

**Family Day (for the Fathers' Family) in Münster,
February 15, 1966**
ASPM 3

Much of what happened in the encounter with our father on this day took the form of a free-wheeling conversation with him.

Fr. Joseph Kentenich

To the New *Pars Motrix* (1966)

Various excerpts from

P. Kentenich an seine Pars Motrix (red volumes)

Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, 2008, 2011

{50} Fr. Monnerjahn: In essence, those were the two questions. First: The issue of how our relationship with *Herr Pater* should look. And the other: How should it look with our [general] superior? What will the structure be? That is the other question. For me it seems that calling Fr. Menningen our *Paterfamilias* somehow implies, at least for me, a distancing from Fr. Kentenich.

Fr. Erhard: That's not what is meant.

I can answer that in two ways. The first comes from principle, but seen historically, and second is something practical.

The matter of principle goes back to what I personally believe to have read from God's plan. It means: I wanted to use the years left to me – twenty years, as you just said – to take a back seat position and see to it that all the formations mature and become autonomous, while, from the background, holding a protecting hand over them. I was therefore extraordinarily happy when Fr. Menningen took over the leadership [of the Schoenstatt Fathers]. And I, of course, concluded from that: the entire work – namely the *pars motrix et centralis* – now governs and guides itself autonomously. From the background I can answer questions, but otherwise I should let the work govern itself. I would have done that in any case, sooner or later.

This is what I did, for instance, in a general way with the priests and the Ladies of Schoenstatt¹. I had been preparing this for a long time with the priests already before I returned from the concentration

¹ In 1945 and 1946, Fr. Kentenich deliberately led the Schoenstatt Diocesan Priests and the Ladies of Schoenstatt in a process where they became autonomous communities (on October 18, 1945 and February 2, 1946 respectively). They later took the juridical form of the secular institutes.

camp. Bit by bit I receded into the background. And then – at first it was Fr. Burdewick², then it was Fr. Kastner and {51} Fr. Mennigen. It was my intention that the individual formations become as autonomous as possible. As is always the case, the purpose of all education is to make yourself superfluous³. Practical life proves, of course, that if you make yourself superfluous, you will never be superfluous. But if you don't make yourself superfluous, you will always be superfluous. Do you understand what this means? I was thinking these things not only tactically, but as a matter of principle. Once I returned from Dachau, I formally constituted both communities, both the Ladies of Schoenstatt and the entire institute of priests.

The act of constituting the Ladies was done with deliberate clarity. I still remember that February 2, 1946, so clearly when the Women's Institute was officially established as an autonomous community. Before that it existed more on the level of a private organization. Then they asked me to appoint the first government. This was when I appointed Miss Gramlich. They were officially constituted on February 2, 1946. Behind this was always the effort to make each formation as autonomous as possible. Now that I have returned [from Milwaukee], I want to do the same thing *per eminentiam*; it is also my intention with the Sisters.

With the Sisters... Let me back up a bit. When I returned from Dachau, that is, after the individual formations became autonomous, I kept the governance of the Sisters in my hands. The deeper reason for this was that, from the very beginning, they were where everything was tried out that later radiated out into the entire Family. Behind this was a conviction: If the things that I think are relevant for the Church on the final or newest shore of the times are tried out in a community of women and prove their worth, then from the start one

² Diocesan priest Fr. Bernhard Burdewick.

³ That is, the purpose of all education is to lead the person or community in such a way as to become able, autonomously and independently, to make and follow through on their own free decisions. Hence, as the person or community matures, the goal of the educator is to make himself superfluous and to rejoice in the free maturity of the "adult child."

can suppose that men are able to do it too, because what is essentially at stake is the relationship between authority and freedom. If a community of women can stand as much freedom {52} as we think is God's plan, then it is clear that it will also be possible for men in an outstanding way.

(...)

