

Fr. Joseph Kentenich

The Founding Document

Talk of October 18, 1914

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p. 97-103

The Setting of the Talk

The first Sunday after classes began was a sunny October 18, 1914. This was the day that the sodality gathered for its first meeting in the refurbished chapel of St. Michael.⁴⁸ It was five o'clock in the afternoon and it is estimated that just over 50 boys took part in the historic event: 14 were from the sodalists inducted in April and 40 others were younger candidates due to be accepted in December.⁴⁹ There must have been great anticipation over what the spiritual director would say. There was the war to consider, or might he proclaim a program of action for their life in confined quarters? And the place – the chapel – certainly he would speak about their new home!

Father Kentenich had prepared himself with a great deal of prayer. He sensed that God was asking something extraordinary of this moment and these young men. There is evidence that he was already drafting this talk in late August, still uncertain about when the school year would begin.⁵⁰ He tried to find the right tone to present a “bold thought, nearly too bold for the public, but not too bold for you.” And he learned his words by heart, so that when they were presented, they would be clear and to the point.⁵¹

His words of October 18 were divided into two main parts. In the *second* he considered what God was saying through the war. He described it as a “retreat” in deathly earnest conducted by a God seeking to restore the long disintegrating relationship between himself and modern man, a relationship badly weakened by man’s increasing arrogance as “master of the earth.” He further noted that this sin behind the war is the one “against which we declare war as priests” with the weapons of “penance, self-discipline, self-control: self-sanctification.”⁵² (Some excerpts of this part are found on page 102.)

But it was on the *first part* that everything depended. It was the *keynote*, proposing a daring new plan, a plan now known as Schoenstatt’s *Founding Document*, words chosen to transform of the little chapel in Schoenstatt into a Marian Shrine and place of pilgrimage and destined to give birth to a new movement for the Church. Such is its importance that we best let it speak for itself:

First Part: THE FOUNDING DOCUMENT
(complete)⁵³

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 which 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 it has been in the possession of the Pallottine Fathers these walls have not 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 present, 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 of 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 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 then not be possible that our little sodality chapel become for us, at the same time, 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 want to 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 should 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 at the point of annihilation. 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 1909.⁵⁴ 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:⁵⁵

11 Do not worry about the fulfillment of your desire. *Ego diligentes me diligo*. I love those who love me [Prv 8,17].⁵⁶ Prove to me first that you really love me, that you take your resolution seriously.⁵⁷

[A. Original text in the handwritten manuscript:]¹

Just now you have the best opportunity to do so. According to the plan of Divine Providence, the great European War⁵⁸ 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. Modifications written into the handwritten manuscript:]

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 if you 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 God⁵⁹ from its overpowering enemies. By fulfilling your duties faithfully and conscientiously, earn many merits and place them at my disposal.⁶⁰ Then it will please me to dwell in your midst and distribute gifts and graces in abundance.

¹ The Founding Document has three endings. All three variations come from Father Kentenich and are regarded as official, though the Ending C (1919) is the one most often quoted, including by Father Kentenich.

[C. As first published in the “MTA” magazine, Vol. IV, p. 59-61, June 15, 1919:]

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 if you increase your striving beyond that of previous generations, indeed 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 do battle for your desires. Diligently bring me contributions to the capital of grace. By fulfilling your duties faithfully and conscientiously and by praying fervently, earn many merits and place them at my disposal. Then it will please me to dwell in your midst and distribute 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.

Second Part: THE CHALLENGE OF THE WAR²
(excerpts)⁶¹

My dear Sodalists, you now see the profound meaning of the current war for the future of our sodality and our chapel. Everything depends on us living the perfection of our state in life. For this the war serves as

1. an extraordinary catalyst,
2. a truly worthy object of our initiative.

We want to take these two thoughts and look at them more closely.

I. “The seriousness of our times,” as I recently found in the newspaper, “is made of iron, like the sword our warriors carry.” Now is, therefore, the great hour which we must thank God for

² This part immediately followed Ending A of the Founding Document, but is not considered part of the Founding Document.

and make use of... If we succeed in extracting from this time of crisis the great spiritual gain which it can bring us, it will become a true time of grace and God. But if we let this great and decisive moment pass us by unused, no such useful opportunity will come our way in the foreseeable future....

The war is a powerful mission or – in our language – an urgent retreat course. The success of this retreat must be all the greater since the retreat master is the infinite God himself, the one who knows best the human heart. The form in which he speaks to us is not words, but mighty actions, a drama of high suspense, in which we all play one role or another....

In his inmost being man is totally dependent on God. But the higher that modern man builds the tower of his culture, the blinder to God he becomes. Now is the time when the Almighty descends from heaven in fury to reassert his sovereign rights. He shows himself in terrible majesty to the nations quaking with fear. From the thunder and lightning of the cannons, from the shaking of the earth his voice is heard as once amid nature’s storm on Sinai: “I am the Lord, your God! You shall have no other gods beside me” (Ex 20,2f).

“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3,10). As a great man said, who later became a saint: “Lord God, teach me to know you, teach me to know myself.” Lord God, [through the challenges of the times] teach me to know you and know myself! This very knowledge will also make our striving for sanctity wonderfully fruitful.

II. But this does not exhaust the advantages which this war has for us in the plans of Divine Providence.... We want to contribute something to the well-being of our fatherland....

The weapon, the sword with which we want to help our country achieve victory is serious, austere penance, self-discipline and self-denial: self-sanctification.

Everything in us which does not belong to God – all ungodly inclinations and passions, pride, sensuality, greed, whining – these are our false gods....

How shall we shape all this? We must plant the cross on the new challenges of the times.