

Title:
Exercise of Power or Abuse of Power

Excerpt:
Father Kentenich's place in Schoenstatt and the accusation of abuse of power

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Exercise of power or abuse of power
(Fr. Kentenich's place in Schoenstatt
and the accusation of abuse of power)

Lately the figure of Fr. Kentenich has been questioned. The Schoenstatt Movement takes it as a challenge to analyze with a differentiated attitude some particular aspects, and in this way to sharpen the gaze on the founder of Schoenstatt. And one of those aspects is the subject of the handling of power, which today is considered with a critical eye in society and in the Church. What does Fr. Kentenich himself say about this subject? Did the founder occupy a place of excessive power in the Movement? What experiences did his collaborators and members of the Schoenstatt gather in this area?

Innumerable witnesses report on the continuous exhortation of the founder of Schoenstatt to be "autonomous" when thinking and deciding, and "independent" in the execution of what was decided. Many testify that he often repeated slogans such as: "Don't believe me, verify everything"; or: "I don't tell you how to do it: Decide for yourself!"

It is important to add that for Joseph Kentenich one of the definitions of the Schoenstatt Movement was: "A Movement of freedom": "It was and is referred to as the struggle for the freedom of the children of God. Schoenstatt originated as a Movement of freedom; as a Movement of freedom it began to travel the road of history; and it hopes never to lose that great mission which is characteristic of it. To open the way to freedom! For example, Fr. Kentenich interpreted his departure for Dachau as his personal commitment so that the entire Movement would acquire this freedom. His intention was to structure all the communities based on the principle: "Freedom as much as possible; obligatory bonds only as much as necessary; instead cultivation of the spirit to the greatest extent possible."

Against this background, the accusations of abuse of power are very strange. Should we assume here an inconsistency between words and deeds?

The accusation of abuse of power in the case of Fr.

A suspicion was generated after his period of imprisonment in Dachau, when in Fr. Those who had contact with him remember clearly that after Dachau there was a change in Fr. Kentenich, in the sense that he had acquired a greater certainty about his mission, a certainty that he

supported with his whole person: If the Movement had succeeded in a spiritual test like Dachau, then the way to the future was paved. But not everyone was able to follow the founder in this new confidence and awareness of his mission.

In the case of Fr. Kentenich, it must also be considered that he was a member of a priestly community in which there was a clear balance of power. How would the superiors and brothers of the community react if one of their ranks suddenly pretended to have its own ecclesial mission that would go beyond the charism of the community? In such a situation what is at stake is almost always the ultimate spiritual competition in a community. Moreover, when it comes to evaluation, the so-called *invidia clericalis* (clerical envy) plays an important role among the brothers: "What does this man assume that we or I do not have?

In the case of Fr. Kentenich the concrete question was whether the mission of Schoenstatt was a mission of its own or a mission included in the mission of Pallotti. Did Fr. Kentenich perhaps intend to divide the community between those who felt part of Schoenstatt and those who tended to distance themselves from Schoenstatt? If so, then it would be understandable that members of the community would take the initiative to prevent such a division.

One possibility for effectively eliminating a person is the debate about his personality, as practiced in U.S. election campaigns. One very effective way is to accuse them of affairs, abuse of power, spiritual abuse, and even sexual abuse.

Examples of Fr. Kentenich's treatment

Fr. Kentenich's place is a constant theme in the letters, reports and testimonies that have been preserved from contact with Visitor Tromp. In them, the accusation of concentration of power and the consequent abuse of power is massively exposed. This can be seen, for example, in the memory of Monsignor Stein of May 6, 1950, written as a report of his visitation to the Congregation for Religious in Rome: "To what extent [Fr. Kentenich] occupies a place of 'dictatorship' is also evident from the fact that, after his return from South America, where he remained for two years, he convoked the leadership (of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary) to Switzerland in February of this year, where he convinced them to resign 'voluntarily' from their posts.

In support of this accusation, a few voices of Sisters who had distanced themselves from Fr. In order to trace the image of a tyrant, a small portion of the total spectrum of the statements is generalized, leaving out very important backgrounds.

To the bishop's accusation Fr. Kentenich responds on May 31, 1950 not without irony: Thus the founder "through his fascinating personality and his way of governing" would have "captivated his Movement so much that it would follow him blindly, deposing all its own will, taking his opinions and will as the ultimate norm of its action" ... "And all this in spite of the fact that he was ten years outside of Schoenstatt: in prison, in the concentration camp and abroad. It would then be a matter of the distant action of a personality as it would rarely have been recorded in history

(...) Then it can be said: How limited must this community of followers be - which the accuser often designates as being of a high intellectual level - if it allows itself to be mocked in this unusual way, especially when there are no external means to exercise power!

Franz Bezler, one of Fr. Kentenich's close collaborators: "I have known Fr. Kentenich. From my personal experience I can say that he is an outstanding educator who is able to welcome all growth and human shortcomings with extraordinary patience and indulgence. Until now I have not known another superior who would try so hard to do justice to every human originality. Even if he had long been convinced that a certain path did not lead to the goal, he was content to give advice, leaving so much room for each one to try what he thought was right that we were often amazed. He always cared more about the growth and development of the person than about external success.

Evaluation

On the other hand, the criticism expressed here about the handling of statements that are up to seventy years old, should not leave aside particular contents of the accusations. However, it is absolutely necessary to critically examine the statements in their historical context, to analyze their background and social structures, and only then to arrive at honest and comprehensive assessments. In doing so, it must be borne in mind that such analyses and assessments are subject to development and change, i.e. they are linked to the level of knowledge that is held at the time by the documents examined.

Contributions to a broader vision of the Kentenich cause

Commissioned by the General Presidency of the International Schoenstatt Work and in cooperation with different people from the Schoenstatt Movement, topics that concern Fr. Joseph Kentenich, founder of the Movement, and about which information is requested today, will be discussed. This approach is made because of the current knowledge of documents and writings to which one has access. The results of the investigations and dialogues can be read in the respective thematic articles.