



5. Fr Kentenich's Relationship to Vincent Pallotti and the Pallottine Society

In 1956, when the controversies with the Pallottine Society about Schoenstatt's 'Leitbild' (guiding concept) had reached their height, Fr Kentenich addressed a study of over 900 pages – probably the longest in his life – to the Superior General of that time, Fr Wilhelm Möhler (because of its addressee it is also called the "General's Letter"). It presents a comprehensive documentation that proves, on the one hand, that Schoenstatt's origin was independent of Vincent Pallotti, and, on the other, shows how the new foundation was connected with Pallotti's mission. Fr Kentenich was convinced that this mission could only be carried out if it was connected with the source of Schoenstatt's life, the covenant of love.

This study contains illuminating autobiographical statements of the founder. The passage quoted here shows how profoundly the founder was convinced of his mission, how he connected it with St Vincent Pallotti's mission, and which strategy he had pursued throughout his life. The text can be found in Heinrich Hug (ed), Möhlerbrief, Bd. I (Bipolarität), 175 - 185.

Everyone who has come into closer contact with me knows that all I have done has been directed by a well - considered plan, not by arbitrariness or impulsiveness.

Similarly it is obvious that this plan always took its bearings from God's plans with great and scrupulous care, which you don't come across every day. So the saying, "It is in God's plan" characterises my whole structure, all my thinking and loving, my life and work; it is the soul of my soul, it is also Schoenstatt's soul and the secret of the extraordinary calm, security and daring that emanates from all who are at home in this supernatural world. In my long life I have met many people, and have been able to study countless souls and the secrets of their lives; however, until now I have not encountered anyone who, in every circumstance of their lives, has adapted themselves to strongly, so passionately and exclusively, so radically and consistently, almost ruthlessly, to the idea of God's plans – in the greatest and the smallest matters – and the co - ordination of the human with the divine plans [as I have].

So I think I can say that someone had at least seen the direction of my striving correctly when he stated, "Ever since I have known you, I remember you as a man who is completely rooted in the supernatural world, and who introduces that world into all the realities of this world. You live in your land of origin like someone whose origins have become a ruling passion. The word passion has to be understood here in both its meanings – as an inner drive and as a fate that has to be suffered."

So it is not surprising if I say that also my relationship and my behaviour towards the Pallottine Society has always been determined by an unmistakable plan, in answer to a clearly recognized divine design.

Once I had personally recognized God's plans with Schoenstatt and Pallotti clearly and profoundly, in the sense of the double axis I have described,²² at a time when hardly anyone thought about the feasibility of Pallotti's mammoth idea, and even less about its realization; and after I had recognized that it was my specific task in life to carry out this plan in a timely way, I had to choose between two ways of entering upon this unprecedented and daring adventure. Since at the time there was no one who was able to think themselves into a daring project of such tremendous dimensions, and who could thus support me with their advice, I had to take the decisions on my own. When I did so, I always looked exclusively and urgently towards God and his design, which slowly anchored itself permanently in my heart and mind. Looking at people and circumstances, I kept a lookout for tangible starting points, for assistance and instruments that could be employed at the right moment and in the right place, so that slowly and in community with one another we could reach out towards these fantastically great goals. In retrospect I see myself as a swimmer who year after year, courageously and daringly has had to swim through the stormy waves with his followers in order to arrive at the unknown shores of a new era. Unless I had been anchored in another world by immeasurably deep ideas and life, this would have been absolutely impossible.

The key question that I had to answer at the beginning of developments was: Should I start to carry out the plan directly within the framework of the Pallottine Society, that is to say, should I first focus it on the great, double goal, and then later proceed through an inwardly reformed Society, which rested on this double axis, to the foundation of my work?

To put it another way, should I advance from within outwards ...? Or should I leave the Society largely to itself for the time being, and follow the opposite way, and thus proceed from outside to the inside?

God had to answer the question – as almost always happened throughout Schoenstatt's history – through circumstances. His answer was soon given in favour of the second possibility, and it was immediately put into action. It would lead too far if I were to enlarge on the reasons that made it possible for me to recognize and interpret God's design so quickly. However, one thing has to be said: Without a profound belief in the reality of the covenant of love – as I have so often emphasized – I would never have dared to reach out to such daring goals.

Nevertheless, my decision did not mean that I completely lost sight of the Pallottine Society at the start, only to move towards it later with the Schoenstatt Movement after developments had reached a certain completion, in order to connect and crown the two to form a single entity. This would have been too mechanistic. It would have contradicted a second characteristic quality of my being – to see things in their organic totality.

