

Schoenstatt's Style of Guidance

1. Introduction: The Importance of Authority

1.1 A Starting point: our role as coordinators

Coordinating on a diocesan level inherently requires the task of guidance. Although at times this task may require giving out directives, nevertheless it poses the purpose of giving direction. From our Father and Founder's point of view, all guidance requires exercising authority – a kind of concrete authority. In the end, due to the fact that we possess authority, we are invited to understand more deeply how it is to be exercised.

1.2 Authority itself is a relevant topic today

The subject of authority is of great interest to us, from both a theoretical and practical point of view. In today's age, questions on authority present themselves in various manners across all sectors of society. This subject matter's permanent presence in our reflection sheds light on a deeper meaning in man's modern life. Moreover, due to its complexity, authority often appears closely intertwined with an abundance of other topics such as the exercise of power and appears studies on the relationship between authority and obedience, and authority and freedom.

In our times, all of these questions acquire greater urgency not only as a point of reflection, study, and theory, but especially in the practical realm that includes the exercise of authority. There are many unresolved questions regarding this topic that arise from cultural experiences in the lives of people and communities. In order to further comprehend the fact that our questions on authority, its exercise, its acceptance, and personal responsibility carry great significance and practical relevance to our daily lives, we must mention the everyday experience of interdependence in our modern world, which has evolved into even the most extreme forms of manipulation and massification.

We can affirm that no one remains indifferent to the topic of authority, especially when taking into account one's personal experience of living authority and its correlative, freedom. It is easy to find opponents of authority: some who violently reject it and others who exaggeratedly assert it. We can find these extremes by observing the exercise of authority in all areas of life: political, ecclesial, family life, etc. There are situations in which authority is abused and others in which it is absent. All of this has repercussions in individuals and social groups, starting in families and ending in the most complex of social structures.

In arriving at a clear vision of what authority should mean, and later on striving to exercise that concept of authority in the most correct way possible, we are addressing a central problem in the lives of people and societies, especially in these times of change in which we live.

1.3 The importance of authority in Schoenstatt

For Fr. Kentenich, the theory and practice of authority is a key subject. This conviction of Fr. Kentenich arises out of his own life experience. During Schoenstatt's beginnings he confronted the problem of authority when he accepted the position of Spiritual Director in the Palottine Seminary and found himself in the midst of the students' rebellion against their superiors, which he eventually overcame through the influence of his pedagogic action. Years later he underwent a long, painful confrontation with National Socialism, a regiment that was known for its abuse of power. Later on, during the time of his exile in Milwaukee, he had to painfully submit himself in obedience to ecclesial authority which was carried out with great deficiencies. It was precisely his conception and way of exercising authority which manifest one of the principal motives for which the Holy See separated him from his Work, sending him into exile.

Fr. Kentenich was convinced that we are in the midst of a period of transition in world history and that in such a time the formation of a new kind of man and community is fundamental. Schoenstatt is called to renew family, to renew the Church and society, a task in which the praxis of authority is central. The relationship between the person and the community, a central aspect of our modern predicament, can be resolved in various ways according to how authority is conceived and exercised. Authority is the first and foremost agent by which values and anti-values can be transmitted. It is the rallying-point around which attachments are created which can either build-up or tear-down a community.

The solidity of these attachments – a person's deep rootedness in the life and objectives of the community, a feeling of belonging to something in common, and creative participation in the life of the community – arise from and depend greatly on the one who holds the authority. This is true for any kind of authority and any kind of community.

2. Exercising Authority

2.1 Our Father and Founder's way of acting and the principal of guidance in Schoenstatt

Our Father develops a pedagogic course of action that goes to work consolidating, expanding, and diversifying the life of the Family that is recognized as such by his presence as father. Without constantly having to invoke legal norms, without impositions or coercion, without applying rules or insisting in his own rights as Father, he is the personal core and example of moral authority to the Family. He inspires and guides its life, awakening communion and active participation in all of its members with his service. The way he exercises his authority becomes an irrefutable testimony to the beneficial influence of authority when it is lived in the

Gospel spirit, as well as a sharp criticism of the abuses and deformations of power, responsible for so many conflicts and so much personal and social harm.

