



18. Schoenstatt's Secret¹³⁷

In 1930, Monsignor Ludwig Wolker, President of the "Federation of German Catholic Youth", visited Schoenstatt in order to study the Movement. After he had taken in a great deal, he remarked to a Schoenstatt Diocesan Priest that he had nevertheless not got behind the secret of Schoenstatt's fruitfulness. Fr Kentenich took up this remark and from it coined the concept "Schoenstatt's secret". The remark and the concept were a welcome occasion to explain Schoenstatt's supernatural origin and point to the importance of the shrine as the source of grace.

It is immediately obvious that the concept "Schoenstatt's secret" is closely connected with Fr Kentenich's statement about the "shadow of the shrine", which he had made just a year before. It was the first time that Fr Kentenich had made the Movement consciously aware of his conviction about the founding process of 1914.

At the end of 1933 Fr Kentenich gave a conference on Schoenstatt's secret in which he defined and explained what he meant with the concept. He had already worked with the subject in the weeks beforehand, as well as in a sermon on the Second Sunday in Advent, 10 December, from which the following text has been taken. It can be found in, Hug, Bethlehem, 245 - 265.

The concept "Schoenstatt's secret" came to be criticized, and was forbidden by the Apostolic Visitor, Fr Sebastian Tromp SJ, who mistakenly supposed that Schoenstatt had a "secret, or clandestine, teaching". For Fr Kentenich the concept and its meaning became all the more valuable because it was attacked. Today we are invited to take a stand to the belief and conviction to which it gives expression.

Dear students, dear Sisters,

This is the second occasion after a very short time that you have prepared a celebration for our Sisters. You have fully achieved what you were aiming at. We all feel that we are again united by strong community bonds. We all again feel an extraordinarily deep sense of responsibility for a great and holy task, for a great and holy mission.

¹³⁷ German, *Schoenstattgeheimnis*. The word Geheimnis means both secret and mystery (in the religious sense, as in the mystery of the Trinity). I have chosen to use secret for idiomatic reasons, but the religious sense of mystery has also to be included.

[The occasion for the celebration – Sending Sisters to the missions]

Offering this celebration above all to our departing missionary Sisters probably shows us most profoundly what your intentions are. This celebration is meant to be seen as a legacy to our departing Sisters. It is as though you are wanting to call out to them: Bear our common secret far away into distant parts of our world! Be the messengers, the bearers, the witnesses to our great Schoenstatt secret.

I would like to thank you on behalf of our Sisters for this call, for this legacy. The future will show whether and to what extent your request and your wish have been fulfilled.

It seems to me that we are surrounded by a sacred space. It seems to me as though the atmosphere of our little chapel surrounds us as we stand before the picture of our Blessed Mother. Indeed, we might almost hold our breath and together kneel in spirit before the picture of our Blessed Mother.

Someone, who has influenced our times very strongly, once remarked, "My friend, hellish noise, I have lost respect for all the great events that are connected with a lot of smoke and fumes. The quietest hours are the most beautiful hours."¹³⁸

In this sacred space we kneel in spirit before the picture of our Blessed Mother. All around us a spiritual battle is raging.¹³⁹ Different *Weltanschauungen*¹⁴⁰ are clashing. It is almost as though a new world is being born. And we, my dear young people, are preparing ourselves here in holy stillness in order to help create this world. Here at a holy place we are striving to serve a holy mission; we are struggling to bring about the Marian formation of the new era in Christ, a new world that is without doubt on the horizon.

I think, my dear young friends, that we have to remain kneeling before the picture of our Blessed Mother. What has just passed before our mind's eye must continue to fill and imbue our souls until the end of this celebration. It was quiet and effective, it touched our hearts profoundly, I might almost say it was virginally pure and untouched. We don't want to desecrate this holy mood, so we won't storm into the great movement of ideas. At this moment we are not looking to develop elemental forces. No, we want to remain quiet and thoughtful and allow ourselves to be blessed.

We want the Blessed Mother to appear above us to bless us, who are the bearers of the light, the messengers, the source of strength, the seeds of a new era.

