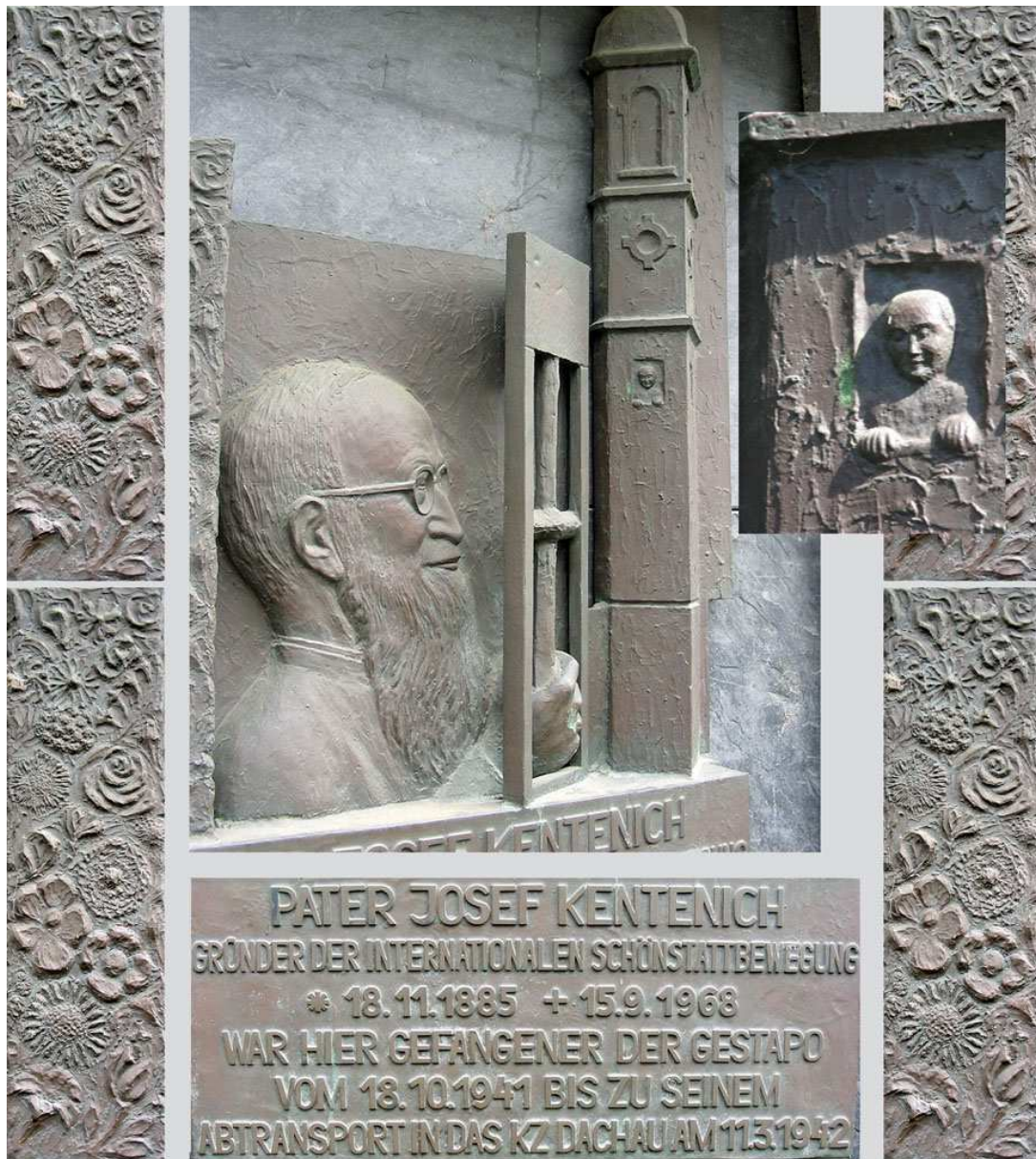




Places to meet Father

Koblenz and Metternich



Memorial plaque Koblenz, Karmeliterstraße/Rheinstraße (photomontage)

The interweaving of destinies between the founder and the Schoenstatt Family

“From a supernatural point-of-view we are a real family – I and my followers, my followers and myself. If we exist as a real family in God’s plans, it means that our destinies are interwoven, in fact they are interwoven on a supernatural level. That means in practice, and it is a reality, that I accept the sacrifices made by my followers for me as a reality, and it is also effective. Vice versa, the sacrifices I make for the Family are a means to save the Family, and are far more valuable than if I had had the whole of the Gestapo on my side ...

We have entered into a covenant with the Blessed Mother, and this is a reality. If we fulfil the conditions, if we now live the Inscriptio for others, this is a means for me to be set free on their account.

