



71. Schoenstatt, Heart of the Post-Conciliar Church

Fr Kentenich understood his return from the concentration camp at Dachau in 1945 as “God setting his seal” on Schoenstatt’s divine origin. It is a work of God based on a divine initiative, although it was called into existence within the normal divine ordinance and through human instruments. The founder’s courageous decision in faith on 20 January 1942, not to oppose his transfer to the concentration camp, which challenged his followers’ loyalty and love; the beginnings made to spread Schoenstatt internationally; and finally his return from the “hell of Dachau” unharmed, were the seal set on his belief and conviction in this divine initiative.

This experience gave rise to the urge in our founder to offer the work he had founded to the Church. This was because he saw Schoenstatt as a fruit of a divine initiative, which God intended to place at the service of the Church for its own renewal, and to act as a yeast in our present and future society.

Schoenstatt’s path into the Church was thorny and laden with conflict. It led to an episcopal and Papal visitation, and the fourteen-year exile of the founder from his work. It required much patience and countless efforts to explain to the competent authorities in the Church what Schoenstatt is, what it wanted, and how it wanted to serve the Church.

In the end the Second Vatican Council brought about a change in thinking within the Church, which also helped to explain Schoenstatt better. So it was a telling sign that the end of the Council coincided with the end of the founder’s exile.

In the first weeks after his exile – in November and December 1965 – when Fr Kentenich was able to move freely in Rome, but was not yet allowed to return to Germany, leading representatives of the Schoenstatt Family gathered around him in Rome. He immediately began his “Rome Conferences” aimed at digesting the past years and interpreting them in the light of Divine Providence. He naturally incorporated into this interpretation an account of how he had followed the events of the Second Vatican Council, and how he interpreted what had happened there. As he saw it, Schoenstatt had already anticipated what the Council aimed at for the Church as a whole. The Holy Spirit has given rise to a stream of life in both Schoenstatt and the Council, and these were now converging.

Our founder characterised this convergence with two classic concepts of Schoenstatt’s history:

coordination and identification with.²⁷⁰ Through the Council the Church had coordinated itself with what the Spirit had already brought about in Schoenstatt. This now required Schoenstatt with all its forces to identify itself with the Church, and to take over special responsibility for putting the Council's teaching into practice through particular loyalty to the hierarchy.

In this context Fr Kentenich's analysis made use of all the steps he had taken and the images he had used in the past to elucidate Schoenstatt's position in the Church: His statement about the "shadow of the shrine" (Cf. Text 16), and his promise to Pope Pius XII (14 March 1947) shortly after the promulgation of his encyclical "Provida Mater" that created an initial basis for the newly founded Secular Institutes. This motivated Fr Kentenich to promise the Pope that Schoenstatt would do all in its power to ensure that the future Secular Institutes would play a similarly fruitful role in the Church as the Orders and Congregations had played in the past. Some years later he was to promise Pope Paul VI (on 22 December 1965) that Schoenstatt wanted to commit itself totally to carrying out the Council. He had already promised Bishop Höffner of Münster (who had facilitated his leaving the Pallottine Society by incardinating him in his diocese) that Schoenstatt wanted to make a contribution towards implementing the Council in his diocese, and the acknowledgement of the bishop as the father of the diocese. Finally, the central concept Fr Kentenich had derived from the encyclical "Mystici Corporis" (1943): If, according to the teaching of St Paul, Christ is the Head of his Mystical Body, it means that the Blessed Mother is the heart. Since Schoenstatt portrays the complete image of the Blessed Mother in the Church, and wants to contribute it to the Church, its mission is to be the heart of the Church.

A special climax in this process was reached on 8 December 1965. When he closed the Council, Pope Paul VI proclaimed the Blessed Mother the "Mother of the Church". On the same day the spiritual foundation stone for a shrine in Rome was laid, as a symbol of Schoenstatt's identification with the Church. Fr Kentenich gave an address on this occasion, part of which is reproduced in the following text. It can be found in "Propheta locutus est", Vol I, p. 99-128.

On this festive occasion I see you not just as individual people, in you I see the whole Family symbolically gathered here; not just the whole Family here on earth, but also all the sections and members of our heavenly Schoenstatt, including those whom we can suppose are now suffering in purgatory. So we are a large community gathered here.

