

Hopeful Living



**"Even though our hearts condemn us ...
God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."**

(1 John, 3, 20)

Those of you who enjoy a cup of coffee with some creamer in it, will be familiar with them ... the small plastic jugs where you have to press down with some force on the little tab at its upper edge. As a result, the tab will break exactly on the edge but not all the way through, so you can pull it upward. No problem then, to pour the coffee milk or cream into the cup. In the same way – by pressing it down slightly – the jug will be firmly closed – *re-sealed* – after using, due to the conical shape in its upper part. Mike Krueger once made a humorous song about a similar contraption. ("All you got to do is pull the nipple through the loop...")

Technicians call this construction a "predetermined breaking point". Not an invention connected with the advent of the plastic milk jug alone, this technology – i.e. the predetermined breaking point – was common practice at least with regard to various types of spectacle frames. In 1972, Guenther Fielmann, an optician from Hamburg, opened up a shop of his own in the city of Cuxhaven. Fielmann had become aware of a gap in the market with regard to standard-issue glasses which – being barely what you would call attractive – were not in the least popular. The selection of models was very limited; there were six plastic frames for grown-ups and two for children to choose from. And these frames were designed in such a way that they simply had to break in every day's normal wear and tear. The eye-glass producers in those days had achieved their goal: A great number of highly dissatisfied customers went after the expensive frames after all – even if it meant their own money. In 1981, the same optician signed a special contract with the AOK* (*German public health insurance company) and created 90 models made of metal and plastic and all of this in 640 variations. This was the end of the standard-issue spectacles. During his first interview on television, Guenther Fielmann gave a demonstration on this construction failure in standard glasses – an intentional, in-built defect, so to speak – well-known to the producers but not to the customers.

Even farmers are familiar with such pre-determined breaking points. When mounting the one or other peripheral piece of equipment to their tractor, e.g. a grass-mower or a muck spreader, then the force will be transmitted via a comparatively thin piece of shaft which is going to break under an extreme load or pressure. Of course, the designers could be blamed for having under-dimensioned the shaft (instead of making it stronger), but the idea behind it all was that - in case of any blockages - the more sophisticated and therefore more expensive transmission gears would remain undamaged while the shaft, which is so much easier to exchange, would be liable to break. In the past, a piece of log or round timber was installed even in the force transmission chain of the cutter bars (tractor). Whenever a stone or piece of wood got caught in-between the knives, then the log or timber would break and not the blade.

Predetermined breaking points do make sense – be it with regard to agricultural machinery, be it in contraptions of common everyday use like milk jugs.

And what about us humans? There are many guidebooks – how-to manuals – around telling us how to educate ourselves to become proficient, *well-functioning* individuals. Father Kentenich can be rightfully named as one of the great pedagogical reformers of the early twentieth century who – rather unusual for those days – referred to the young people's drive for freedom and independence and proceeded from that. With his teaching and

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demonstrating what he called '*The Personal Ideal*' – one important focus being the '*spiritual agenda of the day*' in the form of a daily controlled diary, along with the custom of a *particular examination* – the Schönstatt Founder had opened up new ways of self-education.

And the result? Of course, he was happy to see (happy to be witness) *how* a great number of his young pupils succeeded in the end to cut the famous "Gordian knot" – realizing for themselves what was best for them. Or – at a later date – when the one or other bashful wallflower came to join the noviciate of the newly founded *sister community* – it was thanks to him that these young women gained self-confidence, self-reliance and even joyfulness (regarding their forthcoming vocation / translator's note). And yet – it definitely does happen that even the most ambitious youngster, the one most talented, will come to a point where he feels stalled, caught in a dead end – no matter how big the effort of his'. Once having reached this limit, totally different abilities were needed – all of a sudden – in the sense of: Can I say 'yes' to the fact that I am not the Good Lord myself? Can I let go of all those teenage fantasies as they are consistent motive to James-Bond-movies, to stories about Spiderman and Superman? Can I accept that I am just a little creature (among millions of others), waiting to be loved in an unlimited, compassionate manner? A great number of Kentenichs charges got to this point much earlier. And there were some who were familiar with their own predetermined breaking-point since childhood days.

When looking at the Old Testament, we learn that *man* was created as *God's image*. But then, Adam and Eve came, and they failed this image by far: *that* was the breaking point. The Church's dogma on what is known as *original sin* makes it clear that God's idea and conception of man was indeed a holistic one, as of a being created *perfect and whole, expressing complete harmony of will (mind) and soul*. Man in paradise had no problems with regard to *wanting* what felt to him as being good and wholesome, and *accepting in his very heart* all the perfection around him and all the good feelings that went with it. However – there came the hour of the original sin and with it ... the break, the disruption. Man lost the *donum integritatis*, i.e. the God-given quality of intactness. From that time onward, man's will (or the reasoning of his intellect) and the promptings of his innermost heart are likely to split him apart by pulling in different directions. It is man's suffering from this *unredeemed* condition which is reflected rather drastically in the Apostle's letter to the Romans, chapter 7, wherein it says:

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.^[c] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it." (Romans 7, 15-20, excerpt from: New International Version).

When we are honest about ourselves, then we know about our breaking points, and humility helps us to say 'yes' to them. The sealed milk jug opens up by pressing down on the tab (breaking point). We humans get in touch with our personal breaking point whenever we find ourselves under extreme pressure. But God's idea behind such a sudden awareness is by no means to evoke self-contempt nor is its purpose to make the distraught human run away from his own shadow. The divine idea is in providing us the chance to open up to God's gracious love, so that we may accept that love and let it enter into our hearts.

In the first letter written by John, the evangelist, it says:

"Even though our hearts condemn us ... God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." (1 John, 3, 20)

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This tells us that God in no way suspends or overrides what is understood as morals. And yet, above all that lives *His* all-embracing, merciful and compassionate love. And while we realize this, will we experience that our self- esteem is not based alone on our performance and potential, but that it can draw on God's gracious love at all times. Father Kentenich with his sense of word games left us the following formulation when thinking about the interaction of original sin and redemption: "The breaking point in (human) nature becomes the break-*in* point of Grace."

Pope John Paul II had declared Low Sunday the 'Day of Mercy'. That is what we celebrate today. Led by the visions of Saint Faustyna, the Holy Father – himself a keen observer in his time – wrote about this divine characteristic in his Encyclical on the Mercy of God, describing it as totally up-to-date and absolutely vital and essential for modern man and his needs, whose tendency is to overtax his abilities by demanding too much of himself.

Whenever next time you open up a milk jug by pressing down on the breaking point, please remember that you can do the same thing with your soul. Then your own personal 'breaking point' innate to your nature as that of a human being, can become the break-*in* point for "*all that transcends it*".

Divine Mercy Sunday, 19th April 2009 – Udenheim /Saulheim Parish

P. Elmar Busse

*(Ins Englische übersetzt von **Katharina M.**)*