



## 19/1. Carmel Letters – 1941

*Father Kentenich called the events around 20 January 1942, the Second Milestone, the “axis event” of Schoenstatt’s history, which validly interpreted all the previous events and formed the basis for all the events that happened afterwards.*

*What happened on this day began with Father Kentenich’s arrest on 20 September 1941. This was followed by four weeks of solitary confinement in total darkness in one of the safe deposit sections of a former Bank, which had been taken over by the Gestapo. This period of imprisonment in the dark ended on 18 October 1941. Father Kentenich was transferred to a cell in the Koblenz city prison, which was popularly known as the “Carmel Prison”, because it was located in a former Carmel Monastery. The cells of the monks became prison cells. The church next door, along with its tower, was still used for services. (During the war the whole building complex was destroyed during an Allied bombing raid.)*

*Father Kentenich’s circumstances changed very quickly. On 21 October he was able to send his first letter to Schoenstatt. Since the prison warders were not all convinced Nazis, he was able to win the cooperation of two of them – the “tall” and the “short messenger” – to take his letters with them to the nearby St Joseph’s Hospital, which was served by the Sisters of Mary. The messengers were also prepared to smuggle letters into the prison. An active exchange of letters began.*

*The messengers not only smuggled in letters, they also brought in writing materials and what was needed to celebrate Holy Mass. On 13 December Father Kentenich celebrated the Eucharist for the first time in his cell. Resourceful Sisters also found out that it was possible to look into the prison courtyard and the windows of the prison cells if they climbed half way up the church tower. When Father Kentenich looked out of the window one day, he was surprised to find the collar and face of a Sister of Mary in a little window in the church tower. When he climbed onto the table in his cell, also his face became visible from the window. This started the “visits to the tower window” during which communication was only possible through signs. The letter contact gave rise to its own literature, the “Carmel Letters”. These letters are an incalculably valuable documentation that bears witness to the way the founder matured to take the decision of 20 January 1942. On that day he decided not to take any natural steps to prevent his being sent to the concentration camp. The letters also testify to the way he made his freedom depend on his followers living the Inscriptio, and the way he tried to lead these followers to this point.*

*The following texts are a selection from the Carmel Letters. They have all been taken from the collection entitled “Texte zum 20.1.1942, Band 1, Schoenstatt 1973.”*

## Letter to Fr Friedrich Muehlbeyer, 21 October 1941

Carissime Confrater,<sup>148</sup>

Since “letters from prison” are often relegated later to the acts of the martyrs, I am not keen to write. However, in the end I have to do so if you are not to remain totally without word from me. So, briefly and to the point, a few notes.

Tell everyone who is interested that I am fine. During the first four weeks I could pray with the Creed, “descended into hell”,<sup>149</sup> but since the 18th October “ascended into heaven”, that is, to lighter regions where I now lead the contemplative life of a Carmelite monk. Body and soul have quickly adjusted to the change. All in all, there is no reason to create legends and horror stories. On one point people do me more honour than I deserve. I count

as “the” intellectual head of Schoenstatt. If, by Schoenstatt, they mean the coherent system<sup>150</sup> of a psychologically orientated asceticism, their assumption might be correct, because in 1919 I tried for the first time to give the system an academic foundation. However, if by Schoenstatt they mean the religious current of the MGO (Marian community of prayer and sacrifice<sup>151</sup>), I have to share the praise with countless others, in particular the many Fr Kentenichs who worked in the MGO in the past, and to some extent are working in it still today.

When the opportunity presents itself, you could give the Sisters two sayings of our Lord for meditation:

### 1. Why did you look for me?

Did you not know that I have to be doing my Father’s business?<sup>152</sup>

### 2. Greater love has no one than to give his life for those he loves.<sup>153</sup>

In addition, when Paul asked what he had to **do**, he was given the significant pointer as an answer, “what he has to **suffer** for my name’s sake...”<sup>154</sup>

Our Lord himself did not redeem the world through his miracles and sermons, but through his death.

Those who want to seek and visit me will always find me in the heart of God and the Blessed Mother. All who have inscribed themselves into these hearts are constantly with me and in me. So I don’t lack conversation.

Now I have come to the end of what I wanted to say. One more thing, I may not forget it. Please thank all who have done my laundry so carefully. May the words of the beatitude apply to them: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall have mercy shown them.<sup>155</sup>

In every direction, from above and below, to the right and left, heartfelt greetings and every blessing! So let it be, we shall remain faithful!

