



#### 14. Letter to Joseph Fischer of 22 May 1916

*The following text is a letter from Fr Kentenich to the first Prefect of the Marian Sodality, Joseph Fischer. By 1916 he was a Pallottine seminarian and was studying Theology in Limburg. During the Novitiate, which he had recently completed, Fr Kentenich had broken off all contact with him, as with all the members of the Sodality in the Novitiate, in order not to interfere with the educational process. He now resumed contact. The letter is historically important as the first documentary evidence which showed that Fr Kentenich was grappling with St Vincent Pallotti's mission, and how he did so. It supports the founder's testimony that he took over Vincent Pallotti's mission in 1916, which also means that Schoenstatt's history before then, in particular the foundation on 18 October 1914, happened independently of Vincent Pallotti. However, it is also worthwhile reading the letter with a view to Fr Kentenich himself from two points - of - view:*

*First of all, the letter reveals the whole range of Fr Kentenich's thinking between a world - embracing vision and mission, on the one hand, and the very concrete little steps that had to be taken to realize it, on the other.*

*Besides this, the text bears witness to the way the founder valued a former college student as a collaborator, adapting himself totally to him – even to the language used – and leaving him as much personal responsibility as possible, while at the same time offering him the freedom to collaborate.*

*The text is taken from Kastner, *Unter dem Schutze Mariens*, Paderborn 1939, p. 334 - 338.*

N.c.p.p.b.V.M.<sup>86</sup>

Vallendar, 22 May 1916

My dear Prefect,

I am glad that you are allowed to remain where you are. ... Perhaps it is a hint, an unmistakable encouragement from our heavenly Mother, to dedicate the time at your disposal wholly to her service, and hence to her divine Son's. In what does this service consist?

I will have to go a long way back, tell you about my great, and partly still immature, plans and ideas, and define your sphere of work.

Starting point: a Sodalist's essential task is apostolic activity. In order to find a form for it, to inspire the imagination and motivate the will to action, we set up a programme last year: the moral and religious renewal of Germany has to start from our Sodality chapel according to the example of Ingolstadt. The work of

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<sup>86</sup> *Nos cum prole pia benedicat Virgo Maria* – the Sodality greeting.

self - sanctification took, and still takes, the character of “contributions to the capital of grace of the MTA”, which serve the above purpose.

Our holiday apostolate was enriched by the same idea. As my files prove (which could perhaps be taken out of their obscurity one day), some of the Sodalists worked and still work heroically at this. If our Sodalists retain this spirit, and if they later continue to work in the same direction as priests, our high - sounding goal will be reached. However, my intentions now reach further: Vallendar has really to become a second Ingolstadt.

You know the world now, and you know that the Evil One is extremely fruitful in generating evil, but you will have preserved so much optimism and initiative that you will be prepared to work with all your energy to bring about an outpouring of blessings. All your abilities, even the least – none may be despised – have to be mobilised. You agree with me in this, also because you accept and are convinced that the spirituality we are aiming at in our Sodality is the right one to reconcile our ancient faith with the modern soul – without making feeble concessions – and re - cast the life and cultural values of our holy religion. You will also admit that as instruments in the hand of our heavenly Mother, all of us Sodalists together – admittedly a microscopic little group when compared with the apostles of disbelief and immorality – can nevertheless do something, if each of us does all in his power wherever he is, and, through organized striving for a common goal, sees to it that despite all difficulties the good will continue to generate good. Based on this common foundation let me present an idea for your consideration.

1. It is easy to see how the planned organization for those who have left<sup>87</sup> can be built up on this foundation, and what success is to be expected of it in the course of time.

