



26. Schoenstatt's Spirituality

The following text goes back to a series of nine talks given by Fr Kentenich in 1954/55. They were given to his Pallottine confrères in the Provincial House of Holy Cross in Milwaukee, USA, as an introduction to the monthly recollection day.

Since at the time a number of confrères did not understand German, and Fr Kentenich only knew very little English, he gave the talks in Latin. In this way it was possible for all the participants to understand what he said without the interruptions of a translator.

This text is therefore a rarity, because it reflects Fr Kentenich's own interpretation of his German terminology for Schoenstatt's spirituality, for example, 'spiritualitas' for the German concept 'Frömmigkeit' (= piety), and 'foedus caritatis' for covenant of love.

The selection of texts given here is taken from the third and fourth talks of the unpublished notes. It summarises Schoenstatt's spirituality while emphasising its ideal of holiness and its understanding of Christian instrumentality, as they are rooted in Schoenstatt's history and developed from it.

It has been placed in this part of the Kentenich Reader not only to give a suitable introduction to the subjects that follow, but also to provide a bridge to their roots in the history of Schoenstatt's foundation.

Dear Confrères,

in our last talk we did not begin with proofs, but with an explanation of Schoenstatt from the point-of-view of its supernatural character. We presented two theological definitions. We discussed the first part of the first definition, which, as we know, runs as follows:

Schoenstatt is a prominent, specially chosen and perfect instrument in the hand of the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt for the renewal of the world in Jesus and Mary from our shrine to the glory of God the Father.

I only want to impress one element on our memories once again. It should have become clear that Schoenstatt is a very special work of the Blessed Mother: Both with regard to our shrine and our distinctive spirituality, as well as our whole Family – seen as a whole and in its individual members and communities.

[Gratitude for and trust in Mary's activity in Schoenstatt]

What follows from this? You can find shrines everywhere in which there are so-called votive plaques with the following, or similar, inscription, "Mary has helped", in gratitude for gifts or answers to prayer through Mary's intercession. So all of us, to the extent that we are Schoenstatters, have to trace back all that we have and are, our good thoughts or longings, our actions, feelings or suffering, our good works and the fruit of our good works, to the Mother Thrice Admirable and her influence. And for this we have to thank again and again. We love to sing with our Father, Blessed Vincent Pallotti,¹ "I will extol the mercies of the Lord and the mercies of our Queen for all eternity".² Through the intercession of the Mother Thrice Admirable we also expect to be given many good vocations to our Society and our Apostolic Movement. Besides this, we expect her to give us clarity about the goal of our Society, and not least, unity and a good and fruitful spirit in our Province.

[Our co-operation]

On the other hand, we know the principle: **Nothing without you, nothing without us.** That is to say, we are justified in expecting these graces from the Blessed Mother, but at the same time, she expects our co-operation. The question now is: In what does our co-operation consist? Let me give you a general answer: In our serious and persevering striving to reach the peak of the mountain of holiness.

In order that we may better understand what that means, let us develop the second part of the definition. It states: Schoenstatt is a perfect instrument in the hand of the Mother Thrice Admirable. Allow me to point out that we are not concerned here with providing proofs. We are first giving the rationale; they [the proofs] will follow later. The proposition I have postulated has two parts: First of all, perfect instrumentality in general, then the Marian character of this instrumentality.

Today we will talk about instrumentality in general. As a general principle let us keep in mind that an essential element of instrumentality is the perfect covenant of love and everyday sanctity. To put it another way, our spirituality is a totality with three parts [it is a three dimensional spirituality]; it is an entity that can be viewed from three different points-of-view: from the perspective of perfect instrumentality, everyday sanctity and the perfect covenant of love.

[1. A brief history of our spirituality in general]

¹ At the time, Vincent Pallotti (1795-1850) had recently been beatified by the Church. He was canonised on 20 January 1963. In the further translation of the Latin text we speak of him each time as St Vincent Pallotti.

² Cf. Ps 89,2.

