



## 56. Principles of Education

*“Education” is one of the main words in Schoenstatt’s spirituality and Fr Kentenich’s praxis. There is practically nothing in Schoenstatt’s spirituality that does not have a pedagogical dimension. Usually this is consciously intended. Even when he was young, and although he was the best in his class, Joseph Kentenich had problems in school, because he inwardly opposed and rejected the accepted teaching methods of those times. When he himself became a teacher, he immediately applied other methods.*

*Finally in 1912, when he was given an educational task as Spiritual Director of the College at Schoenstatt, he immediately formulated his pedagogical programme, “Under the protection of Mary we want to learn how to educate ourselves to become firm, free and priestly characters.” Schoenstatt’s spirituality experienced an essential development when Fr Kentenich conducted his pedagogical courses in the 1920s and 30s. At the time they were called “Courses for Spiritual Directors”. After an interlude caused by Hitler’s dictatorship, war and imprisonment, and his overseas tours, the courses were resumed in the early 1950s, only to be broken off by his exile. So it is not surprising that he called Schoenstatt an “educational movement of educators”. The many and varied developments of his pedagogy, and its practical application to age groups and professional groups, to the questions and challenges of the times, of necessity led to the question: What is the core of this pedagogy? What are its essential, and hence timeless, principles? The text presented here offers an answer to this question. It is very succinct, it is hardly elaborated, but it offers a key to Fr Kentenich’s pedagogy, and shows in addition how his pedagogical principles, its “guiding stars”, correlate to the foundations of our spirituality.*

*The text is taken from the 1950 Pedagogical Course, published in 1971 in Schoenstatt under the title “Grundriß einer neuzeitlichen Pädagogik für den katholischen Erzieher” – Outline of a Modern Pedagogy for Catholic Educators, and reproduces pages 151-160, 185-190 with a few omissions. Unfortunately Fr Kentenich did not enlarge on the last two guiding stars in this conference. So this has been added in a short text that shows what Fr Kentenich understood by a pedagogy of*

*movement and a pedagogy of trust, and what was important to him in these two pedagogical processes.*

*This text has been taken from his “Epistola Perlonga” written in 1949 and published in “Von menschlicher oder prophetischer Klugheit” – On human and prophetic wisdom, Letter to Fr Menningen, Milwaukee 24 March 1964, edited by Heinrich M. Hug, Vallendar-Schoenstatt, 1996/2004, p. 144f.*

Now we have to move on and integrate this whole system into our present-day pedagogical situation. We are dealing here with a modern pedagogical system, that is, with eternal principles we have to work out and apply to the people of today. So the task remains to work out an academically unified development of the whole system. An extremely rewarding and beautiful task!

[...]

Before I begin to explain the thoughts I have proposed, allow me to make an admission: All human knowledge is fragmentary,<sup>109</sup> and this also applies here. All human activity in education is fragmentary! Even if we know how to make masterly use of all that we have discussed together, we still know that the process of education remains eternally questionable. Without the essential factor in education, God and his superabundant grace, we will never be able to bring up a child of God, and even less a genius of naïveté in the sense we have spoken about.

[...]

So we are now faced with the second subtask: To integrate the system into the pedagogical situation.

This places us before two tasks: First of all, we have to become aware of our pedagogical system in broad outline, and then integrate what we have heard into the pedagogical situation. This situation is extremely questionable from five points-of-view. I want to start with these points-of-view so that you can feel how tremendous the spiritual world is we are encountering. We are not playing with marbles. We have to grow into the great task God has given us. We put a question mark behind

the educational setting,  
the subject of education,  
the object of education,  
the educational goal,  
the educational process.

[...]

In our pedagogy we differentiate between the guiding stars and the **fundamental forms**.

These **guiding stars** are:

a pedagogy of ideals

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<sup>109</sup> 109 Cf. 1 Cor 13,9.

a pedagogy of bonding or attachment  
a pedagogy of the covenant  
a pedagogy of movement  
a pedagogy of trust.

Five expressions loaded with content!

The fundamental forms of our education are to be found in the threefold “message of Schoenstatt”: the message

of practical faith in Divine Providence  
of God’s covenant with his creatures  
of being gripped by a divine mission.

Evaluated in pedagogical terms the fundamental forms of our pedagogy are

education in faith  
education to love  
education for a mission or apostolate.

[...]

1. First of all, a brief, but understandable, explanation of our **pedagogy of ideals as a pedagogy of attitudes.**

[...]

In normal people, actions are always an expression of attitudes and, if they are more or less meaningful, these actions bring about a deepening of the attitude. *Habitus fit per repetitionem actuum*.<sup>110</sup> This is not the case with people today. Today everything makes a powerful impression, every action is forceful. Action follows action, without the action creating a mentality, and without the action being an outflow of a mentality or attitude. That is the strange thing. It is almost a mystery. You see, in the people today actions are not connected “underground”, they do not grow out of a single root, out of the core of the personality. This is actually how you can explain the discontinuity of thinking, feeling and willing. An SS man, for example, who has shot many people, can turn around and “embrace the whole world”. That is a person who is actually no longer a person any more. The core of the personality has been completely obliterated. I am typifying. It will seldom happen in this crass way, but on the whole it is what you see in people today. That is why we are so helpless.

[...]

Today we must again have intellectual clarity on the laws that create a mentality. This explains why it is impossible to make any progress with the religious education that has usually been given until now. The issues that interest the soul have changed. In the past, the layers of the soul had a completely different relationship to one another. Take, for example, Benedict, Francis, Ignatius. Take the modern founders of religious communities. They all acted in keeping with the pedagogy of ideals, but they did not reflect clearly on the laws. Today, as a result of the total re-orientation of the layers of the soul, we have to know and reflect on the laws.