Our Father uses Divine Authority as a model, letting himself be guided by the way in which God guides the world. While he certainly considers the psychological and social implications of authority, he does not forget its functional and moral roles. However, he extrapolates it all from an attentive reading of the order willed by God. Each aspect is integrated into an overarching synthesis founded in the following of the divine will as it is manifested in creation and redemption. Therefore, his theological perspective comes first, and all other perspectives are derived from this one.

Fr. Kentenich arrives at a synthesis in his faith-filled interpretation of authority, which he formulates using the following axiom: “We affirm the principle of authority and we exercise it democratically.” In Schoenstatt we define this axiom as the “Principle of Guidance” or the “Principle of Governing.” We must analyze two aspects of this principle because they will give us a valuable orientation to the exercise of authority.

2.2 We affirm the principle of authority

Based on his experience and reflection on God’s will expressed in the order of being, Fr. Kentenich arrived at the conclusion that the existence of a clearly-defined, strong authority is important in every community. Every community needs a central figure that possesses clearly-defined powers to exercise his authority, an authority that does not exist for its own self-affirmation, but to serve others so that the community which it serves may have more life.

This vision runs contrary to many peoples’ opinions, especially to the general sentiment that authority is oppressive, that it should be extremely limited, and that it must be accepted as a lesser evil, all opinions which lead people to believe that it is better not to have authority.

Fr. Kentenich, on the other hand, believes that authority is important in principle – authority that acts and that lets itself be known – authority which is present and strong because only then it can respond to God’s desired model, a model which is written in God himself in the Holy Trinity. The order of creation discovers its fullness when it becomes like God. God is a community with authority. In God the three persons are equal, but there exists one who comes first with rightful primacy, He who is the source of life for the other persons: the Father. Jesus Christ came to reveal this reality to us. His entire life and message refer to the Father. His childlike obedience to the Father and his faithful dependence on the will of the Father, which permit him to fulfill his mission to set humanity free from slavery to sin, leave us with a clear orientation and directions: the commandment to love God and our neighbor. To love God implies the permanent search for his will, which leads to the true freedom of the children of God.

When we accept the image of God revealed to us by Christ, in which we come to know the authority of the Father and its centrality to the existence of life, we affirm the notion that a community with a strong authority is more perfect than one which lacks authority, since the service which that authority should render is indispensable for the growth and development of that community. Without an authority that guarantees humanism, brotherhood, and equality, no human group can subsist or reach maturity.

The image of God contains a model, an ideal, which Fr. Kentenich embraces and applies, thus affirming the importance of authority. A new social order is needed, one in which there is a strong authority. The strength of that authority does not exist in order to oppress, but to serve life. It is a strength which serves. Therefore we should not fear a strong authority, because if it is strong in order to better serve, then the stronger the better. This is very different from an authority which is strong and uses that strength to crush or oppress others.

Fr. Kentenich affirms that authority is an idea willed by God and that we cannot solve social problems by escaping authority and trying to mutilate it, but rather by affirming authority as God wills it.

Man, created in the image and likeness of God and made a child of God in Jesus, is called to exercise dominion over all things, over himself, and over history in God's name. God has summoned man to take part in governing the world. God has delegated his fatherly authority to him in order that he may exercise it for the good of all men and creation.

Not only has God created the world and entrusted it to man's care, but he also intervenes in history and guides the world to carry it into its fullness of glory. Since God works in the world through free secondary causes, he also guides the world through man. God relates to us through people who manifest his love. God transfers something of his reality to his people, and they are images or reflections of God's perfections. God's authority comes to us through those who reflect Him: in the first place, fathers, but also all those who hold some kind of legitimate authority. The conflict arises when the authority does not adequately reflect God, to the detriment of the religious experience.

Secondary causes are not only God's way of relating to us, but also mark our way back to Him. God guides us through them. It is His will that we receive them, turn them into objects of our love, and use them as the best path back to Him. All of those intermediaries are instruments of God. Without neglecting the personal, direct relationship of each person with God and of God with each person, it is necessary to clarify the importance and need for the function that secondary causes play as God's instruments, especially when a relationship of authority is in question. When working within the realm of their competence, authorities allow us to

experience God's governing presence in a concrete way because they are intermediaries and help us to know and follow the divine will. In short, to obey God's instrument is to comply with the will of God himself.