See you soon,

Faithfully yours, J. Kentenich.

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<sup>148</sup> Dear Confrère.

<sup>149</sup> That is, the “underworld”, the prison Bunker.

<sup>150</sup> German, *Wissenschaftliches System*. Fr Kentenich is not using the adjective wissenschaftlich – scientific – in the generally accepted sense of research and reflection carried out according to strictly scientific and methodologically exact rules. By “scientific” he meant a thoroughly thought through survey of truths that are solidly founded, and hence can lay claim to be taken seriously in academic - university circles.

<sup>151</sup> The title given to Schoenstatt as a camouflage during the Nazi period.

<sup>152</sup> Lk 2, 49.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Jn 15, 13.

<sup>154</sup> Acts 9,16.

<sup>155</sup> Mt 5, 7.

## Letter to Sr. Anna, 28 October 1941

*Grüß Gott!*<sup>156</sup>

It has been a long time since I was able to break the bread of God's word with you, and I do not know when it will be possible again. How fortunate that the soul is a spirit and is not dependent on outward closeness; how fortunate that God keeps access to the human heart open for himself, and personally determines the climate in which it can carry out its main calling<sup>157</sup> most quickly and surely; how fortunate, finally, that we can not only speak to people about God, but also to God about people. I make a great deal of use of this possibility, just as Paul did.<sup>158</sup>

I pray that as an October gift you may be given strong growth into the "full stature of Christ",<sup>159</sup> to maturity, independence and daring in Christ. With Paul I pray,

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.<sup>160</sup>

The way to this re - orientation leads via internalizing and living the Inscriptio spirit more deeply.

What Augustine called Inscriptio is described by Ignatius in that highly recommended prayer, "Accept, O Lord, my *entire* freedom, my memory, my intellect, my *entire* will and my *entire* heart. You have given everything to me, I give everything back to you without reserve; do what you please with it. There is only one thing I ask: Your grace, your love, your fruitfulness. Your grace, so that I may submit joyfully to your wish and will. Your love, so that I may always believe, know and at times feel that I am loved as the apple of your eye. Your fruitfulness, so that in you and the Blessed Mother I may bear rich fruit for our common work. Then I am more than rich, and I want nothing more."<sup>161</sup>

For us, a deeper internalization [of the Inscriptio spirit] consists in never separating the Blessed Mother from our Lord on our way to the Father, and never separating our Lord from his Mother, especially when we renew the Inscriptio act and spirit. In practice this means that, together with the Blessed Mother, we want to make Golgotha, the altar and tabernacle our favourite place. Or, to experience the reality of Golgotha, the altar and tabernacle in their hearts, and so, heart in heart in holy three - in - oneness, go to the Father.

Living the Inscriptio happens in everyday life. We don't want to be one of those who in prayer have a lot to say about total self - surrender, but who collect all the horses in the world to retrieve the coach when God begins to take our prayer seriously and does what he wills with us. This applies in particular when he takes us into the school of suffering. Paul takes it for granted that as members of Christ we have to become like him in his suffering, and that suffering includes not merely the breakdown of all human forces, but also, and above all, the breakthrough of divine forces, and hence the rich fruitfulness of our life and work.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> There is no English equivalent for this greeting: God greet you!

<sup>157</sup> German, *Hauptberuf*. The German word refers to both the main job by which a person earns a living, and a spiritual calling. Their *Hauptberuf* is their main occupation, in contrast to what they may do on the side. Fr Kentenich often said that it is our *Hauptberuf* to love and learn to love. Cf. USA Tertianship (1952) I, 132.

<sup>158</sup> Gal 4, 19.

<sup>159</sup> Eph 4,13.

<sup>160</sup> Eph 3, 14 - 19.

<sup>161</sup> St Ignatius of Loyola, The Spiritual Exercises. See also the prayer, "Accept, O Lord, ..." in Heavenwards, Part II.

<sup>162</sup> Col 1,24; 1 Cor 4,9.

May the grace of Inscriptio make itself felt in the coming months in the spirit of the feast of Christ the King:  
*Omnia opera mea Regi crucifixo et glorioso!*<sup>163</sup>

Heartfelt greetings and my blessing to all, J.K.

### **Letter of 28 November 1941**

... You may not allow temptations against childlike trust to come up. On the contrary! You should be proud and grateful that God is giving me the opportunity to sacrifice myself in this way for him and his cause, and tries *your* childlike trust so seriously. So he is presupposing a high degree of childlikeness in you.