It seems to me that a threefold plea and request will and must rise up automatically and instinctively to the throne, to the picture of our Blessed Mother, from the atmosphere that surrounds us at the moment.

First petition: Mother Thrice Admirable, please lead me to a deeper understanding of your Schoenstatt secret.

Second petition: Dear Mother Thrice Admirable, grant that I may perfectly embody your Schoenstatt secret.

Third petition: Dear Mother Thrice Admirable, send me out once more from this room of the Last Supper, this holy room. Send me out into my sphere of work as a selfless and joyful herald of your great Schoenstatt secret.

Shall we reflect on these three petitions quietly and thoughtfully? Must we not surround it with our love until it has increasingly formed and moulded our whole personality?

First request: Dear Mother Thrice Admirable, please lead me to a deeper understanding of your great Schoenstatt secret.

We might be inclined to shake our heads impatiently and say: do they think we don't know about Schoenstatt's secret? We young men have just proclaimed it so simply and warmly. Well, there is an enormous difference between knowing and understanding.

¹³⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche.

¹³⁹ The reference here is to the early years of the Nazi dictatorship. Hitler had seized power early in 1933.

¹⁴⁰ World views, outlooks on life, philosophies, ideologies.

Let us listen again to the word “secret”. A secret involves something we don’t know. The bigger and more profound the secret, the more difficult it is – perhaps even impossible – to grasp its core, its ultimate depths. I may even say that when we have grown older – ten, twenty, fifty years – the petition will still be justified: Mother Thrice Admirable, please lead me more deeply into your great Schoenstatt secret!

There are so many mysterious places where the Blessed Mother has shown her effectiveness in our present times. We can think of the many places of grace and places of pilgrimage that are arising today after she has been increasingly forgotten by the people. It almost seems as if the Marian morning star is again shining out over our present - day world. It almost seems as if Christmas will soon take place again in our present times. The light of the Blessed Mother flashes and shines out here and there. She, the Bearer of Christ, is revealing herself more and more in our present times.

The most obvious thing to do, therefore, is to repeatedly search for and examine the question: what is the unique feature of our Schoenstatt secret?

Schoenstatt’s secret! Whoever uses those words will involuntarily think of our little shrine. They will think of our love for Mary. They will think of the capital of grace. They will think of our hero Sodalists. But do you know the original feature, the really unique quality of Schoenstatt’s secret? If I tell you that it is to be found in the Blessed Mother’s attachment to Schoenstatt as a place, and the universal, graced, spiritual fruitfulness of the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt, in a way that is ultimately determined by a very original union between the work of God’s grace and free and active human co - operation, will you say I am right? Or will you shake your heads doubtfully and say: what does that mean in detail?

Let me tell you. Allow me to sink it more deeply into your souls. That is the thanks of the Mother Thrice Admirable to you, her squires,¹⁴¹ the young bearers of a new state, the young co - builders of a new cathedral.

1. The attachment of the Mother Thrice Admirable to a place

Actually it isn’t something new for the Blessed Mother to attach herself to a place, or to connect her love and influence to a place. Hasn’t the Blessed Mother visited countless places in the course of the centuries, so that she could unfold her love and her effective help to a unique degree? Why do we believe, why are we convinced that our Blessed Mother is attached to our little shrine? “Take off your shoes, because the place where you are standing is holy ground!”¹⁴²

If you want to know the deeper reasons for such a belief and conviction, you will have to study Schoenstatt’s Founding Document. In the Founding Document of October 1914 you can read the statement: Blessed Mother, descend here and from here attract people’s hearts to yourself, so that from here you can give them to your Son.

We are all children of the Family. So we are all convinced that the Founding Document was accepted in heaven; it was signed in heaven. That is the reason for our faith that this is a holy place. It is the reason for our conviction that whoever touches Schoenstatt either physically or spiritually will be drawn into the unique river of grace pouring out from here into Germany.

So if I am in need and walk down to our shrine, touching it with faith, I know that grace will pour out more richly here than if I were to kneel somewhere else with the same feeling, with the same fervour. I know that when I am away on holiday, or when in a few weeks’ time our Sisters have found their place of work over in Africa, if we try to connect ourselves spiritually and with faith with our little shrine, all the sources of grace will pour out in the same way as they do when you come into physical contact with this holy place with the same faith.

