

*Msgr. Peter Wolf*

*“Paul” -  
No Coincidental Alias  
for Joseph Kentenich*

*Moriah Week 2008*

# *“Paul” - No Coincidental Alias for Joseph Kentenich*

Talk given by Msgr. Peter Wolf  
during the Moriah Week, 2008

On the eve of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Pope Benedict opened a “Year of St. Paul” inviting the whole Catholic Church, actually all Christians, to honour the great Apostle to the Nations throughout a year dedicated to his memory.

The reason for the celebration is St. Paul’s birthday, which new research reveals took place two thousand years ago, between A.D. 7 and 10. A week earlier, Cardinal Walter Kasper was in Tarsus - the birthplace of Saul - reflecting together with representatives of the Eastern churches about his birth. From the beginning, Paul should be viewed as a man of an entire, undivided Christianity. With the provision of an ecumenical chapel in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, the possibility was given from the start that Christians of other confessions might also celebrate and feel at home near his tomb.

It is worthwhile taking up the invitation of the Holy Father to follow in the footsteps of St. Paul and consciously to enter into contact with him. At a time when the concept of pilgrimage is being rediscovered, many will simply say “I’m off then”, just to follow the route that the great Missionary to the Peoples took upon himself for the spread of the Gospel. Many will visit the parishes which he founded, perhaps in order to read right there the letters he wrote to them. Hundreds of thousands will make their way to the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, where his grave is located. They will seek out his sarcophagus which was discovered a few years ago and recently, intensively studied. It should become a year for the universal Church and all Christians to have an encounter with the great Apostle to the Gentiles and his message of Christ.

## **A BOOK OF TEXTS BY JOSEPH KENTENICH FOR THE YEAR OF ST. PAUL**

To serve the aim of this Pauline year, I have edited and published a book<sup>1</sup> together with the Middle-Rhine division of the Joseph Kentenich Institute (JKI). It presents texts related to St. Paul by Father Joseph Kentenich, the Founder of the Schoenstatt Movement. In seeking out these texts, it has become ever clearer to us how much Fr.

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<sup>1</sup> Wolf, Peter. In the School of the Apostle Paul, Selected Texts of Father Joseph Kentenich, Vallendar, 2008.  
English Translation: Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, Waukesha, WI USA, 2008

Kentenich oriented himself to the person of the apostle Paul and drew strength from his letters. Fr. Kentenich based central themes of his spirituality on Pauline thinking and introduced them into his spiritual community. Here is a man who went to the school of the apostle Paul and then invited others to join him. Time and again, we come across formulations which refer to this practice: “to go to the school of Paul”, “to learn from St. Paul”, “to study Paul”, “to examine the Apostle to the Peoples”, “Paul, our master and teacher”, and so on. These observations lead to the title of the book: “In the School of the Apostle Paul”.

In this way, an original and stimulating access to Paul and his concerns emerges. This is different from the usual exegetical commentary on Paul’s letters. Of these, we have entire shelves of books, and as such they maintain their value. Experience shows, however, that commentaries require a great deal of time and patience until we arrive at statements which actually awaken and strengthen spiritual life.

The texts chosen for this collection allow us at once to encounter those statements and contexts in the writings of St. Paul that, in themselves offer the best spiritual nourishment. There are subjects and passages from St. Paul’s letters which have found an echo in the person of the Founder and in his spiritual movement, and have awakened life. It is a matter of Paul’s concerns and statements from that time, which 2,000 years later spoke to a founder personality like Fr. Kentenich and inspired him in his teaching and educational work. In the insights and directives given by the Apostle to the Peoples, Joseph Kentenich perceived the foundation for a spiritual life and an ecclesial foundation as they emerged under his initiative and leadership.

## **PAUL AS PATRON OF THE FOUNDING TIME**

Right at the start of his founding activity in 1914, the young spiritual director in the junior seminary at Schoenstatt presented the apostle, St. Paul, to the youth<sup>2</sup>. He obviously wanted them to profit from Paul as the great example and named Paul “one of the greatest of the great”, whom they should “study” as an example of the virtue of brotherly love. He wanted to win his young people - who were on the way to becoming missionaries in the community of the Pallottines -for St. Paul and his “serving love”. At the foundation of the Apostolic Union in 1919, we find St. Paul as the second patron in the statutes and a text from his letters as a motto: “Caritas Christi urget nos!” meaning “The Love of Christ urges us on!” (2 Cor 5,14) . It is a phrase that Pallotti had already made entirely his own and that ever increasingly played a role in the founding time. On November 12, 1935 - a year and a half after the old St. Michael’s chapel received its present altar - statues of St. Paul and St. Peter were placed in the chapel above the tabernacle, positioned close to the Marian picture.<sup>3</sup>