The act we are preparing to undertake is most important. Outwardly it is insignificant, but it is tremendously significant if we try to understand its deeper meaning.

We are concerned here with being meaningfully coordinated and identified with the solemn closing act of the Second Vatican Council.

The outward coordination is obvious, because later on we are also going to bless a foundation stone. Since the inscription on the foundation stone the Pope has blessed²⁷¹ is *Matri Ecclesiae*; since the large new church is to be consecrated to the Mother of God as our mother, we can understand, and we probably take it for granted, that our new shrine, the MTA shrine in Rome, may

²⁷⁰ *Gleichschaltung, Einschaltung*. Fr Kentenich explained these two concepts in a letter from Nueva Helvetia to Fr Menningen and the "Treuekreis" for 20 January 1949. It can be found in the Introduction to the address of 8 December 1965.

²⁷¹ The Pope promised to build a church in honour of the "Mater Ecclesiae" (Mother of the Church) in thanksgiving for the Council, and blessed a foundation stone for it at the closing ceremonies. For this purpose four stones stood close to the grave of St Peter. One of the three, which was left over, became the foundation stone for the Sion Shrine with the inscription, "Sion Patris Matri Ecclesiae". A second has become the foundation stone for the *Matri Ecclesiae* Shrine at Belmonte, Rome.

and must bear the title *Matri Ecclesiae*.

Now we are not satisfied with talking about being merely coordinated with the act undertaken at St. Peter's, we also want to be identified with it. This gives us the structure for the thoughts I want to present to you.

The first question: How can we describe the Church that should now be dedicated to the Mother of God?

The second question: How can we describe the Blessed Mother's motherly function with regard to this new Church? This refers to the act itself, which some of you have already attended at St Peter's.

1. How can we describe this Church?

It has a different face from the Church of the past. When you have an opportunity later to mull over all that the Council has brought us in decisions and statements, you will soon find that the most central document is the Constitution on the Church. Whatever else was discussed and decided upon can be found, at least as a seed, in the Constitution on the Church.²⁷² So we are not asking: What are the absolutely unchangeable foundations of the Church? We are not asking about the metaphysics of the Church. The great question is: How does the Church **of today** see itself?

It is a Church that, on the one hand, is profoundly and wholeheartedly bonded to tradition, although, on the other hand, it is extremely free, it is detached from rigid, traditional forms.

It is a Church that is profoundly united in a fraternal sense, while at the same time being hierarchically governed and directed in a truly fatherly way.

It is a Church that has the mission to become the soul of our present-day and future culture and world.

[...]

I think that with that I have briefly described how we can describe the image of the new Church.

Now the Church for which the Pope is laying the foundation stone is meant to be a symbol of the Mother of the Church. You may never overlook that the Mother of the Church has new features.

[...]

At the start we stated that the act we are now ready to undertake is deeply meaningful and significant. Through it we want to be coordinated and identified with the great and solemn act that has taken place in St Peter's.

How can we describe this coordination? Two questions need to be asked:

– How can we describe our coordination with the new image of the Church?

– How can we describe our coordination with Mary's motherly function?

²⁷² Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964.

[1.1 Coordination with the Council's image of the Church]

When we think of the new image of the Church, those of us who know Schoenstatt, who have studied it and lived it, will probably have this difficulty: The image of the Church in the spirit of the Council, as we have just described it, has always been our image of the Church! We have never known any other image of the Church! They will feel that we may not say that we are coordinating ourselves with the Council's image of the Church. Isn't far more true to say that the Council's image of the Church has been coordinated with ours?

We were the first to adopt this image. Without doubt this is correct, it is even a question that would need to be re-studied, even if only because people outside Schoenstatt constantly tell us: You don't have a clue! You don't join in with what the Church wants today, or with what it says of itself! We don't need to join in, we have already anticipated it! We must only know how we have upheld this image of the Church until now, and how we have tried to embody this image of the Church in our own ranks.

The battle of the past years has ultimately been a battle about this image of the Church. The Church of the past did not understand our image of the Church. The Church of the past tried to level our image of the Church to that of an exaggeratedly traditional image of the Church.

