

The First Founding Document

October 18, 1914

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somewhat edited by Fr. J. Niehaus, 2001

Introduction

In July 1914 the little-used chapel of St. Michael was placed at the disposal of the Marian Sodality, which had been founded a few months before on April 19, 1914 by Father Kentenich and the students of the Schoenstatt Minor Seminary. For years this chapel had been used for storing garden tools. By October the inside had been roughly cleaned by the boys themselves and decorated with a statue of St. Michael which had been given to them by one of the priests.

The following is the first talk given in this chapel. The date was October 18, 1914. Father Kentenich revealed a plan which was to become more and more significant as time went on. In August 1914 he read an article about an Italian lawyer, Bartolo Longo, who had asked the Blessed Mother to take up her abode in the church he had built in her honor at Pompeii. He had implored her to work miracles there, and his prayer had been answered. Since Father Kentenich was faced with preparing the boys for the First World War which had just begun, he saw this article and the gift of the chapel as an indication from Divine Providence that he should do the same as Bartolo Longo, with one exception: The Blessed Mother should not work miracles so much in the physical order, but rather miracles of education and inner transformation. The one stipulation made was human cooperation, expressed in the form of making contributions to the capital of grace. The mutual give-and-take expressed so clearly in the talk is the foundation of the mutual covenant of love with Mary, the heartpiece of Schoenstatt's spirituality.

During this talk the boys make Father Kentenich's plan their own, and together with him, sealed the first Schoenstatt covenant of love with the Blessed Mother. Since then they have been known as the founding generation, and the talk as the First Founding Document. The shrine, as the place of the covenant, has since become the home and source of grace for the entire Schoenstatt Movement.

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Program!

Acceleration of the development of our self-sanctification as a means of transforming our chapel into a place of pilgrimage.

1 First of all, I greet you again after quite some time with the beautiful salutation: *Nos cum prole pia benedicat Virgo Maria*. [Virgin Mary, bless us with your holy Child.] It is the first time that these sodality words sound in this place. May they echo and resound for all time to come.

2 It gives joy to father, mother and children to move into a home of their own, even if it is plain and poor in comparison with the magnificent quarters they previously rented. The thought: "This house belongs to us," more than compensates for the loss of all other advantages. We, too, may experience such family joy today. This little chapel belongs to our small sodality family which is guided by our heavenly Mother. It belongs completely to us and only to us. Without envy we leave to others the more beautiful house chapel, our previous lodging. We rejoice and will let no one take this joy from us. Besides joy, a feeling of rightful pride makes our hearts beat faster. For this sanctuary, which has stood more or less neglected, desolate and bare for as long as we can remember, has been—because of us and at our instigation—restored and given to the Mother of God. At least since the time it has been in the possession of the Pallottine Fathers, these walls have never been more beautifully decorated than today. May we see in this joyful fact a good omen for the future

development of our young sodality?

3 Surely! It would be a sublime task, worthy of the diligence and labor of the noblest, if we sodalists could succeed in instilling a burning love of Mary and an ideal striving for virtue in our college such as it has never seen.

4 Why do I express myself so hesitatingly, so reservedly? Have I lost confidence in you? It is true, only the remnants of our flourishing sodality are present¹, but new life will soon spring forth from the ruins. My voucher for that is last year's faithful cooperation on your part, and the genuine Marian spirit which you have acquired. During vacation, many ideals may well have crumbled under the smoke and dust of everyday life; some of the principles which we adopted during the course of the year and which we thought were unshakable may not have stood the test of practical daily life. But one thing remains—of that I'm certain: it is the conviction that to be a genuine sodalist is inseparable from striving for moral and religious greatness according to one's state in life. And we are just as animated today by the will for victory and the attainment of our sodality ideal as we were at the end of the last school year. No, my dear sodalists, I have not lost my trust in you. I know that we, by building on what we have already attained, shall make great progress in this year just as we set out to do in the last.

5 The slow development of the grace of our vocation and the consequent higher degree of our religious apostolic spirit is not, however, the aim which I want to present to you. My challenge goes incomparably higher. Each one of us must achieve the highest conceivable degree of perfection and sanctity according to his state of

¹ In addition to the usual admissions of having fallen short in the sodality strivings chosen for the summer, the "ruins" which the boys faced included the notable absence of many of the older members who had already been drafted into the German army and were serving in the war.

life. Not simply the great and greater, but the greatest heights ought to be the object of our increased efforts. You will understand that I express such an extraordinary challenge only in the form of a humble wish.