## **UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF ST. PAUL**

I have in front of me from the same year a copy of the notes of a confrere who attended the retreat entitled, “The Letter to the Romans as a School of the Redemption

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<sup>2</sup> J. Kentenich, *Brüderlicher Verkehr, Gesinnungs- und Handlungsweise des hl. Paulus*, in F. Kastner (Hrsg.), *Unter dem Schutze Mariens*, Paderborn 1939, S. 270-276

<sup>3</sup> Vgl. dazu Heinrich M. Hug, *Welt-Geschichte eines Heiligtums*, Textband, Vallendar 2003, S. 180-182

and the Redeemed Person". In this retreat (21-27.7.1935), Kentenich takes a position against the National Socialist ideology of his time, which denied every redemptive need of the individual and from the status of the proud "*master race*" (reference to the "Arian elite") made religion laughable.

"During these days of retreat, Paul should be our leader into the vast world of the redeemed person, of salvation", read the notes. Paul is deliberately presented as a leader over and against the one who since 1933 had taken this title for himself. Fr. Kentenich presents Paul as a well-informed, skillful and powerful leader. He states that Paul is effective even now after his death; through his writings, his life and his intercession. Professor Joachim Schmiedl, a Schoenstatt Father, is about to publish the text of this retreat for the Year of St. Paul.

Other retreats and publications offered during the thirties draw to a large extent on the writings of Paul, such as "The Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of Peace" (1930)<sup>5</sup>; "Priestly Joy of Life" (1934/35)<sup>6</sup>; the retreat "Childlikeness before God" (1937/38)<sup>7</sup>; and the book "Everyday Sanctity" (1937)<sup>8</sup> compiled and published from the Founder's talks by Sr. M. Annette Nailis. Again and again, one can observe how Fr. Kentenich gathered basic themes of Christian spirituality from the letters of the Apostle Paul and made them accessible for his listeners.

He himself went deeply into the school of St. Paul and invited his young students and later his priests and sisters, men and women, to journey into this school. For him, Paul is an authority on important questions of spirituality, to whom he oriented himself and to whose views he continually recommended others. He was fascinated by Paul's extensive thinking and strong Christian emotion, his sense of mission, and his untiring commitment to the end.

## **AN INNER CLOSENESS TO THE DESTINY OF THE APOSTLE OF THE PEOPLE**

In the 1940's, the closeness to Paul grew through the experience of being jailed, which for Fr. Kentenich and those close to him, must have suggested itself as a parallel to a similar and comparable destiny. The first evidence pointing in this direction come from the letters written in the Gestapo prison located on Carmelite Street in Koblenz. Directly after his four weeks of solitary confinement, on 21 October 1941, the Founder wrote to Fr. Muhlbeier. "Moreover, in answer to the question as to what he should do, Paul receives the meaningful advice: "how much he will suffer for the sake of my name..." (cf. Acts 9:16) A letter to the Schoenstatt Sisters a week later, held more references to Paul. The Founder wrote with reference to the letter to the Galatians, that he often makes use of the possibility to speak to God about others "like Paul had done" (Gal 4,19). He wished the Sisters strength toward obtaining "the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4,13) and then writes: "With Paul, I pray: I bend my knee before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.." then follows the entire prayer from Ephesians 3,14-19.

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<sup>4</sup> Literally translated, this word means „Lords of Humanity“.

<sup>5</sup> J. Kentenich, *Der Heilige Geist und das Reich des Friedens*, Schönstatt 1979

<sup>6</sup> J. Kentenich, *Vollkommene Lebensfreude, Priesterexerzitien*, Vallendar-Schönstatt 1984

<sup>7</sup> J. Kentenich, *Kindsein vor Gott, Priesterexerzitien*, Vallendar-Schönstatt 1979

<sup>8</sup> M. A. Nailis *Werktagsheiligkeit*, Vallendar-Schönstatt 1974

Towards the end of the letter there is again a passage which points directly to the situation of the imprisonment of Paul. "We do not want to belong to those who know how to say much about total surrender in prayer, but who pull back the reins of all the horses in the world to reverse the wagon when God takes our prayer seriously and does with us what He will. That happens especially when he takes us into the school of suffering. Paul accepts it as self understood that, as members of Christ, we would be united with Him in his suffering and that this suffering not only means a collapse of humanity but also and most importantly, a start of Divine Strength and thereby signifies the rich fruitfulness of our life and action. (Col 1,24 ; 1Cor 4,9)"

A short message of significance is sent from prison at the beginning of December 1941,: "Every day I read Philippians 1". ; alluding to the beginning of the letter to the Philippians, that Paul wrote from prison and in which he prays for his community and expresses his deep and heartfelt bond with them. In such a situation, the words of the Apostle begin to speak themselves anew, filled with their original authenticity and upholding their original emphasis. Thus, do letters from 2,000 years ago once more speak and awaken similar life.

