



55. Option for the Religious and Moral Dimension

There are all sorts of secular and Church movements: the workers' movement, the women's movement, the ecological movement, the option for the poor, the Liturgical Movement, etc. They all have one thing in common – they started at the "grassroots level" with the strong involvement of ordinary people, and all aim at renewing or improving existing conditions.

Schoenstatt is one of these movements, although it is the eldest of the Movements of the last century that are still active.

If we ask ourselves what sort of Movement Schoenstatt is, and what it is aiming at, the first thoughts that could occur to us are that it is a Marian movement and a pedagogical movement. Without doubt this is a correct characterisation. If we add the special mission for the organism of bonding, we would have to add: Schoenstatt is an organic movement. It aims at connecting nature and grace, the order of creation and the order of redemption, as perfectly as possible. All that is good and noble, all the concerns of other movements must, therefore, also have a place in Schoenstatt. This breadth and openness also contains a danger, which the founder described in the 1950s as "dratted universalism".

This danger is all the greater if we live in a social milieu in which the supernatural dimension has practically disappeared from public life, or is in the process of disappearing from it. All good and noble endeavours are therefore exposed to the danger of becoming "fashionable", and, although well meaning, contribute to the fragmentation of people.

Having assessed the present situation in this way, Fr Kentenich felt impelled to emphasise "organic one-sidedness", despite all organic holism, hence the "religious and moral renewal" of the world, as the basis on which all the other justified spiritual currents can again lead to centering people and uniting them with God.

So the following text has to be understood as an essential complementation to those dealing with anthropological and pedagogical subjects.

It has been taken from the "Oktoberbrief 1949" – 1949 October Letter (Schoenstatt- Verlag, 1970) pp. 61-64, 91-93. This document stems from the time when Fr Kentenich was particularly concerned with organic thinking, living and loving.

A movement of renewal that has a distinctive mission for our times may not get stuck half way. It has to trace its teaching and life to ultimate principles, and aim steadfastly at the most perfect possible, comprehensive reform. We are deliberately talking about perfect reform that gets to the roots of the matter. It suggests itself, and at the moment it is at any rate simpler – to mention an example – to bring home to vitalistic or economic people, that is to say, to people who are motivated by their drives or the economy, the ideal of the aesthetically inclined who enjoy culture, or who create culture. They remain on the same natural, this-worldly level and do not need to push forward into the supernatural world. It is natural that such currents, at least in this time of transition, have a greater appeal in Church circles than they actually deserve. It is easier in an era of secularism to direct creative forces to such a tangible goal than to a religious ideal. However, we may not be deceived by transitory success. We will soon stand there with empty hands.

Since the very roots of our times are infected, since they have brought about an ontological revolution that affects the least detail, since they have completely turned their backs on God's idea and plan, they are heading for a manifold and comprehensive breakdown: the breakdown of harmony in the soul and society, the breakdown of the awareness of a home and our dominion over nature and the devil. So we have to struggle everywhere for a completely new creation based on ultimate metaphysical principles. A total ontological revolution has to be opposed by one that is completely faithful to the order of being. The ancient law "*ordo essendi est ordo agendi*"¹⁰⁶ has to be studied carefully, and affirmed and applied in every detail – just as Schoenstatt is trying to do in all its sections and institutions. That is why precedence is given everywhere to the religious and moral standpoint, no matter whether this has to do with the image of the human person or the community. ...

We call this attitude organic one-sidedness in the religious and moral field, that is to say, we subordinate the aesthetical and intellectual, the vital, hedonistic¹⁰⁷ and economic aspects in an organic way to the religious and moral completion of nature.

Sooner or later the following image will result: While the individual is moral and religious in an organically one-sided way, society as a whole will have an all-round character, to the extent that the disposition is there. That is to say, although all agree as to the religious and moral element, as well as its foundation, there will be rich variety, as there is in nature with its many and varied plants, animals and stars.

A religious and moral attitude will affect the individual and society in an original way. So the aesthetical or intellectual, the economic, hedonistic or vital dispositions will unfold in many and varied colours. All this will happen without danger, because the manifold dispositions in people are given support and measure by their fundamental religious and moral attitude. They will have understood God's plan and idea completely, even though they may find it difficult to carry them out in

¹⁰⁶ The order of being is (determines) the order of action.

¹⁰⁷ A modern translation for hedonistic is "the fun-loving society".

practice. Nevertheless we can pass through our storm-tossed times with a calm spirit and firm step, despite manifold deviations from the ideal, and despite all sorts of human frailties.

[...]

In a time that has been shaken to its core and is completely ill, such a movement of renewal cannot avoid setting itself in conscious opposition to the world around it for very long periods. Whether it likes it or not, it has to feel and behave like a “flying” island, or “flying” hermitage, and, while remaining open in everything towards Church authorities, it has to barricade itself against foreign and inimical influences. Outward walls, no matter how high and thick they may be, will not suffice for this purpose. Unless the community and the individual are spiritually immunised, the goal will simply not be attainable. Besides this, every connection with the various currents of the times, which do not strive as it does for a holistic approach, is bad, an unnecessary waste of time and strength, and bears within itself the seed of destruction or degeneration.

[...]

In this time of transition we look with great hope to the ideal image that will gradually begin to be realised in the near future. We live by the faith that is expressed in the Book of Wisdom in the words, *Deus sanabiles fecit nationes orbis terrarum*.¹⁰⁸ At the same time we are honestly trying to bring it about. It is the ideal of the new person in the new community, as we have envisaged it since 1912 and to which we have dedicated our entire love and energy since then.

Our situation is similar to that of the time of the early Church. The early Church had to engage in a titanic struggle with a this-worldly world. In order not to lose its thrust it freely and willingly renounced many noble, natural goods – economic, hedonistic and aesthetical values – in order to be able to concentrate with undivided and unbroken attention on religious and moral ideals. The witness of the lives and blood of believers eventually overcame the opposition of paganism.

This shows us the way. We hope that not so much through our words, but far more through our lives and deaths, we will make a world that has immersed itself in earthly values sit up and take notice, and at least awaken in it a longing to unlock the closed doors to the supernatural, the divine, the infinite.

That is why we consciously and freely renounce many natural values. We have to do so if we do not want the forces God has placed at our disposal to get drowned in what is earthly. The ideal of the organically one-sided religious and moral person may never be obscured by the spell cast by earthly realities, nor may it be hidden by the brilliance of aesthetical values. What is aesthetical may be an expression of a high level of the religious and moral spirit, to the extent that a person has an aptitude for this, but it may never become a substitute for it, or an obstacle to it. If by aesthetical we understand a high degree of moral tact, no one may surpass us in this. All the great and beautiful things that have been revealed to us in the past four centuries about the hidden glories of God’s idea of human beings have to be carefully taken up and brought alive in our striving.

¹⁰⁸ God heals the peoples of the world. Or, in another translation, God created the creatures of the world in such a way that they brought salvation. Cf. Wis 1,14.