For the sake of clarity, let us begin by examining our spirituality in general, and afterwards describe instrumentality in particular. We claim that our spirituality consists in holiness, and indeed in a distinctive holiness. Holiness can be ontological, that is, it consists in the possession of sanctifying grace; or it can be ethical, that is, if it has reached an heroic degree, a perfect Christian life, at least as an effective longing. When we are dealing with our spirituality, holiness is meant in these two senses: ontological and ethical.

[1.1 The Founding Documents]

This can be proved by the authentic documents and the lived convictions of the whole Family.

There are mainly four authentic documents (that come into question here): the **Pre- Founding Document**, that is, the talk given by the Spiritual Director in 1912.³ The educational aim proposed there was: Under the protection of the Blessed Mother we want to learn how to educate ourselves to become free and firm personalities.⁴ In essentials this educational goal has never changed; at most it has been developed with greater clarity in the time that followed.

We soon experienced our weaknesses and so chose the Blessed Mother to be our educator. She has educated us energetically by sending us the greatest difficulties and storms right up until today. The Founding Document can be found in the address of 18 October 1914.

The connection between the Pre-Founding and the Founding Document is as follows: The Pre-Founding Document spoke exclusively of self-education under the protection of the Blessed Mother. The Founding Document entered into a special covenant of love with the Blessed Mother. It has the following content: We ask you to choose this place to be your dwelling where you are particularly at work as our educator and leader. We cannot educate ourselves according to the perfect image of God, because we are weak and unable to reach this goal. So come to dwell among us, educate us and make us instruments in your hand for the renewal of the world. We, on our part, want to love you and your dwelling; we want to draw you down to this place through our constant self-education; we want to be always willing and ready to allow you to educate us, so that we can be suitable instruments in your hand, according to your wishes and for your goals.

The Second (1939) and **Third** (1944) Founding Documents are nothing else than an unfolding of the First Founding Document. What is contained in the First Founding Document as a seed is presented more explicitly in the second and third according to the demands and necessities of those times.

[1.2 Our spirituality developed out of our striving for holiness]

Taking this as our basis, we want to question the First Founding Document. The question is: Where can you find a reference to perfection or heroic holiness? We read, "Just as a shrine in Florence was for St Aloysius, so our shrine must also become for us the cradle of our sanctity." Just as the shrine in Florence became for Aloysius the beginning and source of heroic holiness, so, according to the meaning of the Founding Document, our shrine must be the same for us.

³ Pre-Founding Document (27 October 1912), in: *The Founding Documents*. The Spiritual Director was Fr Kantenich himself. This was the first talk of the newly appointed Spiritual Director in the Pallottine Minor Seminary in Schoenstatt.

⁴ The actual text in the Pre-Founding Document runs, "Under the protection of Mary, we want to learn how to educate ourselves to become firm, free and priestly characters."

The text states, “Such heroic holiness will move the Blessed Mother and draw her down to us, to dwell amongst us.” In another passage it states (the words are placed on the Blessed Mother’s lips), “I demand this heroic self-sanctification of you. It will be the armour you must put on, and will be like the sword with which you must overcome the countless and extremely powerful enemies that battle against God’s kingdom on earth.”

This sanctification is both the condition and the fruit. It was the condition made by the Blessed Mother if she was to come down to this shrine, and from there take the education and guidance of our whole Family into her hands. It is at the same time the fruit of this education and guidance. Further on in the text it says, “Without doubt we cannot carry out a greater deed, or leave a more valuable legacy to our successors, than to move the Blessed Mother to set up her throne, or her royal seat, here in a special way, and from here to work miracles of transformation of our inner lives, and universal fruitfulness.” Of course, these are miracles of transformation, of finding a home and of apostolic fruitfulness.

Vincent Pallotti meant the same thing when he said, “She is the great Missionary, she will work miracles.” The difference from Pallotti consists in the fact that he was talking in very general terms. The Founding Document, on the contrary, speaks of the Blessed Mother to the extent that she has set up her royal throne in our shrine, and from there has educated and led our Family.

What is expressed clearly and unmistakably in the authentic documents is confirmed by the vital and unbroken public conviction of the Schoenstatt Family as a whole and in its individual parts from the beginning until today. They are convinced that the Blessed Mother has set up her dwelling in the shrine in order to cultivate the spirit of the perfection of Christian life, and the spirit of the universal apostolate in and through the Schoenstatt Family.