I don’t know whether you have been told by one of our Federation priests about the reason why they have begun a holy crusade in about 26 - 30 parishes in their home dioceses. Their goal is to bring new life to ancient places of Marian pilgrimage. But they consciously want to connect them with our Schoenstatt secret, Schoenstatt’s source of grace. If you have been able to allow this simple and strong faith to influence you, I

¹⁴¹ Young men preparing to become knights. In the Middle Ages a “knight” was a member of the lower nobility. Here on earth he usually served a greater nobleman, a prince or king, but ultimately he served Jesus Christ.

¹⁴² Ex 3,5.

am certain you will have been inwardly gripped by it. Those are mature men, men who know life and have studied. Yet they bow with immeasurable childlikeness before Schoenstatt's secret.

It won't take long before they are asked to connect other places and other believers with Schoenstatt in the same way. What will their answer be? *Credo!* I believe in Schoenstatt's great secret. I believe that the Blessed Mother has taken up her abode here in our present times, so that from here she can attract people's hearts to herself and help them to conform to her divine Son. What I said to you in a few words would need to be the subject for your reflection and prayer for a long time.

A few days ago we celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Whoever is even slightly connected with the tendencies of our times will also think of the efforts being made to have little Bernadette canonized. The feast of the Immaculate Conception involuntarily reminds us of the history of how the place of pilgrimage at Lourdes came into existence. Do you see the difference [from Schoenstatt] clearly?

I am the Immaculate Conception! The Blessed Mother clad in a radiantly beautiful garment called out those words to the simple fourteen - year - old shepherdess. "Go there, a spring will begin to flow. Then wash yourself and drink." The child did as she was told. Had she misunderstood what was said? She wanted to go where a stream was flowing. "No", the kind Lady told her, "not there. Climb down over there; that is where the spring is flowing." The child looked around. She couldn't see a spring. But faithful to the motherly and gentle instructions of the Lady she began to dig in the sand. Suddenly water began to flow. At first it was a tiny trickle, then it became a powerful river. It is a miraculous spring. Next day hundreds of people came there. In the course of time the numbers increased to thousands and tens of thousands. They scooped up the water and drank from this spring. Lourdes had become the source of countless miracles.

You see, we also have a spring of grace. It is flowing down there in the valley. It came into existence in a much simpler, more down - to - earth way. It is a spring of grace that does not have such an outward symbol as the flowing water in Lourdes. Do you realise what that means? Schoenstatt's secret is the Mother Thrice Admirable's attachment to this place.

If you now fly out from this supernaturally verified standpoint into the situation of our present times, and recall how today the age - old framework has become rotten and ill; if you recall how everything is shaken, you will begin to guess, as a result of your deep insight into history, that at such times a movement that wants to bring about a renewal of the world absolutely has to be attached to a place, even if only for purely organizational motives.

Those of you who have read Hitler¹⁴³ will know that he sees the forces at work in our times in a masterly way and knows how to use them. You will also know why he has also attached his movement to a place.

My dear young friends, that is one the most original features of our Schoenstatt secret. Everything you find here is from first to last a classic embodiment of the organic union between nature and grace. If you look at Schoenstatt's secret from below, it makes full use of modern psychological forces. If you look at the secret from above, everything is a gift and grace. Yes, Mother Thrice Admirable, please lead me to a deeper understanding of your Schoenstatt secret.

Let me remind you again – it is also an essential component of our Schoenstatt secret – of our faith in the profoundly penetrating effectiveness of grace as it has to proceed from here into our present times. We believe in the Marian formation of the world that has to take place from here.

Involuntarily the philosopher and psychologist of our times surveys the many and varied spiritual currents of the past and present. Perhaps places occur to him, for example, Mecca or Rome. How must Schoenstatt be seen as a centre attached to a definite place? If I tell you it is somewhere between Rome and Mecca; if I tell you it is a centre attached to a certain place in an extraordinary spiritual movement, but also and at the same time the centre of moderate organization that is attached to a definite place, you will begin to realise how great and profound our Schoenstatt secret really is. This is the secret before which we bow today, and which the Blessed Mother wants to sink more deeply into our souls today through the working of grace.