2. In order to bring about a unified education in the above - mentioned sense, and, in my opinion, in keeping with the spirit of our revered founder, it seems to be really desirable to transplant our endeavours to Limburg.<sup>88</sup> One of the main objects over there would be the training of the director,<sup>89</sup> not only so that the constantly growing Sodalities for diocesan priests can be led successfully (NB, a fundamental idea of our revered founder is that through his Society the apostolic spirit in the diocesan and religious clergy should be preserved and cultivated. *Qualis rex, talis grex*<sup>90</sup> ... moral and religious renewal. Consult your war experiences.), but also to do justice to a rapidly growing youth movement. We have to work on the youth, otherwise ... Unfortunately there are many useless educators of young people, and directors who were themselves influenced incorrectly in a religious sense, and who on that account either do not come into question, or only partly into question, in the great battle for our youth. Whoever has the youth has the future! Religious and moral renewal! Renewal of our Society, the PSM.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> By 1916 the numbers of the Sodalists and students on the battlefields of World War I had grown. This led to the idea that they would need to be organized into groups, and practical steps were taken to achieve this. The “Outer Organization” came into existence. In order to cultivate their contact with Schoenstatt and one another, the magazine “MTA” was started in March 1916. For many years after the war it was the main vehicle of communication in the Movement.

Some of the Sodalists/Students had left the Pallottine Society completely. In May 1916 the idea was broached of including them in the Sodality (cf. MTA of 21 May 1915). This is obviously what is being referred to here.

<sup>88</sup> The centre of the German Province of the Pallottine Fathers.

<sup>89</sup> The spiritual leader of a Marian Sodality was called the director (German, *Praeses*). Even though the leadership and organization of the Sodality lay in the hands of appointed members, the life of a Sodality depended essentially on the inspiration coming from the Director.

<sup>90</sup> Literally: as the king, so the flock.

<sup>91</sup> The Pallottines were given permission to reside in Germany by the Prussian State of that time, but only on condition that they would undertake missionary work in the German colonies, mainly in the Cameroon. This led to the Pallottines changing their name to “*Pia Societas Missionum*”, PSM, the “Pious Missionary Society”, at the request of Pope Pius IX, who considered that the Church itself is a ‘Society of the Catholic Apostolate’. It was only in 1946 that the name Vincent Pallotti wanted was restored: *Societas Apostolatus Catholicici*, SAC.

3. Not just our Sodalists, also our College students and academics, are showing enthusiastic interest in our MTA. Is this a hint from our heavenly Mother to search in this direction for the intentions of Divine Providence, and, now that we have arrived at the opinion – even if it is still tentative – influence the whole movement slowly, prudently and circumspectly, and then again try to discover the next step? If our Queen wants to gather educated young people around herself through us – an idea that is too comprehensive for us to consider carrying out immediately, but also too beautiful, and, considering the present development of things, not too fantastic, not too impossible, so as to be rejected out of hand. I envisage an organization – similar to the one into which our revered founder wanted to divide the whole word – that could offer our studying youth a substitute for the Sodalities that have been forbidden, a bulwark and counterbalance to the monistic Youth Movement.<sup>92</sup> Dreams! Of course! But if they become a reality one day, it will need a lifetime to carry them out prudently, purposefully and organizationally.

Let us leave that aside and remain on earth. After all, we only want to be the instruments of our heavenly Mother. The weaker and poorer the instrument, the more radiantly Mary's praise will shine through our work. I am convinced not only by theological considerations, but also by historical insights, that our Patroness will and must have a large share in the religious and moral reformation of things, because of her position in God's kingdom. However, it is self-evident to anyone who knows the present economy of salvation to some extent, in the process she has to have human co-operation – just as God himself, by virtue of his divine arrangement. Of course, Mary does not depend on specific instruments; it is a great grace if she chooses and uses us. However, I think we Sodalists have a special right to be preferred. Through our consecration we have entered into a special covenant with her, which is an obligation on both parties, not just on us, no, also on our Covenant Queen, because the Director, who has been approved by the Church, has accepted our promise, and what he does in this capacity is also done and becomes valid in heaven. If we have taken upon ourselves the obligation to strive for extraordinary devotion to Mary, above average self-sanctification, and an allround apostolic attitude and action, so Mary is obliged to educate and use us for this purpose. She is the *virgo fidelis*<sup>93</sup> if we only go along with her intentions.

With you, besides the other reasons, there comes the repeated promise to place your life, which has been saved, and all your abilities at her service. This service is and remains service to our Saviour. The decrees on Holy Communion<sup>94</sup> would be carried out better if our priests would place themselves and their flock under Mary's influence (a new point-of-view for the advisability of founding and leading Sodalities for priests).