How did we arrive at our image of the Church?

- a. Our image of the Church has bubbled up from deeper than usual strata of the Mystical Body of Christ, that is, the Church.
- b. It was always inspired by the shores of a new era, that is to say, the shore that is fought over today;
- c. and it was constantly irrigated by a powerful abundance of grace.

With regard to a: We distinguished between a pre-Conciliar and post-Conciliar image of the Church. We have to say that the post-Conciliar image was our pre-Conciliar image. If we don't see things clearly, we will also not understand the significance of the act we are about to undertake. [...]

Coordination! It is true that the Church has coordinated itself with us and adopted the same image. However, this does not prevent us from saying, in view of the shores of the new era, that we have to coordinate ourselves with and take on the same image of the Church which the Council has now given to us, although in essentials this is our image of the Church.

With regard to b: Quite in keeping with the mind of the Council I have already said: We have constantly taken our bearings from the shores of the new era.

What Pope John XXIII gave us is documented and proclaimed as something new: Throw open the windows, throw open the doors! He did not just ask what currents were dominant within the Church, he also asked what currents existed in the whole world. Recall in this context, how, from the beginning, our thinking was strongly inspired by the law of the open door as we have just described it. We always took as our starting-point the idea that if we want to get to know the modern spirit, the spirit of our times, we would do best to get to know it from our opponents. Think,

for example, of National Socialism (Nazis) or Bolshevism. It was always our strength to allow them to show and tell us what God wanted of us in detail. It is precisely the yardstick that is now being used by the Church. Our doors and windows were always open. So you can understand how our image of the Church has long anticipated the Council's image of the Church.

With regard to c: We have been thoroughly irrigated by a river of grace!

We can discover this by merely recalling the past. We always told the Blessed Mother that it is her task, indeed we insisted that it is her task, to ensure that the new person in the new community is educated and formed. I could express this in other terms and say that the genuine Christian and Catholic has to be formed and educated in the new Church. This should only be an incentive for you to go on digging in every direction.

[1.2 Coordination with the Blessed Mother's motherly function]

Secondly, how can we describe the Blessed Mother's motherly function? If we consider our way of living in conscious dependence on our Lady, and our conscious attachment to her, we have to reverse the order: the Council is on the way to coordinating itself with us.

Our image of Mary, as we have proclaimed it from the first, is far ahead of our times. The Popes have discovered one feature after the other of what we have done from the beginning. The Mother of God is the official and permanent helpmate and associate of our Lord in his entire work of salvation; she is the great educator of the new Catholics. She wants to form the new image of the Church in us!

Let us look at our thesis once again: What is the significance of the simple act we are about to undertake? It coordinates us with the solemn concluding act of the Council.

[2. Identification with the mission of the Church]

Now that the Church has essentially based itself on our ground through the Council – whether as regards its concept of the Church, Mary's motherly function, or her task to educate – we may not overlook that the idea of being identified with the Church is particularly significant for us.

What do I mean when I talk of being identified with the Church?

It means being identified with the mission of the Church and the mission of the hierarchy.

Think of how long we have been striving to be identified with the Church in this way. First of all, as I have already told you, the Church coordinated itself with us and our image of the Church, as well as our way of seeing Mary's motherly function. We may not overlook that this is actually possible because we were never outside the Church, we were always a member of the Church. This is normal, especially if we presuppose sound thinking on evolution in the development of the Church. We can prove historically that on countless occasions the Church has coordinated itself with a new community that has been nourished from deeper wellsprings, and has held onto the great, key inspirations that led it into the future. We may not be surprised by this. This explains our constant urge to make contact with the Pope, to make contact with the hierarchy. You need only recall a few expressions. We used to say:

a. All for Schoenstatt, Schoenstatt for the Church, the Church for the Triune God!

What is meant when we say: Schoenstatt for the Church? As a member of the Church we want to permeate the whole Church, we want to irrigate it thoroughly, we want to act like yeast. All for the Church also means, and must mean, acting in dependence on the hierarchy of the Church, in particular the Pope. Recall a well known expression:

b. In the shadow of the shrine the destiny of the Church is to be essentially influenced for centuries. What does that mean? It may sound a bit strange when I say that a deep, inward transformation of the Church consists in its being coordinated with us. An essential part of the Church is the hierarchy. So if the destiny of the Church is to be co-determined in the shadow of the shrine, it ultimately means that it will happen through repeated contact with the hierarchy.

c. Recently we called ourselves the heart of the Church! The Church has always to be seen not just from within, but also from its essential outward structure.