Schoenstatt secret, wake up! Become increasingly clear before my mind's eye!

¹⁴³ This probably refers to Hitler's main work, "*Mein Kampf*" (My Fight).

2. Universal fruitfulness in souls

I also see a second essential element of this Schoenstatt secret. We called it the MTA's, the *Mater ter admirabilis*, attachment to a place, and universal, graced fruitfulness in souls. You know what that indicates! First of all, we do not expect direct healing for the body from our shrine; our main expectation is that the soul will be more profoundly embraced, that the soul will be supernaturally transformed. Life must be formed into Christ.

This effect must be universal. Where can we find a proof of this? Everything we believe has to be found either *formaliter explicite* or *implicite*¹⁴⁴ in our Founding Document. If it states that a large part of the religious and moral renewal of the world has to go out from here, it means that from first to last we have been strongly oriented to the organic and harmonious connection between nature and grace, so that something like a new and ideal Church has to be built in an all - embracing sense from here.

What does an ideal Church include? A very broad grassroots membership – the masses of the people. So the masses have also to be brought into contact with Schoenstatt as time goes on. If the world is to be renewed from here, we will also have to move the masses. However, a mass of people will become a crowd unless really outstanding and towering leaders lead it.

Universal fruitfulness! To start with, if we think of the co - operators in the League as the broad foundations for a cathedral, we have to think that there must also be leaders in this mass of people. And where and how are they to be born? Where and how are they to be educated? Where and how are they to become effective leaders? We know the structure of the Movement. It is capable of creating an ideal Church in our present times. We see before us the members of the League and the members of the Federation. That is Schoenstatt's secret. *Credo!* I believe in Schoenstatt's secret.

3. Human co - operation

There is still a third essential component of this secret. The attachment of the Blessed Mother to a place, and her universal fruitfulness from here, are not simply and solely the result of being touched by grace. Here we again meet the core of our specific character; it is at the same time the fruit of our own co-operation. Think of Lourdes, think of Kevelaer,¹⁴⁵ or wherever you want to direct your mind's eye. You will always find places of grace that are purely the outflow of God's work of grace. What about here in Schoenstatt? Look once again at the Founding Document. What do you find there? We ask the Blessed Mother to descend, but now without us. We want to co - operate. Nothing without us! Can you feel the original element? Again and again everything depends on the organic union between nature and grace. Haven't you picked that up from what you have read out to us about Joseph Engling? The Blessed Mother has to do it, but not without us. We want to co - operate. Precisely this idea of co - operation became the moment when the capital of grace was born. You see: Nothing without us! Schoenstatt's secret, please let me understand it more and more clearly! We don't just want to be users, we have to become increasers of the capital of grace.

We can feel that a new era is being born. But we don't want to look down into the arena of present - day battles as spectators. No, we have to climb down into the arena. To start with, how are we to fight in this tremendous battle? Nothing without us! The Blessed Mother wants to and has to be at work here, but not at the cost of our own work. Nothing without us!

Am I right when I tell you that it isn't so easy to understand and penetrate Schoenstatt's secret? Am I right when I tell you that when you are ten, twenty and fifty years older, how difficult it will then be to understand and penetrate the unique espousal between the strength of God's grace and human co - operation in detail! And here in Schoenstatt this espousal, this union between God's grace and our personal and strong co - operation, celebrates its full flowering day by day.

So let us kneel down in spirit and quietly and thoughtfully pray: Mother Thrice Admirable, increasingly reveal your great Schoenstatt secret to me!

¹⁴⁴ Expressly or by implication.

¹⁴⁵ A Marian place of pilgrimage in Northern Germany that was founded in 1641.

Second request, we immediately add a second request: let me embody this, your great secret! Whoever knows our profoundly chaotic times today, whoever has recognized clearly that ancient ties and bonds are simply discarded, will also know what a movement of renewal has to possess in all circumstances. There are three things:

first of all, a truly great idea,
then secondly, the embodiment of this idea in individual members,
and thirdly, great, outstanding leaders.

