



Fatherly Hands

Words from Father J. Kentenich, On Monday Evening, #1

May I ask you: How did you celebrate Father's Day at home? That means in practice: How did my wife, how did my children celebrate Father's Day? Did we really place the father in the foreground, yes, in such a manner that our thinking and feeling placed our father on a throne? (...)

I believe if we are honest enough, if we consider the whole development up to date, then we must say: Our whole culture, also in Christianity, in Catholicism, experiences a *father* crisis. What does it mean, a father crisis? It means, the father is gradually removed, he is completely in the background...

What could actually be the slogan if we must create a new culture, a new order of the world? The father must be reborn. What does it mean, the rebirth of the father³? The father must regain his original position. (...)

I want to tell you of another image which is similar, but is applied to a father. We have a popular writer in Germany whose name is Peter Doerfler (1878-1955). He was from Swabia, and the Swabians are especially emotional among Germans. He wrote a book: *Als Mutter noch lebte* (*When Mother was Still Alive*), describing his own physical mother. He could also have written a book with the title: *When father was still alive*. But he did not write such a book. Oddly enough, he had a special love for the *hands* of his father.

He wrote about his youth⁴. His father was, as they say here, a farmer. They had a big farm, had a good income, could live comfortably. Peter studied; he wanted to become a priest. And when he came home during vacation, it was a matter of course – just as they do it here – he helped energetically at home. He was always a little apprehensive about one “ceremony” at the end of his vacation. What happened? You see, his father was a genuine father – just as we still can often say of our old grandfathers. Well, he said: “Boy, how much money do you need for the next semester?” And the son told himself that he had seen again how hard

his parents had to work and labor day and night. And when his father asked, “how much do you need?” he pulled his wallet from his pocket. And the son said that remained forever in his mind, even later when he was a priest. Until old age, he saw the work-worn hands, gnarled from heavy work: here an injury, there a puncture, there something from a horse ... He was an upright man; he never talked much. He told his son: “Well, you know what you need; you will get what you need. You don't have to be embarrassed by others. But you know that we all have to work hard. Although we are comfortable, you see how it is here.” Although his father was in his best years, his hands trembled. Then his father gave him the money.

You see, what is that? These are the hands of a father. Strong caring hands. Isn't it true, we can imagine it if we think of the life of such farmers. He did not have many diversions. What was the great content of his life? To care for his family, for his children! All the things which we modern people have were out of the question for him. You see, these were strong, caring hands.

And then, fatherly-kind hands. How was kindness apparent? He was not a great moralizer, but he knew his son. He shall have what he needs! Exteriorly he did not make a great fuss. But his hands trembled. Why did they tremble? Out of warm love for his son and the vocation of his son. – Do you understand why I tell you that? The ideal of the father! (...)

I think I may draw a conclusion which is of very great importance. Let's assume that I am married and have an enormous apostolic zeal. I would like to convert the whole world. I say that I presuppose that. Of course, that is a great exaggeration. What must I do first of all? I must become the ideal of a *father*. That is the greatest apostolate which I can do as a male and a father: to show the good God to my children as *father*. The main thing is not my talking, but my being. I must ask you not to consider this as an exaggeration; I mean it literally.

But what does the *ideal* of a father look like? I will get to this shortly; that was actually the topic of my talk. But in spite of it, I must repeat that you must be convinced: If I want to save the image of God for my children then I myself must portray it as perfectly as possible.

³ Comp. Friedrich Heer, *Die Wiedergeburt des Vaters*, in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 148. (1950/51) 321-331. Fr. Kentenich refers to this in the so-called Joseph's Letter (1952). Comp. *Das Lebensgeheimnis Schönstatts*, 2. Teil: *Bündnisfrömmigkeit*, Vallendar-Schönstatt 1972, pp 247-251.

⁴ Comp. with the story *Des Vaters Haende* (The Hands of the Father) in the book with the same title by Peter Doerfler, Muenchen, 1931, S. 30-34.