We may not overlook something amazingly beautiful: From my point-of-view, the meaning of the two visitations was nothing else than the identification of our thinking and intentions with the new image of the Church and its essential features, and hence also our identification with our dependence on the hierarchy and the Pope.

When you now look at the new spiritual currents in the Schoenstatt Family – personally it is one of my greatest joys – that especially the leaders of our Diocesan Priests' Branch feel urged to go to Rome, to go to the Pope, to go to the hierarchy.²⁷³ By the way, let us remind ourselves that we always wanted to be at the service of the bishop, in much the same way as religious communities. We have never overlooked the hierarchy, we have always seen clearly that the diocesan priests are the Order of the bishops, while the *pars motrix et centralis*²⁷⁴ is the Order of the Pope.

So the deepest meaning of the act we are about to undertake is not just a matter of being coordinated with, but also of being **identified with** the Church as we have just described it. That is why we see our little shrine in the shadow of St. Peter's. What does that mean? We want to go on pilgrimage to Rome, and in Rome we want to help the post-Conciliar mission of the Church to be carried out also from here. Let us not forget that the post-Conciliar mission of the Church was our pre-Conciliar mission. We are better able to explain what we now want to do in this regard. We are now at one with the thinking and feeling of the Church, the public opinion of the Church. So it will probably be far easier for us today to carry out our tasks in the Church. We want to do so far more strongly than until now, even if only because the hierarchy will soon be more open in their relations with us. The great questions that have to be answered are things that are unknown in their practical realisation in the Church. Think only of all we have said about fraternal unity within the Church, and of the fatherly function of the hierarchy. It is possible that now a great deal will be written on this subject. However, it will take a long time before the episcopacy sees what is meant by the statement that my people are my brothers and sisters, they share responsibility, just as I share responsibility for the wellbeing of the Church as a whole. It will take a great deal of time before these things have become a reality! They are all things we have tried to put into practice in every way. So, when I think of the time after the Council, we have the great advantage, on the one

²⁷³ In the years prior to this, the Institute of Diocesan Priests had made a pilgrimage to Rome on a number of occasions, walking the final hundred kilometers, with the intention of introducing Schoenstatt into the Church, and to bring about the liberation of the founder from his exile.

²⁷⁴ The moving and central part. Fr Kentenich took over this concept from Vincent Pallotti, who intended his community of priests to be the central and moving part of the Apostolic World Confederation. However, Fr Kentenich gave it two meanings: *Pars motrix* refers to the inner core of the Schoenstatt Family, i.e., the Secular Institutes and Federations, *pars centralis* denotes those people who work on a full-time or part-time basis in the inspiration and leadership of the Movement. The function of the *pars motrix et centralis*, which Fr Kentenich intended should be exercised by the Pallottine Fathers, was transferred to the Secular Institute of the Schoenstatt Fathers when the two communities were separated (cf. *Schoenstatt Lexikon*, Vallendar-Schoenstatt, 1966).

hand, because we are far in advance of the Church with our thinking, actions, and feelings, while, on the other hand, we also have a great task.

You have heard that recently I promised the Bishop of Münster that we would see to it that his diocese really becomes a family. What is meant? When we talk about the "People of God", we have to see that there is a single thread joining the episcopacy, the Church and the people. The great question for the future is: How will each diocese, how will each parish, become a family of God? And within this family of God, how do we see the father, and how do we see the child?

Please do not forget that the simple act we are about to undertake includes all these worlds of truths and realities. Actually we cannot even guess at what it implies, otherwise our priests would have prepared for the act quite differently.

[...]

So let us ask the Blessed Mother to impress this day deeply upon us, so that we do not just accept it as a gift, but also as a great task. It is a task that inspires us to look into the past and see great, related truths in their context; and to look into the future and offer our entire lives to the Family, and in the Family through the hands of the Mother of God to the Church and the Triune God.