In the same way, the Statutes drawn up at Hörde in 1919⁵ simply require that the members of the Apostolic Federation and the Apostolic League strive seriously for the peak of perfection according to their own state of perfection.

This applies all the more to the Secular Institutes. Those who want to join the Sisters of Mary have to sign a document already before they are accepted into the Novitiate – the so-called General Statute.⁶ In it, among other questions, they are asked: Are you prepared to strive for the Inscriptio, or love of the Cross? Whoever cannot sign it is not accepted.

What is taught in the authentic documents, and confirmed by the vital public opinion of the Family, finds expression in everyday life. There have always been men and women who have made the ideal their own: I want to become a great, modern saint. Already on 14 June 1914 the spiritual leader declared publicly: “Isn’t our Family called to bring forth a canonisable saint? We don’t know, but we hope and trust it is so. One thing, however, we know with certainty: each generation takes on a great responsibility, and will draw down upon itself the displeasure of the Blessed Mother, if it allows our work, which is at the same time the work of Divine Providence, to be destroyed or diminished. Woe to the Magistrat⁷ which burdens itself with such guilt. It will have to reckon with a just punishment.”

⁵ Cf. *Kentenich Reader*, vol I, p.133.

⁶ This has been taken up by the other Secular Institutes in Schoenstatt. Only the readiness is required.

⁷ Governing body of a Marian Sodality as it existed in Schoenstatt.

Among those who lived in our house at the time was Joseph Engling, whose process of beatification has been started. It gives rise to the justified hope of its final conclusion. There are also many others who accepted the dangers of the First World War with an heroic attitude. They did so with the intention that the Blessed Mother should come down to our shrine as our educator and leader.

In the Second World War the same thing happened under the heading “Blank Cheque” and “Inscriptio”. So those words coined already during the First World War proved true, that “In the thick of a chaotic situation we set up the idea of the triumph of the spiritual life in the Schoenstatt Movement”.⁸ As far as I know there is no organisation for the laity that so directly and explicitly tries to tear out the worldly spirit right to its roots.

[1.3 Heroic holiness is the heart and centre of the Movement]

So if someone asks what follows from what I have said, I would answer:

Firstly, the core of the whole Movement will always be relatively small. The reason is clear: There are not many who are prepared to strive for Christian perfection. Whoever does not strive in this direction can belong to the Pilgrims’ Movement, or become co-operators of the League, but they will not climb up to join the higher sections.

A second consequence: The way in which the Movement is introduced as a whole into a country can be different. Whoever begins to build up the Movement must always keep in mind the final configuration and goal (*Zielgestalt*), which guides all he or she does. So, for example, the Fathers in Brazil began with the Pilgrims’ Movement. Their task now consists in introducing the higher levels. In Chile the Fathers, in much the same way as we began in Germany, worked with and for those who reached up seriously to the peak of perfection. Seen as a whole they have had praiseworthy success. We all know the situation in our area. A third consequence: If someone wants to be the leader of our Movement, he must have a sense, or longing, for asceticism, and strive for the high goal of perfection. Otherwise he is not suitable for leading others to such a goal. No one can give something unless he or she possesses it already in some way or other.

[First and second conversion]

I would like to point out that striving for Christian perfection requires a twofold conversion. The first conversion is only partial; it is connected with many open and hidden reservations. The second conversion is holistic and without any reservations of the disordered appetites. I also distinguish between a first and second Schoenstatt conversion.

[Types of priests]

Some authors distinguish between iron, silver and golden priests. Those priests are called iron who try to carry out their duties conscientiously, but beyond the fulfilment of their duties they are not interested in the salvation of souls. A silver priest is different. He is constantly concerned with the salvation of souls. Constantly, that is, in his working hours and outside the specified times. However, his intention is not pure: It is not always directed to God’s honour, but to his own advantage.