So since 1916 I have always kept the two partners in view – it was as though both lived in my mind and heart. Both were notionally connected in a way we today see embodied in a vital and integral Schoenstatt, in the sense of an integral Society and an integral Movement. In the time that followed both lived, worked and developed soundly according to the law of organic development, that is, simultaneously, but not uniformly, from one organic whole into a new organic whole. God had to decide according to the law of the open door what had to be drawn into the foreground each time and accepted as a priority.

It might be worth our while to illustrate the principles I have mentioned with some examples, so I shall make a few excursions through our Family's history.

After the First World War, as a result of the insights I had gained into God's complete plan, I asked to be relieved of my office as Spiritual Director and to be completely free to carry out the great plan. Both requests were willingly granted. As a result I set out on a road that would lead upwards to the greatest heights past every sort of abyss, through darkness and night, and along wholly unknown paths. The only thread from which I could take my bearings was the thread of faith in Divine Providence that led me forwards and onwards step by step. Those who know the condition of the world, Church and society at that time can guess how risky the whole undertaking was. The saying "journeying into the blue" only reflects the

²² This refers to the two charisms at work, Pallotti and Schoenstatt. The more usual terminology for this is "bipolarity".

real circumstances to some extent. It meant creating a great, tremendous and new world out of nothing, as it were.

Historians could start here to collect and examine material and then trace their findings back to ultimate principles. If you want to gain a fleeting insight into the magnitude of the transformation, and make a comparison between then and now, you could examine what the shrine looked like at that time, and its importance today. At that time it was a place to store garden tools, today it is the heart and centre of a great and worldwide movement of renewal. At that time very few people spoke about Schoenstatt. Today it is a meaningful concept to countless contemporaries at home and abroad. Of the many houses in Schoenstatt that proclaim Schoenstatt, only the Old House and the College were standing at that time. If you think of all these events, you will begin to understand that a great and mysterious power has in fact worked “miracles” in the course of a few decades.

The magnitude, daring and incredibility of the adventure become clearer when you consider that at that time I was mortally ill. When I moved to the hospital in Engers²³ I was received and treated there as someone who was dying. They reckoned with my physical collapse at any moment. It didn't disturb me in the slightest. My body had practically ceased to exist for me. I worked round the clock and lived in vast, worldwide concepts. What I had to do was to discover in little things, as in the great, which road Divine Providence was opening up before me to carry out his gigantic plans. Since the ideals I envisaged were so risky and unrealistic, I was forced to keep them hidden in my heart as my secret. Only here or there did an opportunity offer itself to lift the veil slightly from what I bore within myself. With all I did, I was never impressed by success or failure. What always sustained me was the security in mind and heart that I was working to carry out a divine plan. This has never been shaken in the least, not even today. This explains my sovereign calm in the midst of the most violent storms.

[...]

My concern at all times – without touching or even changing its juridical constitution in any way – was to win the inner co-operation of the Pallottine Society for the double axis, for an integral Pallotti and an integral Schoenstatt. An integral Pallotti includes the well-known and gigantic idea. An integral Schoenstatt is based on its independent axis, and has been inseparably united with Pallotti's axis since 1916.

My personal loyalty to Pallotti and his Society – no matter whether you look at them in their historical form, or the ideal state I envisaged – has never been shaken in the least.²⁴ This did not happen even at a time when it would have been easy for me to gather a group of loyal, gifted and graced disciples from among the diocesan clergy around myself, and together with them found a new *pars motrix et centralis* (1924) in a sort of high-speed process. I need not dwell on how much drudgery this would have saved me and my followers. Of course, the disadvantages of such a new structure had also to be taken into consideration. However, it has to be remembered as a historical fact that such an idea never occurred to me – not even in my dreams. On the contrary, the Pallottine Society always retained that place in my plans that was due to it according to Pallotti's ideas, even when it was not on friendly terms with the Movement. This is still the same today, not just with me, but also with my followers, although the danger of separation from the Society has been raised here or there. However, it must be noted that none of the “integral”²⁵ members have such thoughts. If a separation takes place, it must come from somewhere else – either the “liberals”,²⁶ or the Church authorities. Of course, if this happens, the question remains open as to where the true Society is to be found, as the integral members understand Pallotti. Nevertheless my hope is that the Society and the Movement will “find each other”²⁷ and remain inseparably united in love, just as the integral members of the Society are already united with the integral Movement in an integral Schoenstatt.

²³ This took place in Autumn 1920.

²⁴ This passage, written in May 1956, was still before the Instruction of the Holy Office of 7 June 1956, which radically altered the picture. As a result of this Instruction, Fr Kentenich came to the conclusion in September 1956 that a new '*pars motrix et centralis*' would have to be founded.

