



Daring Practical Faith in Divine Providence

Part Five

Father Joseph Kentenich, *Childlikeness Before God*, 152-155

Introduction: We continue with Father Kentenich's insights given at the retreat for the Swiss priests' community of the Bethlehem Fathers in 1937. In Part Four, Father Kentenich developed the theme of the heavenly Father's very special providence for each person. Then he showed how the Father's heroic *yes* is given in the offering of his son for our redemption. Father Kentenich recognizes: *How little we grasp of this connection.* The heroic love of the Father is difficult to understand. *How little we grasp St. Paul's Dilexit me! [He loved me!] (Gal 2,20).*

The inborn drive of our nature is love

Father Kentenich delves into the importance of love as the basic drive in our nature: *It is so clear: If you know the psychology of love ... you will be convinced that the most essential primordial¹ drive in human nature is the drive to love and be loved, not the drive to fear and be feared! Fear is also a primordial drive, as you can see in our neighboring countries², but when you motivate people by fear, you will only have them as long as you hold the whip.*

Education depends on the drive for love

Education based on love, not fear, is something that Father Kentenich emphasized throughout his life. He continues: *Moreover, in education everything depends on winning over the drive for love. That drive is most quickly won over when we know we are loved. This is the marvelous pedagogy of St. John Bosco³: God loves me! Awakening the drive for love depends on people knowing they are loved.*

Thought question: Where have I experienced the Father's education of love as a stronger force than fear?

Fatherliness is strong and kind

Father Kentenich saw the danger of a soft education if love is misunderstood. *Let me remind you: Fatherliness is not grandfatherliness.⁴ Fatherliness is something strong, though always with the corresponding love and kindness.*

Example of the salesman

The following example used by Father Kentenich illustrates how the Father wants to show his love for us in a strong yet loving way: *From the missions comes the story of a salesman who once visited a tribe in Africa. The chief wanted to kill a wrongdoer with an arrow. The salesman had pity on the one condemned to death. He begged the chief to give the man to him. But the chief wanted blood and shot the arrow. The salesman put out his hand in front of the heart of the condemned man. The arrow pierced his hand and the blood began to flow. "You want blood! Here is blood!" said the salesman to the chief. The chief was so touched that he spared the condemned man's life.*

We cannot swim enough in the ocean of God's mercy

Father Kentenich asks: *You understand what I am trying to say. What is the salesman's action compared to what Christ did! We cannot swim enough in the ocean of God's mercy or convince ourselves enough of how much God loves us.* Father Kentenich poses another question: *I must ask myself: ... Am I convinced that the Father has spoken to me and always speaks to me with his threefold Ita fili! [Yes, son/daughter!]?*

Thought question: Where have I experienced the heavenly Father's kind, personal, and heroic *yes*?

1 Most basic drive of human nature.

2 Germany and Italy are the countries that border Switzerland in the difficult time before the Second World War that began in 1939.

3 St. John Bosco (1815-1888), Italian priest and founder of the Salesians, see his letter of May 10, 1884 to the Salesians of the Oratory in *Forty Dreams of St. John Bosco* (Rockford, 1996), especially, 217, 219.

4 Image of a soft or indulging authority.

It takes a whole life time

Father Kentenich knows that this transformation through love does not take place quickly. He says that ... *to change our whole lives it will take more than eight days [of a retreat]. ... Just think of what changes you would have to make to refocus your whole system of education from the ground up! Do not think this is an easy task! I tell you, it is the opposite. If you really want to awaken heroism in yourselves and in our youth, then this is the only way. Other educators may accomplish something using other methods, but it will not last. We must not delude ourselves, it may sound simple. But if you try to live [out of these inspirations], you will notice that it involves a mighty power which can make us tremble. But it will make us happy because it brings to practical life the finest ... of who we are [to be].*

Thought question: Why does it take so much time to learn to live out of education through love?

The solution is daring childlikeness

Father Kentenich comes back to the need of the time, which continues to be the need in our present time; *The solution to the crisis of our times is the daring yes of childlikeness the enlightened and daring yes to all things pleasing to the Father. We have talked about the features of an enlightened yes. To know the features that make it daring, we must distinguish between daring: as an interior attitude of the soul, as an outward activity, or as a profession of faith in the God-given order.*

Thought question: In what situations in the present time would the daring yes of childlikeness help?

Daring as an interior attitude

Father Kentenich gives the following definition of: ***Daring as an interior attitude** is the ability to muster a maximum of love and humility in the face of a minimum of natural insight and a low degree of the bright-dark insight of faith. What I just said is extremely important. I think I should repeat it, asking you to think it through for yourselves. I think it sums up everything, ... reducing it to the simplest common denominator. Interior daring is the ability to muster a maximum of love and humility when given a minimum of natural insight and a low degree of the insight of faith.*

Thought question: Can you give an example of when a maximum of love and humility has helped when our insights on a natural and supernatural level have been minimal?

Weakness of our natural insight

Father Kentenich addresses the mystery that lies in the nature of faith: *Let me begin with a reminder of the weakness of our natural insight, especially when it comes to the preambles of faith⁵. We have already known and taught for centuries that the classical foundations of faith only offer a moral certitude. I think you will allow me to say that building on such a foundation means building with only a minimum of natural insight. We would do well to accept that. Do not think that all the mystery has been taken out of heaven and earth; do not think that people can discover and prove every secret down to the last letter. To do so would be to allow ourselves to be unfruitful for our times and an easy target for our opponents not to mention the fact that we would be dead wrong.*

Furthermore, I must remind you that even our insight of faith is always only a bright-dark knowledge. Go back to what we said about faith in Divine Providence: How many world events and how much of God's government of the world makes no sense at all! Is everything we see around us so absolutely clear? By no means!

Thought question: What are some situations that cannot be understood or proven by natural insight alone?

-to be continued in Part Six-

5 The "preambles of faith"(in Latin: *praeambula fidei*) refer to first arguments classically used to predispose nonbelievers to the truth of God and the Gospel: e.g. the realization of a creator, the realization of a higher power directing our lives, the longevity of the Church, etc. Elsewhere, Fr. Kentenich stresses that it is the irrational (emotional) preambles to which we must pay most attention today. These include all pre-experiences needed for faith, hope, and love, e.g. the experience of personal love from father and mother in the family or experiences of being sheltered. See J. Kentenich, *Education and the Challenge of Our Times* (second edition: Waukesha, 1996), 36-38, and J. Niehaus, *The 31st of May* (Waukesha, 1995), 148-155.