### **LEADING TOWARD BEING "GRIPPED BY CHRIST"**

After Christmas 1941, The Founder took the risk of writing and then smuggling out of prison, talk after talk for a group of Sisters who were about to make their course consecration in the community and had chosen "Sponsa" (Latin for "Spouse") as their course ideal. These talks, which were later published as "Sponsa Thoughts"<sup>9</sup>, contain yet again the invitation "to enter the school of St. Paul". With noticeable enthusiasm, he presents Paul to them: "what made Paul, the man with 1000 hearts, so immeasurably great and strong and fruitful is his Personal Ideal – 'The new person in Christ'."

It is a highly stimulating introduction to the Pauline image of Christ - into his participation in the "exhilarating and overwhelming aspects of the Lord's life", which page after page arrived in Schoenstatt from the prison. The situation showed that he understood Paul, as it were, from the inside out. At this point, it appears to be that someone who shared in a similar destiny as Paul, studied Paul at the same time.

Fr. Kentenich had in his cell a bible and a book about Paul, well-known and current, written by Joseph Holzner. The book was published in Freiburg in 1937 and was re-printed 14 times by 1940.

Paul's meeting with the risen Lord was a truly new happening which changed his life in a basic way. He became a "new person", a "new creation". His new life is a life in and with Christ. Paul had undertaken in his letters to enter into this reality in a new way and to describe it with words. Joseph Kentenich is captivated by the efforts of the Apostle and attempts, with the theology of his time, to take this reality seriously, spiritually evaluate it and to pass it on to his followers.

He wants to help them to grasp the relationship to Christ not only as a bond in the moral sense, but as a new reality, given as a gift at baptism, which we need to apply

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<sup>9</sup> J. Kentenich, *Nova creatura in Jesu et Maria*. Vallendar-Schönstatt 1991

and base our life upon. Our relationship to Christ should develop into a being “gripped by Christ” which has its basis in a new reality of “membership in Christ”. This fact paves the way for all our striving and efforts.

With the concept of membership in Christ, we come to the central point of the teaching of the school of the holy Apostle Paul. For Kentenich, it is not one chapter next to others, but a thought which Paul made the central idea of his teaching and his life. It is his original point of entrance to Christ, which he, in contrast to the other apostles, did not know from an experience as a follower of the historical Jesus, but from the overpowering encounter with the Risen Lord. We know this from the authentic witness of Paul in his letter to the Galatians and from the narrative and embellished description in the Acts of the Apostles.

This encounter after Easter changed his existence into a “being in Christ”. This meant a new basis for living and from which grew a new way of existing. From out of this “following after” - which in the language of the evangelist denotes a disciple - came the expression in Paul’s letters “to be in Him”. The concept of the body and its members helped Paul to express, think through and hand on to others the consequences of this so called “in each other” and “for each other”.

It is important for Paul and Kentenich to use the reality given in Baptism as the launching point for our relation to Christ and our Christian life. How strongly Joseph Kentenich weighed these thoughts of Paul can be seen in the “*Sponsa Gedanken*” (“Thoughts of a Spouse”) and in the prayer book “*Heavenwards*”<sup>10</sup>. How consistently Joseph Kentenich held onto these Pauline formulations, becomes quite clear, in that in preparation for the first incorporation into the community of the Sisters of Mary, he planned a four week retreat centered on the theme of membership in Christ. Until today, the Spirituality is bound to these perceptions sent from prison on Carmel Street in Koblenz.

### **“PAUL” AS AN ALIAS FOR KENTENICH**

Following the imprisonment in Koblenz, Fr. Kentenich was transferred to the concentration camp of Dachau on 13 March 1942, where he remained until he was released by the Americans on 6 April 1945. Already in his first letter written from the concentration camp he wrote: “You surely have waited a long time for my first letter from my new home. That’s why I am using the first opportunity to fulfill your wish. How am I going? Paul would answer ‘I can do all things in him who strengthens me’...” (22 March 1942)

In the concentration camp “Paul” (or simply “P.”) became the alias for Joseph Kentenich. In a letter dated April 19 of the same year he says: “He would only understand P. when he adhered to the fact, that he lived and worked in a city of pagans, fools and death...” Looking back at that time, the Founder described: “Around the camp was a big ditch, as well as a live electrical fence, in addition to SS with trained dogs. It was practically impossible to send any message out. That is why, in the beginning, I

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<sup>10</sup> Vgl. dazu: Peter Wolf, Gebetsschule Himmelwärts, Geistlicher Kommentar zu den Dachauer Gebeten von Pater Josef Kentenich, Vallendar-Schönstatt, 2. Aufl. 1995, S. 394-394

sought to rule the whole Family by only using lawful correspondence, which could be written each fortnight. What had I all written there: Studies about perfect, loving surrender; the abandonment and demands of love; studies about the Transfiguration for the “Transfiguration Course” of sisters. I have not kept quiet. I wrote everything possible from the camp, naturally everything was undercover – Letters of St. Paul! Everything went exactly as written through the censors”<sup>11</sup>.