⁸ The reference here is to Fr Kentenich’s letter of 6 November 1919 – cf. Text 15 – in which he wrote: “In the thick of this chaos we set up a programme that is synonymous with the solemn proclamation of the inner life. As far as I know there is no lay organisation that so directly and so plainly, and I would even like to say, so mercilessly pursues the worldly spirit into its ultimate hiding place”

The golden priest, on the contrary – no matter where he is working – does his work with a pure and correct intention, and in the process seeks God’s honour and the salvation of souls. He accepts all sorts of difficulties of every degree, and he does so not just patiently and gladly, as St Bernard said, but also with burning zeal. That is to say, in practice he lives the Inscriptio.

[1.4 The specific character of our holiness]

What has been said so far is part of our spirituality to the extent that it is part of the general holiness of the Church. The question now arises: What is our specific holiness? We have already said that our spirituality is special or specific. So you are probably aware of the answer already. Our very specific holiness is the holiness of an instrument, of everyday sanctity and the covenant of love.

The nature of the spirituality of an instrument can be deduced from comparing it with the other two essential elements of our spirituality, and meditating on it in itself. The comparison brings a brief definition and then goes into greater detail in considering the individual elements. The definition of everyday sanctity runs as follows: Everyday sanctity is the perfect, heartfelt and organic harmony between heroic attachment to God, work and things.⁹

What we have thus described for practical everyday life, St Vincent Pallotti describes as “*sanctus est qui sancte vivit* – that person is holy who lives a holy life”. So someone is not holy who merely knows a lot about holiness, but that person is holy who sleeps in a holy way, eats in a holy way, hears confessions in a holy way, plays in a holy way. To put it briefly: who does all his daily work in a holy way.

Another description of holiness is: That person is holy who carries out all his duties out of perfect love and in a perfect way, that is, who does ordinary things extraordinarily well.

The holiness of the perfect covenant of love consists in a mutual exchange of tasks, goods and hearts between the two partners.

The holiness of an instrument consists in perfect dependence on the First Cause: in being, in ability and in actions.

The differences between the individual definitions arise from the perspective from which holiness is viewed.

* **Everyday sanctity** emphasises above all our practical, visible lives.

* **Covenant spirituality** formally and explicitly combines all that we do with love.

* **The spirituality of an instrument** stresses above all our instrumentality in the hand of the First Cause in order to achieve apostolic goals.

[2. The spirituality of an instrument in particular]

It is obvious that we are here not dealing with an instrument that is a lifeless object but with an instrument who is a free person whose inner perfection consists in the perfection of instrumentality. So if people are perfect instruments in God’s hand, or in the hand of the Blessed Mother, they are at the same time perfect in themselves.

⁹ *Everyday Sanctity* defines it as: Attachment to God, things and people.

[2.1 Perfect instrumentality has six essential elements, which I will only explain briefly.]

The first element: perfect separation from, or perfect renunciation of everything, to the extent that it is not related to the First Cause (that is, God and the Blessed Mother). It follows that perfect instruments in the hand of the Blessed Mother have detached themselves from the spirit of the world and from every inordinate attachment to things or people.

Second element: perfect co-ordination of all their forces with the effective cause (*Wirkursache*), both as a spiritual attitude and in the orientation of all their forces to the goal. Hence the perfect instrument forms a certain moral unity with God, the First Cause, and is able to say with St Paul, “I can do all things in him who strengthens me”¹⁰, or with St Francis de Sales, “Of myself I can do nothing; when I am united with you I can dare everything”.

Third element: the willingness to place themselves and all their powers wholly at the disposal of the work and intention of the First Cause, that is, Schoenstatt.

Fourth element: perfect resemblance between the divine, effective cause and the human, instrumental cause. Or, to put it another way, the *Parousia* or appearance of the First Cause in the effective cause. This similarity is the effect of the uniting power of love between God and the human person, which makes them resemble each other.

Fifth element: the perfect inner security and freedom of God’s children; freedom from inordinate wishes and, above all, from too great anxiety and confusion.

Sixth element: extraordinary fruitfulness. Since an inordinate love for creatures and their own will has been conquered in human instruments, the First Cause can use the instrumental effective cause without hindrance for the foreseen work.