To return to the idea that has been raised: through the way things are developing our Mother requires us for the moment to advertise our publications quietly and prudently. Only people who really think as we do should be enlisted: an elite. I will be satisfied if we have won over one or the other by autumn. At the moment I am considering the question of whether we should start a special fund for this purpose, etc. At any rate, the advertisement will achieve one thing: making our PSM known, which is to be recommended. Perhaps vocations will also be awakened, and the value for everyday life of a timely Catholic education, the Marian Sodality, and devotion to Mary, will be acknowledged. ... Enough of that. What do you think?

Now to your task. To start with, you have to make the necessary preparations in Limburg in the way already described. For the present it will be sufficient if you send the MTA magazine to the people concerned, and try to say a word or two to show how we share the same ideas. Depending on the result, the next step will follow, which must be a further stage on the way to the proposed goal. In individual instances you will have to make the detailed decisions. However, I am quite prepared to discuss things with you once I have the

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<sup>92</sup> Monism is a branch of philosophy, theology, and also psychology, that denies polarity and that tries to trace everything to a single principle: only God, only the body, only matter.

At the beginning of the 20th century it was mainly the philosopher Haeckel in Germany who stood for philosophical materialism, which he said would overcome Christianity. In 1906 the "*Monistenbund*" – the association of monists – was founded in Jena with the goal of spreading the teaching of monism, above all in order to fight the Catholic Church.

<sup>93</sup> Virgin Most Faithful (Litany of Loreto).

<sup>94</sup> In his historic decree, *Sacra Tridentina Synodus* (20 December 1905), Pope Pius X promoted the frequent reception of Holy Communion; in a further decree, *Quam singlarii Christus* (18 August 1910), he lowered the age for the reception of First Holy Communion.

information I need, on condition that as a result your autonomy and freedom of action are not curtailed. I hand over the matter to you with the greatest confidence. If you retain the way you have done things until now, and your experience in life, you will reach the goal with the hints I have given you. You are Mary's knight, not just Mary's child.

Vallendar has to remain the focal point, that is, the chapel and the MTA. People change, the chapel remains. You will be well advised to nourish love for our shrine in yourself and others, even if only for the sake of permanent centralization. Of course, from this comes a new task for us – to develop our little treasure chest<sup>95</sup> accordingly.

Your juridical position in relation to myself is that of a Prefect. You can consider your section in our Sodality as independent; in this sense you are its leader with the rights of a prefect. Unity is preserved through dependence on the chapel and the governing body. You can see the connection between two and three. We have to create competent educators of our youth, who if anything happens will become the heirs and apostles of the third idea.

If you are interested in the other plans (1 and 3) over and above the limits of your field of activity, your co-operation will be very welcome. I leave it to your wisdom to decide in how far you want to influence your people in the direction indicated, or whether it is wise to do so, and whether it is a good idea to pass on the goals and the inner context to the individuals, or to lead them unconsciously towards it. Act according to the principles of the Sodality, and decentralize when it serves the purpose. What matters is to achieve much while using little strength.

Perhaps you could also give your self - sanctification the concrete goal of "contributions to the capital of grace." Those words apply: All hands on deck! The cause we are serving will and must be victorious. God's authority guarantees it. We are experiencing only a brief phase in the gigantic struggle between God and the Devil, between the spirit, the world and the flesh. Even if the worldly spirit storms ahead victoriously, God will triumph. As the apostles of devotion to Mary we want to help to prepare his triumph, so that in eternity poor humanity will not come to feel his superiority, his omnipotence and justice too much. Either all or nothing ...

I give you my priestly blessing a number of times a day. ... One more thing! I am placing the responsibility for your people on your shoulders in such a way that I will significantly restrict my personal correspondence with our soldier Sodalists. Don't let any vocations get lost. I ask for your prayer.

With heartfelt Sodality greetings and my priestly blessing in sincere love ...

[Signed] J. Kentenich

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<sup>95</sup> That is, the shrine. A term of endearment that Fr Kentenich used until the end of his life.