²⁵ Those who supported Fr Kentenich during his exile.

²⁶ Those who opposed Fr Kentenich and favoured a different vision of Schoenstatt.

²⁷ The German phrase used here refers to the way boy and girl “find each other” in novels and films.

Allow me to describe briefly in chronological order some milestones on the road to this two - in - oneness. I shall only mention a few of the most important ones.

After my request to be relieved of my office as Spiritual Director, and exemption had been granted in 1919 for work in the Movement, I separated myself radically and visibly from my former field of work. At least outwardly I drew a line to separate myself from the young people to whom I had devoted all my strength, working day and night for them for years. I handed them over completely to my successor in the College and the new superiors in Limburg. I did this partly because I wanted to devote myself with the same organic one - sidedness and consistency to my new task. A symbol of my unrelenting and purposeful intentions in this regard was my move to Engers. This separation from the place was meant to make it easier for my former followers to find the way to my successor. ...

I was later elected to be a delegate to the General Chapter in Rome. I clearly and decisively refused to accept this election; I upheld this decision even when Fr [Arthur] Wynen asked me from Rome, on behalf of the Superior General of that time, to accept it. I did this because I was convinced I had no mission at that time and for the foreseeable future within the Society. To put it another way, it was not in God's plan. For the same reason I refuse to accept it when influential members of the Society seriously wanted to elect me to the office of Provincial Superior. Here too those words apply, "It was not in God's plan". Later (1928), when I did not reject the office of Rector of the "*Bundesheim*",²⁸ but accepted it, I did so because it meaningfully united this office with that of the Movement Director. Again, to put it another way: It was part of God's plan. As is generally known, from the moment I moved out of the College I, on principle, never entered a house belonging to the Society, not even the College on the opposite mountain. If it was impossible through circumstances to avoid such a visit, it was very brief. Also here the reason was that this, and only this, was part of God's plan.

I only changed this method and way of life after Dachau when I began my overseas visits. The "plan" had changed, so I also had to change my practice.

Nevertheless, I kept the Society constantly in view, because I always saw things as an organic whole and with strategic farsightedness, and held myself responsible for it.

Until 1919 there were plenty of opportunities to sow seeds in the hearts of the up - and - coming generation, and to give it the task to continue working in Schoenstatt's spirit. To start with, the young Spiritual Director proclaimed the ideal of the new person in the new community, which was innate to him, and he enkindled their enthusiasm for it. He proclaimed it without any reference to Pallotti.

In 1915 the well - known clash with Fr [Karl] Gissler, the Superior General of that time, took place. He told me he could not justify my actions before Pallotti, so I should leave the Society if I was not prepared to distance myself from what I had started. I replied that I could well justify my actions before Pallotti. This event was a sign to me that I should check and prove more precisely and reflexively that indirectly, through the absence of vows in the structure of his Society, Pallotti not only endorsed, but actually required my ideal of the new person in the new community, and hence also the educational methods I had introduced and practiced.

[...]

From 1919 all of our Brothers took part in the Congresses I conducted for the burgeoning Movement. So they naturally grew into Schoenstatt's spirit, and after their return to the Novitiate and Scholasticate were able to enlist their contemporaries and the members of their course.

This picture was repeated later with our Fathers who took part in the pedagogical courses and retreats for priests. To this was added an important means that was most suitable for uniting the Society in principle and permanently with the Movement. Fr Kolb, who became one of my co - workers in 1919, at my request and also because it was the greatest desire of his heart, took on the task to keep the government of the Society in Rome and Limburg constantly up - to - date with what was planned and carried out in

²⁸ First Movement House, now called 'Covenant House', solemnly opened on 15 August 1928 by Bishop Bornewasser of Trier.

Schoenstatt. Later, with regard to the governing body of the Province, he shared this task with Fr Mennigen, Fr [Heinrich] Schulte and Fr Kastner. So I knew that this aspect was in good hands and included the orientation of the Society towards my whole strategic plan. It meant that I could devote myself directly and exclusively to outside work.

In addition, the number of Fathers and Brothers who drew their spiritual nourishment from Schoenstatt grew year by year. The members of the Provincial government were also present as guests. In the talks I never suggested changing the legal basis or framework of the Society. I in no way cut or criticised its independent right to exist, or its independent juridical framework. Since the higher superiors constantly took part in the courses, an indirect control of the form and content was secured.

All in all, then, Schoenstatt's penetration of the Society – at least in the German Provinces – progressed all the time.

Vice versa, the Society and Provinces increasingly, year by year, understood the Movement as its legitimate work.