All of us can now prove whether we have understood the Inscriptio and Blank Cheque correctly. We are nowhere more secure and sheltered than in the darkness of faith and trust. How lovely it will be when we are later able to see the ways along which God's wisdom has led us in this time.

So make use of the difficulties in order to grow more deeply into the world of childlikeness. Thank God that contact is still possible.

Heartfelt greetings to all and thanks for your loyalty.

### **Letter of 21 December 1941**

That was a surprise! I had just written my Christmas letter and given it to ... I looked out of the window and there – that was my first great Christmas joy.<sup>164</sup> You can see how human I still am despite all growth into the spiritual and divine world.

I am sure you would have liked me to open the window. If only I could have done so! The limitation of freedom here includes the tiniest detail. "Peter, the time will come when another will gird you."<sup>165</sup> That time has come. But I don't find it difficult, because everything is secondary. The main thing is God [working] in your souls until they grow to the full stature of Christ.<sup>166</sup> That is my greatest joy of all. –

Could you see me as clearly behind the window as I could see you? You will have noticed that I am fine. I again know better how you are. – Now remain faithfully united – each at her place – and serve the Sisters with sincere kindness and love. I would like to give you all a great deal of love. You have to do on my behalf what I cannot do.

Heartfelt Christmas wishes!

### **Letter of 22 December 1941**

To start with, for training purposes ask the circles<sup>167</sup> two questions:

1. Why is cultivation of the spirit the key and vital question, the question that will decide the fate and future of the Family?
2. Should those responsible for the cultivation of the spirit in the Family<sup>168</sup> replace the confessors or spiritual directors, or make them superfluous?

**[Thanks]**

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<sup>163</sup> All that I do is for the crucified and glorified King.

<sup>164</sup> First visit to the tower window. Cf. introduction to this text.

<sup>165</sup> Jn 21,18.

<sup>166</sup> Eph 4, 13.

<sup>167</sup> This probably refers to the so - called "circle of leaders" of the Sisters. It was composed of the superiors, educators and course mothers.

<sup>168</sup> Fr Kentenich was mainly thinking of the educators and course mothers.

In addition, until now I have not thanked you and all your helpers for your very many Martha services. I did not do so, because I did not want to encourage further services. You can imagine that it is not easy for me to accept so many gifts, because they are only possible as a result of the personal renunciation of the Sisters, and because in principle I do not try to avoid any difficulty presented by life. On the contrary, I want to grow through them. So, with Paul I can also say, "I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well - fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."<sup>169</sup>

If I had only myself to consider, I would have hoofed it long ago. However, I have a Confrère with me who greatly depends on material things. So I let you and others go on. But now allow me to thank you for all the love and sacrifice connected with the gifts – first of all, on behalf of the priest, and then on my own behalf. Let me say with Paul, "You have acted well in sharing in my need".<sup>170</sup>

In that regard my need is not particularly great. We are given the minimum we need to live. Beyond this I don't have many needs.

Must I now fear that my thanks will be interpreted as a request? You may not do that. At any rate, the Sisters may not be harmed. And if, beyond this, you want to give me an opportunity to make the hard lot of the priest beside me, and others, more bearable, you will have done a good work. In this spirit please thank all involved ...

### **[Interweaving of destinies]**

Our Sisters may not become restless because I have been away for so long, and their prayers and sacrifices do not seem to be heard. My destiny is far too strongly connected with that of the whole Family for that. The battle fought on my account and against me is the battle of the devil against the Family. (Think of Job). My liberation, therefore, also means the liberation of the Family. On the other hand, people think that by fettering me, they have fettered the Family. In the background – you may visualize this to yourselves – a bitter battle is raging between the Woman who crushes the serpent, and the serpent. There is no doubt who will win in the end. It is fitting, and it is a great honour, that I should be the buffer. However, you can observe how God always makes use of this imprisonment for the best of the individual and the Family as a whole. That is also how he wants us to make use of it. So we have to be careful to ensure that we do not disturb God's plans in the least. It follows that the Sisters should not worry so much about me; they should care more about the growth of love in their souls and in community life. Your prayers and sacrifices will be richly heard, indeed they have to a large extent already been heard. Otherwise I would not be in such complete control of the situation, nor would I be able to do so much good in various directions. Otherwise the Family would not try so soundly to acquire God - willed autonomy in every regard.