[Example of how Fr. Kolb doubted his giving so much freedom to the Sisters, but how Fr. Konrad Hock – who had experience with a women's community – confirmed it's importance]

{54} What I mean to say is this: Why did I keep [my leadership role with] the Sisters at that time? In order to take everything which I thought was organizationally important for the future and first try it out with them. If it works there [then it will work in general]. Perhaps you think that women are the easy case. Not at all. [My] normal expectation is that the man with discursive knowledge will have a surer grasp of many things than the woman who comes at things much more from her instincts. (...)

I consistently followed this policy: the Ladies were made autonomous and I entrusted the leadership to Fr. Muehlbeyer. I did not trouble myself with it, at least not that one could feel. The same with the priests: as autonomous as possible.

It had to be this way, for if a work is to last one must work to make it independent from the grass roots up. That proved its worth. Let me digress again. In the course of the last 14 years it was self-understood that everyone, especially the Church authorities, was convinced that the Work would collapse. They made their calculation assuming that all governance went out from me. They emphasized that again and again. I don't know in how many ways they said it. I don't need to {55} repeat them here. I know how that side always rumored with the idea that everything comes from and depends on me, on a genius of governance, etc. You see, if this is your point of view, you will naturally be convinced that the Work must collapse. It was later often said from the other side: How is it possible that such

a multifaceted work can exist without a final head, and that in times and situations when even the most vibrant organization should have been shaken? These are things that I don't need to describe in detail. They always had to conclude: He governs by remote control! They could only explain it through remote control, and that it was all held together by remote control.

Do you understand? Already then [after Dachau] the strong tendency to let everything develop as autonomously as possible. And with this attitude I have also returned from exile. I want to see to it that the formations become even more autonomous [able to govern themselves] than they were before.

You know, what has been seen as a goal – it is one of Fr. Menningen's favorite ideas – to establish the temporal head⁴ as a permanent institution. I don't need to repeat or explain the tendencies behind that. I am always very reserved toward such things, especially new institutions. I have never supported this idea, nor have I ever say anything against it. One must leave every development as much freedom as possible – free space, room to freely develop – in order to test how and what. But in the background was always the thought: We must see to it that we organize ourselves and complement each other in such a way – introducing the principle of creative tensions, incorporating them into the entire organism – that the general effect of the creative tensions is to give the whole organism a certain balance. Isn't it possible [without a temporary head]? I think it is possible – but if it is not possible, then one can ask whether a new principle should be introduced. {56} But in general I would say that the old principle should still hold: *non sunt multiplicanda*, we should not unnecessarily multiply institutions without urgent necessity.

The question can remain open. For God speaks through each one that he calls. Therefore: each one also has some part to play in the

discernment. I would ask that we hold fast to that.

⁴ German: *stellvertretendes Haupt*. Presumably the question of a strong central head for Schoenstatt after the passing of the founder (temporal in the sense that he would always be elected for a time, while the founder always remains the head from eternity for all times).

**Conversation with the General Council
of the Schoenstatt Fathers on Mount Schoenstatt,
June 20, 1966
ASPM 3**

**A Question about the Formation of Seminarians
of the Schoenstatt Fathers (1966)**

The community bulletin (KN) reports that on this day “there was an extraordinary council meeting at Little Castle (Schlößchen) and on Mount Schoenstatt, where our father himself joined us for an entire afternoon.” The following passage about the formation of our vocations was recorded “almost perfectly” in shorthand by Fr. Klein; portions were published in the community bulletin (KN, July 27, 1966, p. 342-346).

{213} If we, the older generation, do not sit firmly in the saddle, then the generation to come will create such insecurity in us that it will take us years to find a new foundation. A thought which I have already presented so many times, but which still moves me over and over again: You can see all of our people – whether the Sisters or the Brothers, the Ladies, or us as priests – we are approaching a time where only those who have firm foundations will be able to stand up to the times. As long as we still had a secure Catholic enclave, it was, of course, simple. One could ordain a priest at a young age. He entered a world which supported him and which he himself was able to support. But I think that the way the world is going [that will no longer be the case]. However, today things are not yet so far. It follows that one must be attentive to what, in the end, essentially co-determines the final image of the coming times, the final image of the overall structure. One’s deliberations ought to start with the final image in mind.