I feel that I have put it clearly. – Can you see the extremely strong supernatural attitude that found expression in taking the covenant of love seriously? In retrospect this seems so natural. There is such logic behind it! However, when you are faced with the human decision, if you have to choose certain death, the certainty of being murdered, and if on the other hand all the people you love are begging and beseeching: Please act differently! Can you understand that this included a profound spiritual battle?

From: J. Kentenich, Brasilien-Terziat (Brazil Tertianship), Santa Maria 1952.



The Places:

The spot where the “Carmel Prison” stood – it was destroyed in 1944 – can be found at the corner of the Karmeliterstrasse and Rheinstrasse. It is marked by a memorial tablet. Next to it there is a memorial tablet put up by the Schoenstatt Movement (cf. photo and photomontage on p.1).

The Mariengarten current, and the memories of Fr Kentenich’s time in prison in Koblenz, have also been localised at the Provincial House of the Providentia Province of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary in the suburb of Metternich, Trierer Straße 388.

Reference:

P. Locher et al (ed), *Kentenich Reader*, Vol 1, p. 189, 225.

Philippi-Schoenstatt Parallel

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. (Phil. 1, 3-5)

The apostle Paul wrote those words from his prison in Ephesus to his church in the city of Philippi. The apostle felt throughout his life that he was intimately united with this first Christian community in Europe. It was profoundly united with his fate, because he was always a credible witness to Christ for them. The Christians in Philippi not only accepted their faith in Christ from the apostle, they also shared his suffering (vs. 7). That was why the apostle was so warmly united with this church; while he was in prison he became profoundly aware of this fact.

In December 1941 Fr Joseph Kentenich wrote to Schoenstatt from the Carmel Prison in Koblenz: "Read Phil 1 every day", that is, the chapter from which the above verses were taken. He found himself in this text. He, the father and founder, was imbued with a similarly profound sense of being united with his "church", with the Schoenstatt Family. He observed that his relationship to his spiritual family was as deep and heartfelt as Paul's union with his church in Philippi, and that he shared a similar union of destinies with it.

These ties had grown over decades as the fruit of his total self-giving to his followers, and their openness for his leadership borne by faith. Then, from 20 September 1941, he was forcefully separated from his Family. First of all he had spent four weeks in solitary confinement in the dark, then, from 18 October, he had been transferred to the Carmel Prison from where it became possible for him to set up a certain contact with Schoenstatt thanks to daring warders.

For Fr Kentenich, with his unchanging attitude of faith, it was clear that this union might not be allowed to suffer or be weakened as a result of this separation. On the contrary, it should grow and be deepened through a deepened union of destinies. He found the Biblical basis for this in "Phil 1". He read this chapter daily and drew from it direction and strength.

If we transport ourselves into this situation and read Phil 1, the letter begins to speak to us very eloquently. *All of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel (vs. 7). This is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best (vs. 9f). I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel (vs. 12). Whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that*

you are standing firm in one spirit (vs. 27). For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well (vs. 29).

Fr Kentenich didn't want to draw direction and strength from these words just for himself; he wanted his followers and spiritual family to understand him and to imitate his thinking and actions. So, already at the end of November, he wrote to Schoenstatt: *In December, instead of my letter, you can have the first chapter of the Letter to the Philippians read out at the beginning of meditation.*

At Christmas he was able to note that the heartfelt union and community of destinies had grown deeper. In particular, all that had come alive in the Sisters of Mary in Koblenz under the heading of "Mariengarten" was a clear sign that this had happened.

Obviously Divine Providence had more in mind for this community of destinies. There are two passages in Phil 1 in which grace is mentioned. Fr Kentenich highlighted them in a special way. *All of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment ... (vs. 7).). For he has graciously granted you the privilege (grace) not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well (vs. 29).*

His imprisonment, suffering for Christ – a grace! Could God possibly have more in store for him and his followers?

In Schoenstatt great efforts were being made to save Fr Kentenich from being transferred to the concentration camp at Dachau. He, however, remained reserved. It was possible that God wanted to let – but also his followers – share even more in the "grace of imprisonment". If that was the case he could not reject this offer of grace! It was a bitter struggle until he finally came to a decision on 20 January 1942: He would not complete the form that would save him from the concentration camp. *Please understand this answer in the light of faith in the reality of supernature and the interweaving of destinies of the members of our Family.* He wrote those words to his closest collaborator, Fr Alex Menningen. In the language of Phil 1 that meant: *You are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have (vs. 30).* The Schoenstatt Family went along with him, although some needed a bit more time.

The fruits of the three years he spent in the concentration camp at Dachau proved that this pathway of faith was the correct one; there is a parallel between "Philippi and Schoenstatt"

Oskar Bühler