This does not mean that we will always, in every circumstance, view authority as legitimized by the authority of God. We cannot neglect the abuse of power which marks the history of so many people and nations. Sin also ruptured the harmony that God created in this area of human life. Therefore, human authority is always a relative authority: it is always refers back to divine sovereignty.

2.3 We exercise authority democratically

The principle of guidance according to Fr. Kentenich has a second aspect, which refers to the way in which authority is exercised or applied: It is applied democratically.

This does not mean that we accept authority "in theory" while in reality we work in some other way. If on the one hand we affirm the importance of a recognized authority who acts correspondingly in his respective community, then on the other hand we must accentuate the democratic dimension of authority in the way it is exercised. This does not mean that we are referring specifically to a democratically-organized national political system, but to the very meaning of authority. Authority is democratic when it serves life. The meaning of authority is to serve life. The primary function of an authority is to help those who are entrusted to it to develop and grow. There is a direct relationship between peoples' growth and their active and free participation in the life of the community. When a member of a community (family, business, organization, etc.) stops participating as an object and becomes a subject, that is to say, when he or she feels called and is permitted to freely contribute his or her originality to the community, then the community and the person both grow.

Authority exists in order to foster, stimulate, channel, enrich, and encourage the communion and participation of all members. This "constituent phenomenon" depends in great part on the authority of the leader. A group needs a clear authority to be transformed from a disconnected array of people into a community, through the strength of the bonds formed in their mutual objectives and the members that enact them. This is when the group becomes an interpersonal nucleus. The democratic exercise of authority is oriented around these two central concepts and attitudes: service and life.

Service, as a fatherly attitude, represents the driving force of authority, understood as moral or inner authority. Inner or moral authority is based on the coherence of the life of the person in charge. It demands a permanent effort to incarnate the values which one desires to transmit. Fr. Kentenich viewed external authority as being closely linked to inner authority. One

is an effect of the other. Therefore, moral authority is the foundation for every external charge of authority or task of guidance. Service to another's life is the full realization of the one's authority and puts it into practice. That service will be fruitful if it is founded on moral authority and if it orients itself by the real lives of those whom it is called to guide. Therefore, authority will be strong if it is based on inner moral authority and if it projects itself through disinterested service to those entrusted to it.

The democratic aspect of Fr. Kentenich's conception of how authority is to be exercised comes in with the reference to life and to the freedom of those whom the authority is called to serve. It is what allows paternal authority to realize its task, since, according to Fr. Kentenich, fatherly authority is, by definition, author of life. He always refers to this definition of authority based on its Latin root: "*auctor esse*", which means to be author or creator of life in each person. With this he defines the deepest root of authority as being a synonym of the Divine Fatherhood. Authority exists and is important because it is at the service of the growth of the life of those entrusted to it. In God we see the Father who possesses indisputable rights and the sum of all powers, but he uses them to awaken and favor the freedom of his sons. Where there is freedom there is co-responsibility, initiative, and creativity. In short, there is life. Just as Christ defines his mission as: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

To conclude this reflection, we can also make reference to the intimate relationship between authority and freedom. Freedom is the road which allows me to search for happiness. To achieve it, I must attach myself to those realities which bring me happiness. Freedom is my capacity to opt for those realities, my capacity to unite myself to them, to commit myself. From the Christian perspective, freedom consists of binding oneself with all his heart's strength to the will of the Father in heaven. His will is that we have life in abundance. Upon achieving his will, we will reach happiness since He wants what is good for his children. His will manifests itself, among other things, through the authority of his representatives, those who are reflections of his fatherly authority on earth. To obey, within the field of their competence, those who have legitimately received the task of guiding others, is the same as obeying God to us. God speaks through secondary causes. This is how we verify that there is an intimate relationship between authority and obedience, between obedience and freedom, and therefore between authority and freedom.