[2.2 *The source of our instrumentality*]

It isn’t difficult to apply the six elements to Schoenstatt, if by “Schoenstatt” we understand the place, the spirituality and the Family. From this follows that the Schoenstatt Family as a whole, and in its individual sections, is a perfect instrument in the hand of the Blessed Mother, to the extent that the members have detached themselves from disordered drives, and are united with the Blessed Mother in attitude, goal and readiness to be used, and are prepared to give their all for our Queen and her realm and work. To the extent that the essential elements mentioned above have become a reality in the Family, it will also share in the essential fruits: in co-ordination in being and action, and in free, secure and fruitful action. The resemblance in being and action has reached such a high degree that, to a certain extent, we may describe the history of the Schoenstatt Family as a repetition and radiation of Mary’s life here on earth. This resemblance with Mary begins with the Annunciation, continues in the presentation in the Temple, the loss of the twelve-year-old in Jerusalem, right up to the death of her Son. In this way she allows her Son’s glory to shine into and light up the world, just as it states in the Founding Document, “All who come here to pray should experience Mary’s glories and confess: It is good to be here. We want to build our huts here.” This also applies to the Schoenstatt Family’s freedom, security and fruitfulness. Thanks to her instrumental intercession, the Blessed Mother has given it a high degree of freedom, security and fruitfulness, because she is the Bride and Helpmate of Christ in a uniquely wonderful way.

¹⁰ Phil 4,13.

In summary we can say the following about the sources from which Schoenstatt's spirituality as a whole, and its instrumentality in particular, have come into existence and are nourished:

- a) The spirituality did not come into existence without the special influence of the Holy Spirit, who was at work in the mind and heart of the spiritual leader living and serving at that time;
- b) The spirituality found authentic expression in the Founding Document;
- c) It unfolded under the gentle and purposeful education and practical guidance of the Blessed Mother.

I don't want to say anything to **the first point**.

With regard to the **second point** I shall limit myself to the first Founding Document. We read there about everyday sanctity: "Through the faithful and most faithful fulfilment of your duties earn very many merits and place them at my free disposal."

It states about the holiness of the perfect covenant of love, "*Ego diligentes me diligo* – I love those who love me. First prove (through your practical lives) that you really love me. ... Then I will show you my love (by taking possession of this place as my royal seat, from where I will educate and lead you in a special way)."¹¹

Perfect instrumentality is mentioned in the following sentence, "Be diligent in bringing me contributions to the capital of grace, to the treasure of grace ... Then I will gladly come down to you and draw youthful hearts to myself, and educate them to become useful instruments in my hand."

So all the important elements of our spirituality can be found in the Founding Document, where they are like seeds that developed in the course of time under the special influence of the MTA, and that were formulated in a scholarly system.

A great deal can be said about **the third point**. We have made the statement: This spirituality, in particular as far as a perfect spirituality of an instrument is concerned, has developed under the kind and purposeful education and guidance of the MTA. She has personally planted the three seeds into the family and seen to their growth. Through her gentle, educational and governing activity, she has given us a superabundance of graces, and thus proved that she is the Mother of Fair Love, of Knowledge and Holy Hope. Her work as educator and leader was purposeful and strict. That is to say, it was not without physical or mystical shedding of blood, nor without the blood of body and soul. So in truth Schoenstatt has become a child of war: It came into existence during a war, it grew in a war, and is meant to enkindle and lead its members to war everywhere on earth.

In order to understand better what is meant, allow me to compare it to a seed. We have already spoken about it. The fruitfulness of a seed depends, as we know from experience, from its natural ability to germinate, the quality of the soil and from outward factors – the sun, rain and wind. The first thing we have to say is that no one can give what he or she does not have. The factor of growth is illustrated in Jesus Christ's beautiful parable of the growing seed.¹² The third fact is confirmed by experience. Some plants require storms as the climate most suited to them – for example, the oak tree – others need a mild climate for growth.

¹¹ The second sentence cannot be found in the Founding Document. It was added here by Fr Kentenich in order to make his meaning clear.

¹² Mt 13, 1-23.

