



Daring Practical Faith in Divine Providence

Part Two

Father Joseph Kentenich, *Childlikeness Before God*, 143-146

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 One, Father Kentenich encouraged them to live the daring yes of childlikeness. In this second part, he continues by explaining how the trends of the time oppose an enlightened daring yes to God's will and that faith in divine providence is the needed answer.

Intro to theme: Making the ideas small enough to penetrate the heart

Father Kentenich began with: *These introductory thoughts have served the purpose of making the ideas small enough to gradually penetrate your hearts...To make another step in this direction, let me pose and weigh two questions. The first is about the characteristics of childlikeness—though under the simpler and more concrete title of saying yes to God...*

1. *What does saying yes to God look like?*
2. *What are the rewards of saying yes to God?*

Our momentary interest is not expanding our theoretical knowledge but allowing our hearts to drink these things in more deeply.

Thought question: What answer would you give to Father Kentenich's two questions?

The characteristics of saying yes to God

Father Kentenich continued: *I therefore tell you that our saying yes to God must be, first of all, enlightened and, secondly, daring. I ask you to first place your ear to the ground of the times. You will immediately sense that we stand in the midst of teeming life—modern, vibrant, even overflowing.*

Father Kentenich went into three trends of thought that would have been of interest to the priests. These trends make it difficult to say an enlightened yes to God's will. Father Kentenich expertly detected what God tells us in these trends of the time through the lens of practical faith in divine providence.

Opposing trends of thought that influence saying yes

Father Kentenich explained to the priests: *Why do I stress enlightened... The struggle over saying yes is going on almost everywhere. It leaves its mark on almost every modern current of thought which wants to make a difference. They all cry yes but what does their yes look like....*

1. Heidegger's¹ *...idea of life was set adrift and something we must face with gritted teeth. People are simply set adrift in life, as if tossed out onto a stormy sea. What is the implied imperative? I must say my yes with determination. What kind of a yes is it? A blind yes, not knowing its source or its final end. It is bold and reckless... I must go somewhere; I must fight. It is a yes with bravado in the face of the battles of life.*
2. Barth² says that there is... *a blind yes... It is one of despair.*³ *... Do you now sense how crucial childlikeness is?*
3. Jaspers⁴ says: *don't make any decisions at all, lay low! How many millions take this approach, never making any decisions! There is always an excuse, always an escape...*

Thought question: Can you give examples of these forms of saying yes that are used today?

¹ Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), German existentialist philosopher.

² Karl Barth (1886-1968), Swiss Protestant theologian.

³ Barth's teaching of God as the totally other forces us to speak our yes to God and to His action in the world without hope of any real understanding of God or the Divine Plan in my life.

⁴ Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), German existentialist philosopher.

The effect of the trends of the time on our lives

Father Kentenich was realistic with the priests before him. His insights have value for us today since we, too, are affected by the trends in the world in which we live: *While you analyze the currents of our times, you would do well to check and see if such extremes have not left a mark on your own life... It is always best if we observe and know ourselves. Then we will immediately understand the times we live in... Listen once more: What kind of a yes should I speak? It must be enlightened and daring.*

Thought question: Where have the trends of the time affected my life and my childlikeness before God?

Bright-dark of the yes given in faith

Father Kentenich, after showing the trends of the time, gave a contrasting answer. This answer is found in what he describes is the mystery of bright-dark of faith: *Our yes is a bright yes, though admittedly bright-dark.⁵ After all, it would be unfair for me to want to have it both ways. It was not too long ago that I told you that there is always so much darkness in faith. Everyday Sanctity describes faith as a bright-dark... Even the mysteries opened to us by dogma are always enshrouded in a bright-dark or half-dark. Those who influence the trends of our time offer a yes that is blind, ours is bright or bright-dark. Their faith is reckless, ours is daring! (...)* We do not speak a yes which despairs, but rather one which is joyful and daring, even if it is surrounded by much darkness.

Thought question: Why does bright-dark of faith lead to joy and daring and not to despair? Give an example.

Description of the enlightened yes

Father Kentenich began to describe the enlightened yes by asking the following question: ... *What makes a yes enlightened? Answer: When it is exposed to and enlightened by the light of faith. And what does the light of faith tell me? That my yes is built on a threefold yes from the heavenly Father.*

The heavenly Father's threefold yes

Father Kentenich unfolded three qualities of the Father's yes. *For me to say yes, the Father must have spoken his yes first. What does this Ita fili, Ita filia! [Yes, son; yes, daughter!] look like? It is:*

- *first of all, a yes spoken with fatherly kindness,*
- *secondly a fatherly personal yes, and*
- *thirdly a fatherly heroic yes.*

Please allow me to express the things just as naively and simply as I can, even if here and there you feel it sounds too human.

A fatherly kind yes

Again, Father Kentenich emphasized the importance of faith in divine providence: *If my yes is to be enlightened, I must expect that the heavenly Father has already spoken his yes first, and that it is spoken with fatherly kindness. Which world does this open up to us?... It opens to us the entire depth and greatness of the teaching of divine providence...What does this teaching say? It says that God, out of love and kindness, made from all eternity a great plan for the world and a little plan for me. He, with complete respect for my personal freedom and out of his love for me, guides all things in such a way that this plan for the world and for my life is ultimately fulfilled in all its detail.*

Thought question: Right now, how do I experience God's fatherly love and kindness in his plan for my life?

-to be continued in Part Three-

⁵ For Father Kentenich, bright-dark ...means that God allows us to see much (of truth, of the direction of our lives), but that much remains enshrouded in mystery.