Christians conquer their freedom in the measure in which they obey God. This is why, for the Christian, obedience and freedom do not oppose each other, as long as it is obedience to God. Freedom searches for happiness and happiness lies in fulfilling the will of God. To obey and to reach the goal which freedom seeks are one and the same.

3. The Laws of Guidance

Through his observation of life, our Father confirmed a set of constants or laws in the guidance of a community that he later systematized throughout the development of the family. The majority of these laws are related to what we know in Schoenstatt as the “pedagogy of movement.” At first glance, we can distinguish between two types of laws in Fr. Kentenich’s style of guidance. One group of these laws has its starting point in the community and therefore approaches guidance by incorporating that which comes from the group that is being guided. The other type of laws has its starting point in the person who is guiding the group. It accentuates the influence that the leader can exercise over the community from the outside, in other words, through he who is guiding the group.

3.1 The Inductive Style of Guidance

In order to define this style of guidance, we must do so by describing different aspects and attitudes that allow the leader to grasp, take in, integrate and channel the life of the group.

a) Guiding through dialogue

Fr. Kentenich’s style of guidance is characterized by dialogue. For this to occur, one must leave time for dialogue, actively search it out, and create the space necessary for personal and communal dialogue to arise. We must make a permanent effort not to prohibit or drown out dialogue, directly, indirectly, consciously or unconsciously.

b) Guiding through contact

Contact is one of the central concepts of Fr. Kentenich’s thought. He mentions it frequently in different areas of his work and reflection. For him, contact is more than a conversation. It implies contact with the lives of those who are being guided. This type of contact requires substantial confidence and permeability between the leader and those being guided. The life in different communities differs greatly: personal, intimate life; life that is oriented towards projects; life that is oriented towards ideas that lead to action. Through contact, this life must be grasped, channeled, and guided.

c) Guiding by capturing the atmosphere

It is also important to get to know and understand how to evaluate the atmosphere that pervades in the community in order to better understand it, and in the end, to purify it and put it at the service of the goals of the community.

d) Guiding through serving life

Everything mentioned above is meant to assist us in understanding and realizing this

central attitude in Fr. Kentenich's conception and praxis of guidance. "Life" is the overall integration of a community's perspectives and interests. In other words, it is the sum of all the ideas and tasks that move and animate them. It is the soul or ideal of the community.

The following aspects can help us gain a better understanding of what is understood by "serving life" and what elements one must keep in mind in order to carry out his service toward life, which presupposes a space for dialogue, the capacity for contact, and a grasp of the corresponding atmosphere:

- Guiding through the discovery of life. This means to avoid projecting one's own ideas and conceptions onto the group. For this it is important for the group to go through a process of seeking out those concerns and desires which are authentically present in those being guided.

- To guide means to help the life within the group to be expressed, to take shape and to project itself.

- Guiding through interpretation. This refers to the fact that ideas can be at the service of life. By forming words, we can help express the life that blossoms within a community. To do this we go about collecting different points of view which clarify and identify what is happening in the group. These are elements which permit the members of a community to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, as well as the community's situation and processes.

- Guiding by bringing into focus the "concentration points." The individual longings and methods of realizing those longings can be guided to a point of convergence to the extent that the leader can formulate them and bring them to the attention of others, making them a topic of dialogue and exchange. That is, he must bring together what is dispersed and create communal points of concentration.

e) Guiding by interpreting the signs of the times

Guidance doesn't occur in an isolated environment, or in an objective, ahistorical, chemically pure space. For Fr. Kentenich, the fact that God's voice manifests itself in time, real events, life, and in history is very important. He always invited us to distinguish between a positive and a negative spirit of the times. He who guides others needs to be able to take in, discern, and interpret those voices that form a part of the lives

he is guiding and that influence them. Therefore, one must depend on these voices of God in order to guide others and help them find the path that will allow them to develop within the context of their times. From there, they can discover the greatest potential for themselves and their community.

3.2 Guiding through impulses

Whoever guides others must not only be able to capture, understand, put into focus, and interpret the lives of those being guided, but he must also be able to give of himself. Fr. Kentenich always expected authority to be life-creating. In other words, he expected those in authority to give impulses as a free offering to the group, impulses that are not imposed, but proposed. The inspiration flowing from the authority must be subordinated to the life of the group, in other words, to the inductive style of guidance. However, Father expected those in authority to always share with others the life which they possess.

