



3. Spiritual Compulsion

On a number of occasions Fr Kentenich testified that his youth and the period of his studies were strongly marked by spiritual battles, which he himself called "compulsion". Only some passages are quoted here in which he describes his situation at the time. The psychological background revealed here will make it easier for those who have to struggle within themselves to identify more closely with our spiritual father. It casts light on our founder's original history of maturation and the special educational activity of the Blessed Mother.

The final passage of this section is taken from his "Apologia". The rest of the passage can be found in Text 7, "Fatherly Education Today". It is a good idea to read both passages together.

Later on I often said that what I had personally experienced was a certain psychological compulsion. How many compulsions there are everywhere today! Today the object [of the compulsion] is often different from mine. However, people have to be and become so mature that they can transfer the essential structural lines of one compulsion to another. Perhaps I may add that I made the same mistake that many make – I demanded and expected metaphysical certainty. Of course, this doesn't exist. There is absolutely no philosophical or metaphysical certainty about the foundations of the faith. This is even more true when I think of the individual truths.

On top of this I had a strange outlook on life. If you suffer under such problems, and are fanatical about the truth, so that you defend the truth to the extreme everywhere, and are prepared to give your all for it; and if in addition you exaggerate the degree of certainty to such an extent that you insist on having metaphysical certainty everywhere, it means that every tiny detail that each one of us has to go through becomes a tremendous problem.

I have a Brother in the most senior course in mind. He was quite talented, but when he chatted about things, at least 99% was a lie. There are people who are fine conversationalists, but everything they say is somehow a "lie". Perhaps I have put it too strongly.

Suppose, for example, that someone can talk brilliantly about dogmatic truths and questions. I immediately ask myself whether he really believes that what he is saying is true? Is he really convinced that it is true?

You see, I had a certain compulsion with regard to the truth.

Milwaukee Tertianship (1963), Vol. 1, 9th Conference, p. 199f.

Allow me to remove the veil a little from my past. From the time I entered the Novitiate until my ordination to the priesthood, and still somewhat beyond, I had to survive the most incredible battles all the time. There wasn't the least trace of inner happiness and contentment. I was not understood by my spiritual director, and I had only very limited supernatural support because of my unsound rationalistic and sceptical mindset. I went through the most crazy inner and outer, that is, mental and physical suffering.

Letter to the first Prefect, J. Fischer, 11 December 1916

After I had inwardly overcome the long and violent struggles of rationalism, the scepticism of the waning 19th century, and the apologetic understanding of Christianity that dominated at that time, Schoenstatt appeared in history with a clear understanding of Christian existence and Christian education, which it has upheld unswervingly since then.

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The life and death battle for my spiritual existence (sanity) connected with the attacks of scepticism in puberty, gradually became a sort of compulsive need that shook body and soul to their depths; but in the end they were victoriously overcome. These experiences enabled me later to recognize every form of compulsion quickly – also on the lower and lowest levels. Along with the diagnosis I was also able to give a prognosis with some certainty. The content of the compulsion may be very different, but the formal expression and rhythm is essentially the same. A trained ability to associate phenomena meant that I did not find it difficult to draw conclusions from one case to the next, and more or less independently to work out and proclaim a universal method of healing.

Apologia (1960), p. 178

The underlying principles that were applied are ancient, so they have nothing to do with psychoanalysis, unless you argue that this young and controversial science has shed new light on them and proved them true. From time immemorial it has been a rule in pastoral practice that a clearly proven spiritual compulsion cannot be overcome by compulsion, but by humbly bearing with it. It has to be relaxed and resolved by increased childlike self - surrender. Through meaningfully applying this rule in the most difficult spiritual states, I have been able to help countless people. To highlight only one case, which can at the same time be seen as a visual teaching aid, I would like to draw your attention to a Sister who died with a reputation for sanctity. She was saved from the mental asylum by these principles, and owes to them the ascent to heroic holiness.¹⁵

I hope that by using this example I will be able to unlock the whole world referred to here, and to make it more accessible to others.

Apologia (1960), 107, 113f.

¹⁵ Fr Kentenich is referring to Sr M. Emilie Engel (1893 - 1955). Biography: Wolff, Margareta, *Mein Ja bleibt*, Schönstatt - Verlag, 2000; Schönstaetter Marienschwestern, *Emilie Engel, Ein Leben für Gott und die Menschen*, 1998. (English translation: *Emilie Engel, Schoenstatt Sister of Mary*, 1999.)