At the same time, there are texts in which Kentenich reflected about the different demands of prison at Paul’s time versus those at hand in the Concentration camp. When we gather all this evidence together, it becomes clear how pervasive the analogy to Paul was lived through and experienced.

### **COR PAULI - COR MUNDI**

In the time of the Dachau imprisonment, the founding of Schoenstatt International took place, as announced by Fr Kentenich in the Third Founding Document. In this event, which concerns the spreading of the mission [of Schoenstatt] to the whole world and creation, St. Paul is totally present as well. In the corresponding talk given on 8 December 1944 it says: “It can be said of the heart of the Apostle Paul, ‘*Cor Pauli cor mundi*’”, that is, the heart of Paul embraces the whole world with his love.”<sup>12</sup>

Flowing out of this spirit, after his release from Dachau, followed the great world tour in the life of the Founder. Kentenich is totally filled with his mission which he wanted to carry to the ends of the earth during his travels. After stays in Switzerland and Italy (1946), he flew to Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile (1947). Thereafter followed journeys to South Africa (1947/48) and North America (1948) and once again to various countries in South America (1948/49). One can identify parallels to the great missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul, even if I have, up to now, found no evidence that he himself intended this connotation.

### **FR. KENTENICH IDENTIFIED WITH PAUL**

During the time of the great world journey, the Episcopal Visitation occurred. This event was conveyed to the Founder in South America. From there, he wrote an answer to the report about the Visitation, which because of its length and comprehensiveness, became known as the ‘*Epistola per Longa*’ (the long letter). “The problem of Schoenstatt is not so much dogmatic or doctrinal, rather it is much more an educational, practical type. The theological world of thought is in its content orthodox and faithful to the Church...” So began the report of the Visitation which Archbishop Stein delivered in 1949 to Fr. Kentenich, the Founder of the Schoenstatt Movement. No dogmatic complaints, but thoughts and misgivings of an educational, practical nature were put forward. Fr. Joseph Kentenich could by all means have been pleased with the approval of his theology and teaching. However, Fr. Kentenich reacted differently.

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<sup>11</sup> J. Kentenich, Triumph der Bündnistreue, in: Texte zum 20. Januar II. Teil, Sion Patris, Schönstatt 1973 S. 199-200

<sup>12</sup> Schönstatt, The Founding Documents, p. 104

He starts to do battle. He begins with a very basic analysis of different ways of thinking which he perceived behind the Visitation report and his own way of thinking and acting. Suspense builds in a central passage in which he explains the difference between “organic and mechanistic thinking” via a literary dialog between representatives of both modes of thought and gives the two conversationalists the names “Peter and Paul”. It is evident that the author, Joseph Kentenich, takes the role of “Paul”. When one realizes that this is nothing less than a defence of his foundation and mission, one can understand the choice of this name. The candidness exercised here may remind one of Paul’s own candour to which he witnessed in Gal 2,11, opposing Peter (Kephass) to his face.

### **A LIFE LIVED OUT OF A MISSION**

Kentenich is prepared to bear the consequences of his extensive and candid answer. Exile followed by decree of the Holy Office - which was spent in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA - far from his beloved foundation. He went in obedience without giving up trust that he would again return. There, he would later become the pastor for the German parish of St. Michael, where Sunday after Sunday, he preached the homily. Also here, we find once again the invitation to enter the school of the Apostle Paul. On his 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday, he articulated to a small, trusted circle in the Holy Cross Schoenstatt Shrine, what significance was profoundly concealed within the inner closeness to Paul:

“If we would once ask St. Paul what was the mission that he had, then he would say: ‘I was given the mission to pass on, to announce the secret of Christ to the world, Christ the Redeemer, the Mediator, the Head of the Mystical Body.’ Instinctively, we may now ask: What was the mission given to me 73 years ago? With a side glance at St. Paul, I can say: My mission was and is to announce the secret of Mary to the world! It is my task to announce the Mother of God, to reveal her to our time as the lasting Helper of the Lord in the entire work of Redemption, as the Co-redemptrix and Mediatrix of Grace; the Mother of God is deeply united to the Lord with the specific mission which she has for today from her Schoenstatt Shrines!” He understood himself to be as filled with this mission, as Paul was with his. He lived and risked everything for it. Again and again, he was impressed with how Paul lived his mission. In this regard, he is comparable!

Translation: Fr. Denis Foley, Australia / Sr. M. Angela, Germany