We immediately think of our Movement. We believe that our Movement has been called by God through the Blessed Mother to help bring about an essential part of the Marian formation of the world into Christ. At times we have formulated it brusquely as: in the shadow of this shrine the fate of the Church will be extremely strongly influenced for centuries and millennia.

If our Schoenstatt secret is not a crazy idea, a very large Movement of renewal will one day have to proceed from here. What does this require?

1. A great idea

We know this idea: the Marian formation of the world into Christ, localized, attached to a place, proceeding from a very definite place. We don't need to arouse our enthusiasm for this great idea once again. But you may not forget that such an abstract idea is not enough unless it is presented to us in close relation to life.

2. The embodiment of this idea

If a Movement is to become rooted in everyday life, its idea has to be embodied. It has to take on flesh and form in the individual supporters of the Movement. That is the most important thing.

If you would like to take a side glance into the other camp, recall how National Socialism [the Nazi party] is working with every means at its disposal to embody its ideas with great fervour and enthusiasm in each individual supporter of the movement.

That is what we have so often said in the Family: the cultivation of the spirit! It is not enough for us to be camp followers. Unless we succeed in embodying the fundamental ideas of the Family in every supporter of our Marian Schoenstatt Realm, we can be sure that we are not on the right way: as much cultivation of the spirit as possible!

3. Leaders

Let us not forget that if an all-embracing Movement is to fulfil its meaning, it needs leaders. Do you know what qualities such a leader has to have? He has to embody the concentrated will of his followers in an intensified and concentrated way. That produces leaders, not ring leaders.

Every one of the followers must feel that all their noble aspirations have been embodied in an intensified way in their leader.

Now let us pray once more: Mother Thrice Admirable, embody your Schoenstatt secret in me. I don't know how I should formulate your requests in detail. Should I pray: embody your idea in me as a follower, or, embody your great Schoenstatt secret in me as a leader. May God's grace touch your souls. First of all I pray on behalf of those who still do not dare to reach out to a leadership post: Mother Thrice Admirable, please embody your Schoenstatt secret in me.

The embodiment of a great idea! What does that mean?

Blessed Mother,
please embody attachment to the shrine in me,
please embody attachment to Mary in me,
please embody attachment to our task in me,
please embody attachment to the Family in me,
please embody attachment to the organism in me.

3.1 If I want to be a genuine upholder of our Schoenstatt realm, I must be the embodiment of attachment to the shrine. It is a “Schoenstatt heresy” if someone only sees the shrine as a symbol. If I want to be someone who upholds the great Movement, I will have to be attached to this place with every little fibre of my heart.

Read what was proclaimed about this truth in the early conferences right at the beginning of our history. “Whoever does not love the shrine, whoever only sees the shrine as a symbol of ideas, will never be a support for the Family.” They may be interested in the Movement, they may accept the great thoughts gratefully, they may even talk about them with great enthusiasm, but we have to apply them in earnest. *Aut Caesar aut nihil!*¹⁴⁶ We can’t use camp followers and hangers on.

Study the signs of the times. What do other movements do? Each supporter, every follower, has to be inwardly full of the fundamental ideas, they have to embody the secret in themselves. So I have to embody attachment to the shrine.

3.2 I must also embody attachment to Mary. We will have to say that whoever in the course of their lives does not arrive at a profound and childlike attachment to the Mother Thrice Admirable as she lives and reigns in our shrine, may be learned, they may be gifted organizers, but God does not want to bring salvation to Israel through them. This is an essential requirement.

3.3 Let us proceed. Mother Thrice Admirable, please embody attachment to our task in me. You know the great goal: the Marian formation of the world in Christ has to go out from here. Here you have the movement of ideas. In this context you might like to regard Schoenstatt as a symbol of an idea. However, in some way or other great attachment to the task has also to be present.

3.4 Then attachment to the Family. We all carry out this task – I am not just on my own. We are a holy phalanx, a holy city, a holy and living cathedral. All of us are standing shoulder to shoulder. Those are the ideas, the goals. Each one of us must embody them. Mother Thrice Admirable, please embody Schoenstatt’s secret in me!

