to secure my religious exercises, meaning indirectly my *religious life*. This is very sober! I can also secure it in other ways, but I look at the down-to-earth reality of the exercises.

1. You see, it is like this – if I would tell myself something like: I will just keep the usual examination of conscience, that's fine, that's enough, isn't it? After all, it is enough for others; countless others have managed without anything else. But I must now ask: What does it mean to keep a written self-control? Psychology tells us: *the greater the number of the senses that are involved, the deeper the act*. I make an examination of conscience. Well, we already know how it goes for us modern people. Who of us *really* makes an examination of conscience every night, especially in the thick of daily life? Even when it says [in *Heavenwards*]: at this point we examine our conscience. You ought to see how quickly we are done with the examination of conscience! It might still work in younger years [but when we get older...].

But now, when we [fill out the SDO], how many senses are in play? First of all there is the *hand* which must make the marks. Already this makes it less likely that I will forget. What am I trying to say? “Oh well, I'll just lay down and think about what I did and then...” I fall fast asleep. Now you must not think that it is as if

heaven and earth and hell depend on whether, in this very moment, I examine my conscience. What *is* at stake is always a higher level of the religious life and therefore also a concrete safeguard of my religious exercises. Many senses are therefore made active, starting with the hands.

Second, when I see what is written on my card, the *eyes* are also put to work again. You can already see that this makes it go a little deeper than if I only do it mentally. But always: It is not as if heaven and hell depend on it! The only thing that depends on it is that I want to have a sober spirituality. And because otherwise, especially as we age, we tend to be driven more by life or in my inner attitude am perhaps more inclined to follow what drives me, having such a safeguard is certainly not superfluous – though I won't say necessary, {172} only “not superfluous.”

Now in addition I must add: as long as my senses are concentrated on the examination of conscience, the situation commends itself to making a corresponding *resolution* for the future because everything is so concrete and tangible. Therefore: not only attitude, but also action. Therefore: not only a general safeguard, but as perfect a safeguard as possible for these things, these little things.

2. Now comes the *outside control*. When we first started to set down these things with our priests, we frequently compared with the *Unio Apostolica*<sup>6</sup>. You know about them, don't you? They also have a community, a community life. But their community consists mainly in common exercises. That is simply the great difference, especially in today's times: We always first wrestled to find the right attitude and the other things were means to an end.

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<sup>6</sup> A community of diocesan priests modeled after the “Bartholomean” Priestly Institute founded by Bartholomew Holzhauser (1613-1658). The *Unio Primaria* had its seat on Montmartre in Paris. The entire *Unio* is organized by nation and diocese. It strives to be an “*apostolica acies bene ordinata*” (a well-ordered apostolic troop) of diocesan priests. There is no community life, but there is a common rule of daily life, a schedule, and a monthly report. Under the direction of V.E. Lebeurier (d. 1919), Holzhauser's work was renewed and strengthened in Paris in 1862 and Paray-le-Monial in 1879. It was introduced into Germany in 1908 by M. Jüttner.

(....)

{173} *With us* it developed this way. I must present this more out of the atmosphere of our early years. We always consciously distinguished between the *Unio* and us. For us it was always clear that the most important thing was more the communitarian<sup>7</sup> *life*. We looked on the common exercises as an effect and a means. But the aspect of sharing life – after all, we were born in a time when the social aspect came more into the foreground – was meant to overcome something of the extremes of individualism. This is why we stressed so much the development of *small groups*, forming a kind of life-community, which came together at such and such intervals; and if they cannot come together, they find their way together every so often in at least a symbolic manner. Therefore, on the one hand, more weight on communitarian life, the life in and with one another, inasmuch as this is possible for diocesan priests, and still, on the other hand, a stronger individualization. But everything in an appropriate manner [for our state in life]. On the one hand we did not pre-determine a concrete order, although such a thing normally comes later because of practical life. It has to come, does it not? Based on general experience, the normal religious life of a priest who is striving for sanctity needs such an order, more or less. But here it has the advantage – and it was thought of and strived for as an advantage – it should not interfere with the individual’s development. We therefore always held fast that these things (which point I adopt) should be discussed with one’s confessor or spiritual director. The Family has such renounced immediate insight into the soul of the individual.

Now, of course, the community must also be able to be responsible for the individual; therefore some kind of control on the part of the community must be possible and desirable. We therefore have what we {174} always used to call the *report to the group leader that we have fulfilled our religious exercises in the spirit of the Family*.

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<sup>7</sup> German: *gemeinschaftliches Leben*. The accent of this statement is not on *vita communis* (community life in the sense of living under the same roof), but on a regular sharing of life such as a Schoenstatt group is able to do when the members meet on a regular basis.

What does this mean – in the spirit of the Family? First of all, in essence it means: dependent on and in connection with my confessor. But if my confessor has dispensed me from this or that point, or even from the control, all of it is in the spirit of the Family. There must only be a certain intervention from the outside which helps me so that the “laws of gravity<sup>8</sup>” of human nature do not cause me too much trouble. For instance, if I have to say to myself at the end of the month, or at the beginning of the new month: I am anxious or for other reasons, real reasons which have been approved by my confessor, to omit the one or the other point, then I can honestly say: Yes, I have done everything. Dependent on my confessor I have done everything. You see, this is what it means to give a report.

On the one hand this gives plenty of room for the person to mature and for personal initiative, and the community as such has only as much possibility to intervene as absolutely necessary so that the community is taken into account, too. This is the meaning of the control – the self-control and the outside control.

When in his time Holzhauser wanted to apply the *vita communis*, almost as *vita communis perfecta*<sup>9</sup>, as found in the religious orders to the life of secular priests, it naturally produced {175} many, many complications. First he tried to bring the priests of a district or deanery together in a house. Then they simply swarmed, the one to this parish, the other to another parish. It doesn’t work in the long run because the order of being is easily disturbed. Such attempts have been made for centuries: How can one secure the life of the diocesan priests? And it was easy to try and follow a model from the religious life because it was a kind of ideal. Now, what can one do in keeping with the true reality, *mutatis mutandis*, in order to safeguard the life of the diocesan clergy?

Now I don’t know if that is enough to explain the control, the self-control and outside control. I don’t know if you have more concrete questions. I think that the general thrust is now clear, especially because they can be tested in our own practical life and

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<sup>8</sup> Namely, the tendency to fall, to fail, to sin.

<sup>9</sup> “Perfect” community life, that is, as one would find it in a monastic house.

because you have been practicing it in daily life for a long time already.

But then there is something else. We are not merely priests of the Federation or of the League. We have the task to form a kind of secular institute, in fact, a *secular institute par excellance*. Because of this (I really mean to discuss this at a later point.... but I can pre-view it now) we must ask: *What is the true structure of our community life?* In the past I could always say: it is a *vita communis mixta*. In the spirit of the later decree<sup>10</sup> we can say: also as a secular institute, as *pars motrix et centralis* we want to choose the lowest possible juridical bond. I say: the lowest. Alone from the fact that we remain flexible.

**Date (Talk ..)**

DD 8, ...-...

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<sup>10</sup> Presumably the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater* of Pope Pius XII (February 2, 1947) which created the juridical form of the secular institutes.

## VOLUME 7

**date (Talk ..)**

DD ...

## VOLUME 8

**date (Talk ..)**

DD ...

! DD 8, 221-235 and 9, 13, 21

The thinking of women and men

(Circular and building-block thinking)

see King, Collected Texts Vol. 1, p. 267-284