6 But if you want to know the reason for this wish, I must tell you of a favorite and [up to now] secret idea of mine.

7 When St. Peter saw the glory of God on Tabor, he called out with delight, "It is good for us to be here. Let us build three tents here" (Mt 17,4). These words come to my mind again and again. And I have often asked myself: Would it not be possible for our little sodality chapel to likewise become for us the Tabor on which the glory of Mary would be revealed? Undoubtedly, we could not accomplish a greater apostolic deed nor leave our successors a more precious legacy than to urge our Lady and Queen to erect her throne here in a special way, to distribute her treasures, and to work miracles of grace. You gather what I am aiming at: I would like to make this place a place of pilgrimage, a place of grace for our house and for the whole German province, and perhaps even further afield. All those who come here to pray shall experience the glory of Mary and confess: "It is good for us to be here. Here we will build our tents, here our favorite place." A bold thought, nearly too bold for the public, but not too bold for you. How often in world history have not small and insignificant beginnings been the source of great and greatest accomplishments? Why could that not also hold true in our case? Whoever knows the history of our sodality will have no trouble believing that Divine Providence has something special in store for it.

8 Even as I speak, my dear sodalists, I feel that I have struck the right note. Your hearts have caught fire. You have made my plan your own. With confidence I place it and its fulfillment into your hands and will not hesitate to enter it into our chronicle. Future generations may then pass their judgment upon us. But, will we reach our goal? As far as it depends on us—and I no longer

pronounce that with uncertainty and doubt, but with complete confidence—none of us, my dear sodalists, will allow anything to be lacking. This sodality chapel will become for us the cradle of our sanctity, just as a chapel of Our Lady in Florence was for our second patron, St. Aloysius. And this sanctity will apply gentle force on our heavenly Mother and draw her down to us.

9 It was more than five centuries ago. In a bloody war the English and the French were tearing each other to pieces. France was already on the point of being annihilated. At the same time, a simple French village girl was wrapped in ardent prayer to the Blessed Mother for the deliverance of her king. Suddenly the Archangel Michael appeared to her and told her: "She whom the great God acknowledges as His Mother has commanded me to come to you and tell you to take up the sword, clothe yourself in armor, and defend the cause of justice. You will deliver the city of Orleans from its enemies and lead the king to Reims for his coronation. A sword is hidden in the ground behind the altar in St. Catherine's Church at Fierbois: let it be brought forth and gird yourself with it."

10 The girl's name was Joan of Arc, known to history as the "Maid of Orleans." Pius X beatified her in May 1909. To me it is as if at this moment, here in the old chapel of St. Michael, Our Lady were speaking to us through the mouth of the holy archangel:

11 Do not worry about the fulfillment of your desire. *Ego diligentes me diligo*. I love those who love me [Prv 8,17]. Prove to me first that you really love me, that you take your resolution seriously.

A

[Ending 1914²] Just now you have the best opportunity to do so.

² Original ending found in Fr. Kentenich's handwritten manuscript which serves as the written documentation of this talk.

According to the plan of Divine Providence, the great European War is meant to be an extraordinary help for you in the work of your self-sanctification. This sanctification I demand of you. It is the armor that you shall put on, the sword with which you shall free your country from its overpowering enemies and place it at the head of the Old World.

B

[Ending 1915³] Just now you have the best opportunity to do so. Do not think that in times like these, when momentous decisions are being made, that it is something extraordinary to increase your striving to the highest degree. According to the plan of Divine Providence, this World War with its mighty incentives is meant to be an extraordinary help for you in the work of your self-sanctification. This sanctification I demand of you. It is the armor that you shall put on, the sword with which you shall free the Kingdom of God from its overpowering enemies. By fulfilling your duties faithfully and conscientiously, earn many merits and place them at my disposal. Then it will please me to dwell in your midst and dispense gifts and graces in abundance.

C

[Ending 1919⁴] Just now you have the best opportunity to do so. Do not think that in times like these, when momentous decisions are being made, that it is something extraordinary to increase your striving beyond that of previous generations, indeed to the highest degree. According to the plan of Divine Providence, this World War

³ Modified ending written into the 1914 manuscript (see A) by Fr. Kentenich in 1915.

⁴ Ending as edited by Fr. Kentenich for the first publication of this talk in the "MTA Magazine" (Vol. IV, p. 59-61), June 15, 1919. This is the most quoted ending and was generally used by Fr. Kentenich in his work as founder as the definitive text.

with its mighty incentives is meant to be an extraordinary help for you in the work of your self-sanctification. This sanctification I demand of you. It is the armor that you shall put on, the sword with which you shall do battle for your desires. Diligently bring me contributions to the capital of grace. By fulfilling your duties faithfully and conscientiously and through an ardent life of prayer, earn many merits and place them at my disposal. Then it will please me to dwell in your midst and dispense gifts and graces in abundance. Then from here I will draw youthful hearts to myself, and I will educate them to become useful instruments in my hand.