What applies to the seed in nature can be applied to the seeds of our spirituality. Their inner ability to germinate urges them to bring forth a distinctive spirituality and a universal apostolate. The good earth they need is the natural and supernatural readiness to be generous, but above all, to be chaste and to love. Normally only those who are generous are capable [of living our spirituality]. St Francis de Sales expressed it in this way, "On the ship of love there are no galley slaves, only free oarsmen". Chastity is necessary according to the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God".¹³ The outward conditions for growth [which our spirituality needs] are all sorts and degrees of difficulties, continual inner and outward battles. This is meant when we say that Schoenstatt is a child of war. It was engaged in a double "war" in our own community and in the First World War.

[3. Schoenstatt a child of war]

I call the rebellion of the students against the superiors in the Minor Seminary in Schoenstatt a "war in our own community". That was in 1912. The situation at that time was the following: In 1901 our Society bought the property in Schoenstatt for the minor seminarians who were subjected to harsh discipline. In Ehrenbreitstein, on the contrary, where the major seminarians were housed, discipline was lax. In 1912 the two seminaries were combined in the new house. The superiors who had governed the minor seminary with strict discipline were appointed the superiors of the new house. This did not appeal in any way to the major seminarians who came from Ehrenbreitstein. They were afraid they would lose the freedom they had enjoyed until then. This gave rise to a sort of revolution in the house. The seminarians refused to obey, and the superiors did not want to give in. This was the situation when a Spiritual Director was appointed in October that year. In order to dispel the rebellion in the house, he started an inner revolution, that is to say, he presented a programme for their hearts, which was later called the Pre-Founding Document. This programme was,

"Under the protection of the Blessed Mother we want to learn to educate ourselves to become priestly, really free and strong men."

The spiritual leader proceeded according to the following method: He awakened a sense for generosity in the seminarians through the talks he gave to all the students, and through personal advice, and indirectly he also awakened a sense for chastity. He did this by showing philosophically, psychologically, and by means of practical examples from life, that the youthfully pure soul is by nature ready to assimilate high ideals and to do outstanding things. He connected both goals with the Blessed Virgin Mary and her royal throne in the shrine. He then placed before them a specific, great idea, and a really great work.

The great idea soaked in gradually, and this is what is today known as Schoenstatt's specific spirituality. In the first years the young seminarians were united in their enthusiasm for the ideal of everyday sanctity, and later for the covenant of love and the spirituality of a perfect instrument. Through an organic process false concepts of true greatness and holiness were corrected, and correct ideas presented. This took place until the hearts were ready to climb the mountain of everyday sanctity.

The following were the false ideas of holiness:

¹³ Mt 5,8.

* Holiness deprives us of our youthful joys. I answered this by saying that holiness by no means prevents permitted natural joys; on the contrary, it opens up an inexhaustible source of supernatural joys.

* Further, in practice holiness makes people unable to live an honourable and fruitful life. I answered that on the contrary, true holiness consists in a person doing all his tasks and work perfectly and out of perfect love.

* Moreover, holiness makes people weak and unable to bring about great things in the natural order. I answered, that according to the axiom "*gratia praesupponit, non destruit, sed perficit et elevat naturam*,"¹⁴ holiness does not exterminate the natural passions, but improves and ennobles them. Since no human being is without passions, and since there are no great people without great passions, the holy person combines his passions with true holiness and apostolic works. In this way he tames the wild and animal instincts in his soul, and focuses them on heroic virtues.

The lofty work to which the seminarians were gradually introduced, and which aroused all their natural and supernatural forces, is Schoenstatt.

Just as the Pre-Founding Document is a symbol of the battle fought inside the house, the Founding Document, humanly speaking, is the fruit of the First World War and its interpretation in the light of faith. The immediate preparations for the foundation took place in the battle within the house; the foundation itself took place during the First World War, and was in fact inspired by it. Those whom the Blessed Mother used as her instruments were in fact not spared the turbulence of an inner and outer war. They gave the blood of their bodies and souls, as we shall see later. So we are justified in saying that Schoenstatt is a child of war, because it came into existence in a double war. History testifies that Divine Providence has set up an absolutely essential law, which applies wherever Schoenstatt comes into existence. It also applies to our Province.

¹⁴ Grace does not destroy, but presupposes, perfects and elevates nature.