In practical terms this would mean: We must examine our outward development and our interior structures.

Outward development: Is it sufficient? Is what we are doing

today the right thing? When we send our people out – and this applies to us as well – must we not first make sure that they are first of all a man, through and through, that they are sent out as men?

This was the psychology of Jesuitism: They consciously postponed ordination until later. I don’t know if they reflectively understood it to this extent, but: one is considered a man when one reaches 30 years old. Thirty years! If someone has been constantly going [through the Jesuit system] from atmosphere to atmosphere, then one can assume that this person can be sent into the world without any worries!

Of course, we should never do it in such a way that they are left alone. The battle which we must fight in life [is too strong]. It is irresponsible, it is inconceivable. Today one can still say that the times are not yet so godless. But {214} look at the coming times! And whoever is sent out, must first prove his faithfulness.

... Therefore, the answer to this is easy to give: We should try, since precisely today, where the exaggeration is present, the confusion – one extreme contradicting another – I would think, we ought to come with our people from atmosphere to atmosphere. It demands too much if we simply say: You must manage [on your own] today. I don’t think that this will work.

In addition comes something else – we already notice this with the Sisters – the vocations that come today are no longer from the solid families like they did years ago.

We must always [keep in mind] the final image. We cannot stop [by asking what we will do] in the next step. Therefore, let me repeat again: Even if everything which the bishops suggest for the formation of the clergy would be implemented! I don’t think it will have an effect.

I don’t know if I can make this understandable to you so quickly. The ideal that is always before my mind’s eye is the formulation – already for several years, that is, before I returned from the exile – the universal anticipation of the Church on the newest shores of the times. What does this mean? Of course this is another concept that is dangerous. It is otherwise usual to say that every family is a church

in miniature. One can say that every association is a church in miniature. That is alright. But for us it is this way: In a certain sense we are the model for the Church of tomorrow. And if we do not go our way and shield ourselves from everything coming from the right and from the left, protect ourselves from everything which is hyper-modern, what does not fit [to our identity], then Schoenstatt will have lost its deepest mission...

[The question comes up if we should imitate the Jesuits who, in their founding time, sent out their seminarians individually {215} or in small groups to different universities in order to form many people and to spread the young community. Our father:]

I can say different things to that. It might still work because the substance is still there. But we have just been speaking about the most recent times. If you use the communities who existed in the Middle Ages or at the beginning of modern times as your point of comparison, you must always keep in mind: the atmosphere then was not the same as it is today. It was essentially a Catholic atmosphere, only partially negated. This made it a lot easier. Today you must simply expect – of course, always differentiate: we are not yet there! – a totally pagan atmosphere. This must be your starting point. If you do that, then I think...

I think I must add still one more thing: Yes, we should do it some day! Second, all the more since we should build our own university! We want all of this, don't we? If we believe in Schoenstatt's universal mission, we must do this; of course, then we must also have men who go out to all the other universities and study there with a strong awareness of how we are different. Do you know what this means: to study with a strong awareness of how different we are? Do you know what that means?

You see, today it is still possible. But is it advisable? And tomorrow it will no longer be possible. If you accept the premise that tomorrow everything will be infected, then we must shield our family from everything coming from the left and from the right; but with open doors and windows. In other words, not the way one jokingly says here and there about Schoenstatt: that today we are largely

viewed as an out-of-date museum, a mausoleum. Whatever is stored in the mausoleum is no longer of any use today. I don't think that this image is correct, but it serves as a good explanation...

{216} Once more: I want to say in response to your question: Yes, today it could still be done, but I would advise against it because there is so much uncertainty in the universities today. For instance, I would have originally thought that we ought to send our young theology students to Switzerland, because I always thought: everything is still solid there...

We are standing in a time where one could make so many suggestions, and each of them would be more or less defensible. But I am rather inclined to make sure: stay together [in formation] as long as possible!...