The following are some aspects of this style of guidance that can further our understanding:

a) In order to guide, one must be “more than” and be “above.”

As a leader of a community, he who guides holds a responsibility for it, and it is normal for him to want to influence the group in a positive way. The mere fact that he wants to serve the life those entrusted to him makes him rise above them. It forces him to be in constant observance and to reflect on the processes they are living out from their own perspective. By carrying out his task in a serious way, he stands out, acquires a rank and demeanor before them and influences them.

b) Guidance through “fullness of life”.

In the measure that the leader bears authentic life, this life will necessarily flow into the community in all directions. This is why he has been chosen as leader, the people can identify with him and are influenced and blessed by the life that radiates from his person. Many aspects of the leader’s life and actions will indirectly find expression in the life of the community.

c) Guidance through ideas.

On the one hand, we have those ideas which interpret and express the inner life of the group. But here we are referring to ideas that awaken life within the group. These correspond to true impulses. We must steer away from those ideas which are unilaterally abstract. There is an overabundance of good ideas, but far too often they are no good for life. We are looking for those ideas that can provoke a movement of life because they respond to a true necessity or

they bring about a new level of consciousness, which allows new forces in the soul of the group to flourish which previously lay dormant. Normally only a handful of people arrive at the level where they can formulate these ideas that penetrate the depths of the society to which they belong. These ideas then provoke a dynamic of life which carries the group into a certain current. This is true, for example, in the case of ideas such as fraternity, ecology, feminism, etc. He who is capable of offering new ideas exercises guidance in a group. For this to occur, he must be convinced of that idea, must understand it to the core, study it and place his life at its service.

d) Guidance through a goal.

In the end, what one hopes for in a community is to achieve a goal that exists in their plans but also must be pushed in order to achieve it. Moreover, one must show the group new goals and objectives. Fr. Kentenich expects whoever is guiding to be capable of demanding things from others. He must possess the will to influence, which today is often looked upon with suspicion of manipulation or abuse. This makes it difficult to carry out this function.

e) Guidance through prayer.

We cannot omit prayer as a powerful force that effectively acts and influences life. It is not mathematically tangible but its action is undeniable and it belongs in the tradition of the Church. Whoever guides others must trust in this power and use it accordingly to allow his leadership to be influenced by the will of God.

3.3 Guidance through the interplay of natural forces within the community.

For the type of community that we generally guide, be it life groups, branches, or the diocesan family, it is not essential or even characteristic to have a variety of institutional or normative aspects which impose clear limits, attributes, or definitions of what we may or may not do.

On the contrary, our communities are characterized by having general guidelines, goals, and spiritual and pedagogical orientations. Although many formative materials and itineraries are at our disposition, in general each group and community enjoys a wide spectrum of freedom, mobility, and originality to grow, commit itself to goals, take on tasks, and build its own path within a shared spirituality.

This allows the communities within Schoenstatt to possess an interior, original interplay of forces that deeply characterize it. Whoever leads a community must come to know and use this dynamic. As an example, we can name some “laws” of guidance that correspond to the sociological model of the community in Schoenstatt:

- Discover the strongest impulse of life in the group and make way for it to develop.
- Guide through lifestreams.
- Guide through personal initiatives that arise within the community.
- Guide through symbolic actions, the strength of those symbols which transmit the actions and ideas of a community.
- Guide through eminent cases.
- Guide through the particular and rhythmic development of the inner life of a group.
- Guide through tensions and polarizations.

Bibliography:

- P. Ángel Strada, "Concepto y práctica de la autoridad según el P. Kentenich" en: Carisma Nr. 6, Julio 1982
- P. Hernán Alessandri, "Cómo ejercer la autoridad", Cuadernos Patris Nr. 4, 1998
- P. Herbert King, "Leitungsstil nach Pater Kentenich" en: Schönstatt-Studien 7, 1991
- P. José Kentenich, „El Problema de la autoridad“ en: Desafíos de nuestro Tiempo Nr 1, 1985