Of course I would rejoice humanly with all my heart if I could see you and all who belong to me again. You noticed this on Saturday.<sup>171</sup> Actually it would be easy to make this possible in some way. Yet, for the course and outcome of the bitter battle it would be better for both parties to continue making the sacrifice of renunciation. As soon as the situation makes another course of action advisable, I will tell you. In the meantime, in the spirit of the Inscriptio, let us visit each other all the more deeply and lovingly in the two Holy Hearts.

I offer up Holy Mass every day for the Family. Make a special intention each day. Please do not forget to thank God for allowing us to remain in constant contact. Consider whether it would not be a good thing to keep the "Circles" and the superiors of the bigger houses in and outside Schoenstatt constantly informed about the course of events. This will create calm and a sense of responsibility, and will have an educational, clarifying and encouraging effect.

You know how I am. I could not have had a better holiday than I have had here. I have so much peace. Other spiritual leaders have gone into solitude before important stages in their lives. God had to force me

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<sup>169</sup> Phil 4, 11 - 14.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Phil 4, 16.

<sup>171</sup> Fr Kentenich is referring to a visit to the church tower window.

to do so. So I don't want to leave it until he again sends me out. You will see, I will be there [in Schoenstatt] again at the right moment, newly equipped and ready for the battle – unbroken in body and soul. See to it that the Family has grown, so that it can run along God's paths with me. To all, in particular the "Circles" and superiors of the large houses, sincere greetings.

At Christmas I will be with you. Thinking of each other and remembering each other in prayer will make us happy, inspire us to love others greatly, and give them joy.

All want to and should try to make use of the circumstances to grow with me, and to mature to the full stature of Christ. This is what God wants. So we want it as well. The Blessed Mother, who loves us as her favourites, will help us to do this with her blessing, intercession and example.

All for our Family. Now I have unburdened my soul somewhat, but at great speed. I wish you as much calm, security, contentment and joy as God has given me as a permanent possession in answer to your prayers and sacrifices.

### **Christmas Letter for 25 December 1941**

A 61 - year - old priest is sitting next to me... He is sobbing like a child, "I could burst with fear and suffering. – Christmas in prison, and besides that my poor relatives and my parish." This is how the poor man is suffering under the loss of freedom.

#### **[The spirit of the freedom of the children of God]**

With all my heart I gladly give God the loss of my freedom. I am ready to bear it in all its conceivable forms until the end of my life if, as a result, I could purchase continued existence, fruitfulness and holiness for you and the whole Family until the end of time.

What we are striving to attain with our Family, and what we want to achieve, is to dizzyingly high that only an extraordinary measure of grace can enable us to bring it about. You may never forget this! Those who love the Family will therefore consider themselves fortunate if they can give their all for it. The most precious possession of human beings is their freedom. With sincere and glowing love I sacrifice this freedom, so that God may give you for all time the spirit of the freedom of God's children, which I long for so ardently.

There is nothing that so resembles God as a noble - minded woman who, with noble spontaneity and simple, God - filled self - possession, can call this spirit of controlled freedom her own, that is, as a Sister of Mary, a Sister of the Blessed Mother, whom I would so much like to give to the Church.

My wish and prayer for the Family for Christmas is a high degree of this spirit of the freedom of God's much loved children, and as a return gift I yearn for your promise of faithfulness to the Family and the spirit of the Family. At the same time I want to thank you all for the seriousness, faithfulness and depth with which you have stood to the ideals of the Family until now.

#### **[Make correct use of my imprisonment through faithfulness and Inscriptio]**

My being here is a greater trial for you than for me, just as my fate is the fate of the Family. I am not in prison on my own account, or because of some stupidity, but because of the Family – both in the narrower and wider sense. So the Family is imprisoned with me and in me. So also you must make full use of my imprisonment, as I do, as a personal lot and fate. You do this if you consume yourselves as until now with unwavering loyalty for the ideals of the Family, even when new trials come.

I hope to God that I will be able to catch many of the blows of fate foreseen for the Family, and be allowed to carry them alone. But, but – I won't be able to do it completely. So prepare yourselves! In noble competition we want to try to be worthy of one another, and to become ever more worthy of God and the Blessed Mother, so that with us they can erect the great building they want to build. In practice we cannot do better than to cultivate, live and love the Inscriptio spirit. Pray that I may be given this spirit, just as I pray for it for you and for all coming generations.

Now rejoice with all your heart like a happy child in a richly blessed Family. I rejoice with all my heart with you. Greetings and blessing!