3.5 There is still one concept that has to be explained. Please embody attachment to the organism in me. That is to say, please make me the embodiment of a holy person who combines two things at the same time: a person who is stamped by grace, and who is moral and noble - minded.

These are not thoughts I have just shaken out of my sleeve, they are key thoughts that the Movement has kept in view from the beginning. This is the original feature of our striving for holiness. This is the original feature of our great Schoenstatt secret. So we don’t expect to create “pious” people. We have to bring about a new type of person who can bear the present times. This new type of person has to embody the organic and harmonious connection between nature and grace.

Allow me to kneel down again in spirit and dare to ask: Mother Thrice Admirable, embody Schoenstatt’s great secret in me as a leader!

A time that is as chaotic as ours today, that is becoming rootless, that is often detached from things and places – such a time is far more dependent on genuine and true leadership than other epochs. The less people are attached to places and things, the more strongly they will depend on being attached to people. Everything in our times points forcibly in one direction – in order to regenerate our times we need genuine and profound leadership.

You may not overlook that in a time such as we are living through at present, when so much is whipped up in people in an extreme way, the danger is great that those people become leaders who are psychologically ill, because such people have over - produced and stored warm feelings. The uprooted people of today all too easily run after such people¹⁴⁷.

The history of a Movement, just as the history of a people, has always been the history of its leaders. Do I have the courage to pray: Mother Thrice Admirable, please embody Schoenstatt’s great secret in me as a leader?

¹⁴⁶ Either Caesar (king) or nothing!

¹⁴⁷ A clear, although camouflaged reference to Hitler.

For my part I only want to emphasize one point. At present you are living in the springtime of your lives. Think of it, our Movement aims at having universal and worldwide significance – worldwide significance because of its goals; worldwide significance also because of the fundamental forces at work in it. For me as a leader it means that I must in some way embody the fundamental forces of an era. That is a true leader. So as a leader I have to embody the essential aspirations of my followers. So I will need a good mixture of masculine and feminine qualities. I have just mentioned attachment to the organism. An ordinary leader will have to develop this attachment to the organism to this extent. So there may be no essential fundamental force in the present times that has not taken root in some way in a genuine and born leader.

So let us kneel down once again and pray: Mother Thrice Admirable, embody your great Schoenstatt secret in me.

A third request: Mother Thrice Admirable, make me a herald of your Schoenstatt secret.

If you have understood Schoenstatt's secret correctly, you will know that there is a saying written in flaming letters over Schoenstatt: Nothing without me! Schoenstatt did not come about simply through grace. Schoenstatt consciously came about – as has possibly not happened at any other place of pilgrimage on earth – through the co - operation of the bearers of its secret. Nothing without me!

A powerful river of grace is pouring out into the world – not just in Germany, but beyond.

Schoenstatt did not come into existence without the active, selfless and heroic co - operation of its first supporters. Schoenstatt may not develop further without us. So, Mother Thrice Admirable, make me a herald of your great Schoenstatt secret. I want to make you known. I want to proclaim your secret through my whole being. I want to embody Schoenstatt's secret to the very fingertips. My parents, my relatives, should notice it. A movement has to enter into them, a Schoenstatt movement. I may not rest, I want to be a herald of this secret to my parents and circle of relatives.

Next to me there are friends who have not been as gripped by this world as I have. I may be a herald. I have to be prudent in the way I proclaim it, not pushy. It must become like a shepherd and his flock. And if I study somewhere else, it must at least be my goal, even if I don't achieve it immediately, or overnight: I must and may be a herald of Schoenstatt's great secret.

So let us kneel down in spirit and pray:

„Mother Thrice Admirable, please let me penetrate to a deep understanding of your and our Schoenstatt secret.

Mother Thrice Admirable, make me an embodiment of your Schoenstatt secret either as a faithful follower, or as the leader of many followers.

Mother Thrice Admirable, please make me a herald of your Schoenstatt secret wherever my feet and my task may take me somehow and some day.“