What does that imply? We have to cultivate the pedagogy of ideals more than in the past. However, we have to work consciously to create Christian attitudes and keep the laws of metaphysics clearly in view. How many of us do this? How many pastors try to do it, with greater

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<sup>110</sup> 110 The repetition of an action creates an attitude.

or lesser skill?

[...]

2. A **pedagogy of attachment or bonding** answers the lack of bonding, the comprehensive uprootedness of people today and their detachment from a nest. This uprootedness creates the most fruitful climate for begetting and developing people who are part of the collective. The denial of and failure to respect human bonding makes people characterless, soulless and hence irreligious to the very roots of their being.

[...]

Also with regard to bonding, we have to take our bearings from the objective ontological order. It follows three great truths:

**Firstly**, there is an organism of bonding in the natural order.

**Secondly**, there is an organism of bonding in the supernatural order.

**Thirdly**, the natural and supernatural organism of bonding are connected by a clear, God-willed and God-stamped relationship.

We don't find it at all difficult to deduce these things from our ordinary, everyday lives. The only condition is that we ourselves have grown up in sound circumstances and are able to differentiate between what is sound and unsound.

According to God's intention a child should normally grow up in a balanced organism of bonding. A child has to grow into attachments to places, people and ideas.

Life today, which is strongly marked by moving from place to place, often leaves people without the least opportunity to find a place where they can feel at home. For example, look at how long it takes for an infant to get used to this or that thing. Such familiarisation is necessary if human nature is to grow into attachment to a place. Also in this regard you need to keep the natural development of people in mind. How unsound this relationship is in people today!

Bonding to people has to be added to attachment to places. We will apply this to the fundamental relationship between teacher and pupil right away. Please understand that unless there is a more profound relationship between teacher and pupil, and unless the educator is completely at home on the supernatural, otherworldly level, in God, so that he or she can make demands on God's behalf and achieve them through their mutual relationship, it is impossible to approach our young people with demands or challenges today. Personal attachment makes the reciprocal relationship easier in every respect. It gives the educator what was called "uplifting understanding" a decade ago. Such a relationship is uplifting despite all our weaknesses and difficulties. It believes in the good in the pupil, in his character and his mission.

[...]

3. At least something about our **covenant pedagogy**.

What does this pedagogy answer, where does it take its bearings, and what follows from it?

Covenant pedagogy answers the longing of our hearts and in practice tries to overcome deism, fatalism and transcendentalism.

Deism is the most difficult problem; it is the illness of our present times. It maintains that although God created the world, he doesn't bother any more about it. As a result the warm and personal bonds of love between human beings and God are negated.

To fall away from God is to fall to destruction! How clearly we described this! We are insufficiently attached to God. That also applies to so many people who have passed through the Liturgical Movement. They see God too strongly as an idea. It is intellectualism with a religious colouring, and lacks deep and personal attachment to a personal God. It is not the Person who is loved, but the idea of God. With it you won't be able to warm the people of today for the divine.

Look at this in connection with our covenant pedagogy. It is as though the living God "goes out of himself",<sup>111</sup> and is constantly moving towards us. Our task is to move constantly towards him. Neither in theory nor in practice is God merely an idea; he is a Person, a God of infinite love. He looks for people whom he can love, and he creates them so they can love him and all that he loves. Covenant pedagogy is based on a concept of God that "fits the people of today like a glove", but it also exists in the objective order.

[...]

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**4. A pedagogy of movement.** A Family that has the smallest number of juridical ties imaginable depends on this type of spiritual current.<sup>112</sup> If it doesn't work with such currents, it will soon fall prey to the danger of fossilisation or superficiality.

If there is real life, there are constant tensions, high and low tide follow each other. For a time the waves may overflow the banks. This has always been the case with us, and it will always remain this way.

5. So we talk not just of a pedagogy of movement, but also of a **pedagogy of trust**. A pedagogy of movement leads by way of movement to the clearly recognised goal. A pedagogy of trust deliberately gives free rein to something, even when the waves and tides are high. It not only trusts in the good in people and the law of tensions in a community, but also in God's merciful guidance. To be sure it keeps the whole situation constantly in view, but likes to remain in the background; it only intervenes if it is necessary or beneficial. All this was fully borne in mind with our father current, or obedience current. The head of the Family kept the reins firmly in hand. If tensions temporarily shook up the body of the Family, this can be explained as method and part of the developmental history. It is simply part of the essence of our educational method. We will always have to reckon with it.

So when the 'Report'<sup>113</sup> mentions undesirable developments that are supposed to have actually happened, it does not see the situation clearly. It rejects what we call and strive to achieve as a first rate creative principle of life. This could have happened because it applies the usual benchmark for measuring the conditions of pedagogy to a Family that is governed by the principles of a pedagogy of movement.

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<sup>111</sup> 111 Cf. Phil 2,7.

<sup>112</sup> 112 The reference here is to the "Father current" that broke through following 20 January 1942, and in the Dachau period, particularly among the Sisters of Mary. Through it the founder as the father of the Family was drawn into the foreground. This was criticised during the episcopal visitation in February 1949 by the Visitor, Auxiliary Bishop Stein. Fr Kentenich defended the process by drawing attention to the principles of an education through movement and a pedagogy of trust.

<sup>113</sup> 113 This refers to the official report of the Visitation by Auxiliary Bishop Stein, to which Fr Kentenich responded on 31 May 1949 in the so-called "*Epistola perlonga*".

The future development of the world, which hardly knows any distance any more, and that quickly and easily connects people from the most distant continents, and hence has to reckon constantly with fluid situations, not with settled forms, will not be able to escape this pedagogy of trust and movement. Also the Church will sooner or later have to confront it in its own interests. Today it seems that it is already having to face this necessity.