## **Letter of 26 December 1941**

You may not allow yourself to be sad on my account, first of all because I am where God wants to have me – and that is always the best place – and also because for the moment I can serve you and help you far more from here than from outside.

### **[The loveliest place in the world]**

Finally, you may not forget what I told you in the past: there is no more beautiful place in the world than the heart of a noble - minded person who loves God fervently. Look at how richly God has given me such places. See to it that your heart becomes increasingly noble, pure, strong and filled with fervent love for God, then you will have prepared a comfortable home for God, and also for me. And who is better off in the entire world than I am, who has a more beautiful home than I have, despite this prison?

### **[Freely willed self - surrender of freedom]**

Before he set out on his way of suffering, our Lord prayed, “No one takes my life from me, I give it freely, because I want to”.<sup>172</sup> I do the same. No one is depriving me of my freedom, I give it freely, that is, because I want to do so, or more precisely, because God wants me to do so! “My food, my favourite task is to carry out the wish of him who sent me!”<sup>173</sup>

### **[A communion of love and destiny]**

There is only one thing that could make my outward distance difficult – the awareness that you are no longer striving for the stars. That would cause me tremendous suffering. Everything else, including what the first four weeks cost, is just a game, a pleasure, because God wants it for your best. I am convinced that you will do everything to spare me this suffering, even more, that you will do everything to allow God to govern you completely in the way required by the Inscriptio. What a surprise it will be for me when I return to find you so rooted in God that I will have to do my utmost to keep up with you! That is how it has to be. Genuine love never says, “That’s enough!” The measure of love is immeasurable. And our relationship to each other has to lead us deeper and deeper into this measure without measure, into our eternal, infinite God.

In order to confirm us in these endeavours, let us renew the Inscriptio together at Christmas. I will join you.

Let us consciously extend the close communion of love and destiny that chains us unbreakably to God and one another, and carefully cultivate it with our poor Sisters in the missions. They too are approaching serious crises when the contact with home they have had until now will have become impossible. There is only one thing that can solve all problems completely and perfectly: the Inscriptio – to surrender ourselves without reserve to Eternal Love, uncreated divine Wisdom and infinite Omnipotence, in the hearts of our Blessed Mother and our Lord.

## **Letter shortly after Christmas 1941**

### **[Prison – a God - given school of heroism]**

We, you and I, have to be prepared for all sorts of things. *Non sine sanguine*. A great work cannot come into existence without much blood – in a spiritual and actual sense. Therefore, in the first four weeks, when they tried to use modern torture, I felt extremely well. Clemens of Alexandria said, “To be close to the sword is to be close to God!” This must always apply to us. To have been given a great mission by God is certainly an act of trust that can make us very happy, but it is also a call and an obligation to die constantly in a mystical and real sense. What Paul said about God’s word – that it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow<sup>174</sup> – also applies to the words he speaks to little people through such a calling.

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<sup>172</sup> Jn 10,18.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Jn 4,34.

<sup>174</sup> Heb 4,12.

What applies to the two of us, may and must also be said to those who are called with us. Such a calling is not just a pleasure, but also a divine burden. It has to be. And those who are called may never feel happier than when the great law of God's kingdom has become a reality in them. It is something extraordinarily great that our Family has made the Inscriptio. Join me in thanking God, because I am the first who is allowed to live it. My present actions and way of life are a single great act of daring. Much light and warmth goes out of my room. I have a task here. We want to know but one goal, one love, one passion – to take the Inscriptio seriously. The development of the Family until now convinces me again that the saying about the shadow of the shrine will come true... Heroes are growing in our ranks. God is educating them for himself, and will sooner or later use them for his purposes. This is how the many prayers sent up for me have been heard. So please go on praying and sacrificing in the spirit of the Inscriptio. Until now my absence has only brought a blessing everywhere.

Besides this, God uses the prison and concentration camp as a school and training for heroes. Unfortunately many are not mature and able to co - operate with God's chiselling. Those who live quite simply from the spirit of the Inscriptio will always overcome the world and the devil, because divine powers are alive in them, and they will rejoice in this chiselling.<sup>175</sup>

So, let us be happy, and thank, live and suffer for our Family in the spirit of the Inscriptio. The standard - bearer is nothing, the standard everything! Long live Jesus and Mary in the souls of our children!

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<sup>175</sup> God is like an artist when he is forming and educating people he wants to prepare for a mission. He is like a sculptor who chisels away so that a block of raw marble will increasingly become a masterpiece. Fr Kentenich often used this image for the process of God's educational activity.