

In the Clutches of the Holy Office

In order to evaluate the events that eventually led to Father Joseph Kentenich's exile, it is important to take a closer look at the position and functioning of the "Holy Office."

As the supreme guardian of the faith of the Catholic Church, the institution had an exceptional position in the tradition of the "Holy Inquisition" as well as outstanding, even unrestricted rights to judge and, if necessary, condemn life and faith processes in the Church.

The Position of the Holy Office

The "Holy Office" was the most important of all the Congregations and had a primary authority. It did not have to explain itself or justify its actions to anyone. Its instructions were to be followed absolutely. Thus, procedures remained non-transparent and incomprehensible to outsiders. For those accused before the Holy Office, there was no protection against possible injustice. The good of the church as a whole took precedence over the good of the individual. In this regard, the congregation alone could determine what did and did not serve the common good of the Church in each case. The term "holy" in the name of the authority already signaled inviolability.

In concrete terms, this meant that anyone who was accused before the Holy Office generally had no possibility of taking a stand or defending himself. Disagreeable theologians had their teaching faculties revoked. "Being under the Holy Office" was tantamount to ecclesiastical ostracism. To this end, everything was usually done in great secrecy.

The Causa Kentenich at the Holy Office

The Causa Kentenich was in the hands of the "Holy Office" in the 1950s. Father Kentenich, however, was apparently not very familiar with the workings of this institution. At a lecture in Münster in 1966 he confessed: "Actually I was a novice in all the methods that were common in Rome. I had always thought they were as eager to ascertain the truth as I personally had always been."

Therefore, the fact that Father Kentenich contradicted the ecclesiastical authority in his request, had to have corresponding consequences. But he was not the only one to suffer the full harshness of the proceedings. When Father Adalbert Turowski, General of the Pallottine Fathers until 1953, wanted to do defend Father Kentenich at the "Holy Office," it had harsh consequences for him. He expressed that no one should be condemned without a defense. At the following General Chapter of the Pallottines, at which his re-election as Superior General was pending, the "Holy Office" intervened and in a letter declared Turowski as a *persona non grata* and thus ineligible.

In the aforementioned 1966 lecture, Father quoted Cardinal Lavitrano, the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious and a friend of the Schoenstatt Movement, to illustrate the approach of the authorities: "If I had known how the law is dealt with in Rome, I would never have accepted the post as Prefect of the Congregation for Religious." And further in that talk, Father confessed, "[I] knew - I had experienced this on my world travels - how even the highest ecclesiastical authorities trembled when the Holy Office spoke."

The theologian Hans Küng, himself condemned, describes the "system" of the "Holy Office" thus: "Only in the case of more well-known victims does one hear something in public. Certainly, no one is physically

burned today, but are psychologically and professionally destroyed, wherever necessary for the 'good of the church'. ... No less serious than the public condemnation of the few, which is resorted to only in the case of great public resonance, is the secret harassment of the innumerable, who are called to 'order' through a bishop or religious superior, and under certain circumstances are unceremoniously silenced deposed, transferred, placed under special censorship, or banned from publication and speech. On such occasions, the official letter of the Sanctum Officium (or of another Roman Congregation) is usually not handed to the accused by his own superior, but at best is read aloud, so that the person being reprimanded has as little evidence in his hands as possible."

The Reform of the Holy Office

It was not until the Second Vatican Council that the supremacy of the Holy Office was publicly denounced. In the Council Hall on November 8, 1963, Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne, in front of more than 2,000 bishops and to the applause of the Council participants, broke the wall of silence by publicly denouncing the Holy Office headed by Cardinal Ottaviani. It had done serious damage to the Church and offered "a nuisance to non-Catholics." Frings said, among other things: The Office – the successor to the medieval Inquisition - accuses and condemns orthodox scholars without lending them or their bishops a hearing. Theological books are banned without the author being told why. The cardinal demanded that no one should be condemned in the future without he and his bishop being heard. Furthermore, no one should be subjected to a sanction without having had the opportunity to make amends for his errors.

Pope Paul VI initiated the required reform toward the end of the Council. On December 7, 1965, in the *motu proprio Integrale servanda*, he reordered the tasks and structure of the congregation.

Contributions to a more comprehensive picture in the Causa Kentenich

In cooperation with various persons from the Schoenstatt Movement, topics are being worked on by order of the General Presidium of the International Schoenstatt Work concerning Father Joseph Kentenich, the founder of the Movement, and which are currently in demand. This is done on the basis of the respective current state of knowledge, which are accessible from documents and writings. The results of the research and conversations can be read in topic-related articles in each case. You are welcome to send your suggestions for topics for further articles to: mk@schoenstatt.de.

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