

Kolvenbach Memories

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In the late eighties, while doing doctoral studies at the Gregorian (Rome), one day to my surprise I met Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach on the road leading to Bellarmino. He was literally watching the sky through the narrow space of the tall buildings. When I expressed my surprise, he said: "it is good to look at the sky even through the narrow spaces, whenever possible". That was Kolvenbach; he seemed to place himself in limited space and routine schedule, but through them he tried to look at the vast expanse of the sky! A sort of monasticism of the heart in action! Later when we walked into the dining hall at Bellarmino, he was invited to the head table; he whispered: "I don't like it; but I will go". That was Kolvenbach; he seemed to dislike many things; but he liked to do things that were not to his taste; he obliged with a large heart.

At another occasion, I was taking my turn for the 'manifestation' during the provincials' meet in Goa. I was surprised to see him waiting for me outside the room. I said: I am delighted to see that General of the Society waiting to receive me! He said: 'that is the least I can do for you.' He had the knack to be present to us when we met him, without betraying any personal inconvenience to him. Rarely he went out of the script; when he did, it was often cryptically witty.

In Kolvenbach I found an embodiment of classical tradition and wisdom. Classical in the best sense of the word: articulate and thorough; tradition in the sense of accumulated practices of the many ages; wisdom that is born out of regularity and routine. In him I found a consolidating figure for the Society that was needed to be consolidated. That he did in his style.