

Fr. Joseph Kentenich

Letters to Joseph Fischer

Excerpts from the

unpublished correspondence of 1914-17

translated by Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, 2006

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About Joseph Fischer

Joseph Fischer (1894-1955) was born on November 25, 1894 in the village of Kiechlingsbergen near Endingen in Breisgau, part of the diocese of Freiburg in southwest Germany. He was the fourth child of a farming family.

In the Fall of 1908 he joined the Pallottine minor seminary in Schoenstatt. He completed his internal high school diploma there on July 12, 1914. During his senior year he was an instrumental part in the founding of the school's Marian Sodality (April 19, 1914) and was elected its first prefect¹.

The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 meant that after a brief time in the Pallottine novitiate in Limburg he had to join the army, where he served from November 25, 1914 until November 25, 1918. During the war he often wrestled with his call to the Pallottines and in early 1919 he discerned a call to the diocesan priesthood instead. He went on to be ordained a priest of the diocese of Freiburg on June 18, 1922 and served as a priest in Hechingen/Hohenzollern (1923-26), Mannheim (1926-31), and Weingarten near Offenburg starting in 1931, where he became pastor in 1933. He served the rest of his life in Weingarten and died there on September 16, 1955.

Fr. Kentenich, who became spiritual director in Schoenstatt in October 1912, had a profound influence on Joseph Fischer, and Fischer remained a lifelong member of the Schoenstatt Movement. Fr. Kentenich always held this former student in high esteem, most often starting his letters to Fischer as "My dear Prefect" even though he had long relinquished the post. Certainly a good portion of the respect was the courage and perseverance which Fischer showed in the founding process of the Sodality. It is interesting that Fr. Kentenich always addressed Joseph Fischer with the formal *Sie* form of "you," even though he addressed many of the other students with the informal "Du."

The letters that follow are a testimony to the close relationship between spiritual father and spiritual son and shed much light on both the external circumstances of the time and the person of Fr. Kentenich at this crucial time in his life.

Fr. Jonathan Niehaus

¹ See Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, *New Vision and Life: The Founding of Schoenstatt* (2nd edition: Waukesha, 2004), p. 73-81.

1914

Letter to Joseph Fischer, August 14, 1914

N.c.P.p.b.V.M.²

Postmark:
Vallendar, 15. 8. 1914

My dear Prefect!

Tomorrow is the Assumption of Mary – the day set aside for our General Communion. Will all the sodalists be able to complete their resolution? Konder³ is serving at the fortress at Ehrenbreitstein, as a volunteer. And the others? Nothing is known about them yet⁴. Be that as it may and regardless of what comes: I am extremely consoled, calmed, and encouraged by the thought that Mary is our Queen and Leader in battle. I commend all our sodalists to her several times each day. She will help us that all those *who truly have a vocation* will pass the difficult test of their firmness of character in the present extraordinary hardships! How good that we founded the Sodality! This way the individuals have something more to support them. I have no doubt that *you* have remained faithful to the genuine sodality attitude. Your kind letter reconvinced me of that; I thank you sincerely for it.

Our house here in Vallendar, in Ehrenbreitstein, and in Limburg has become a field hospital. Fr. Provincial⁵ offered all our Fathers to

² *Nos cum Prole pia / benedicat Virgo Maria* (Virgin Mary, bless us with your holy Child), popular greeting used in the Marian Sodality organization of the early 20th century. See *New Vision and Life*, p. 193.

³ Johann Konder (b. 1895, Saarbrücken)

⁴ Because of the outbreak of World War I on August 1, the students under Fr. Kentenich's care are all either at home on vacation or (especially the older ones, like Fischer) already in military service. At this point Fr. Kentenich must have only heard from two of those of military age (Konder and Fischer), no doubt intensifying his prayer for the well-being of all the rest.

⁵ Fr. Michael Kolb (1873-1950).

the government⁶. For now I am remaining here. Otherwise there is nothing new to report. Write again soon.

Many greetings to Vogel⁷, to your parents and brothers and sisters, and especially to you

with sincere love
J. Kentenich, P.S.M.⁸

Letter to Joseph Fischer, September 8, 1914

N.c.P.p.
b.V.M.

Vallendar, 8. IX. 1914

My dear young friend and Prefect!

I feel compelled to answer your letter today, on the feast of Mary's Birth.

You make fun of my inclination "to really like to write letters." If you could see all the letters and cards which I wrote during this vacation, you would really be amazed. I don't think I wrote so much in the course of two school years as I did in this short time. Be that as it may! Mail is the only way to stay in touch with our boys, especially our soldiers. So, contritely beat your breast!

I am happy that you have continued to develop in the spiritual direction you have taken. Naturally I would have only expected this, and nothing else. Great times always produce great men, you write. Very correct! What can prevent you from becoming one of the great? Since the outbreak of the war I have thought a lot of Sodom and Gomorrah, of the cities which God wanted to spare for the sake of a few who were righteous. You can continue this thought for yourself in how it can be applied to our current circumstances and on *our* task. I think that if we try to be, become, or remain righteous and perfect

⁶ For use as chaplains in the war. Fortunately, the German government did not take him up on this offer.

⁷ Karl Vogel (b. 1898, like Fischer from Kiechlingsbergen).

⁸ "Pious Society of Missions," the canonical name of the Pallottines until 1947, when Pallotti's original name (Society of Catholic Apostolate) was restored.

according to our state in life, then we are doing the most we can for a happy conclusion of the world war. Surely Coassini⁹ would think and act exactly in this vein!

That you are haunted by the anxious fear for whether you will reach your goal¹⁰ is something I fully understand and can feel with you. I am personally free of this fear, however, both for you and for all of our students – to the extent that they have a *divine vocation*. Backed up by more than a little experience – of which you are also a part – I hold unshakeably fast to the words *Diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum*¹¹. As a result all of my prayers are that our heavenly Mother and patroness will hold all of you tight to herself, and keep you well and in God's love and grace.

We can be quite satisfied in this regard, too, so far, as I can see from the letters you have sent... You did not work in vain therefore when you placed your strength at the disposal of the Sodality. In return you will also experience a special protection from Our Lady.

It is possible that you will be called up to arms by the end of September. At least the recruits from here must brace for this, as Hafeneth¹² tells me.

Hafeneth – stationed in the Ehrenbreitstein fortress – is holding firm. While others have their fun at night in the casino, he quietly prays the rosary outside. By being *consistent* and tactful he is gradually winning the respect of those with other opinions about dirty language (women, drinking...). With dedication and diligence he has acquired the respect of his officers.

⁹ Giovanni Battista Coassini (1887-1912), young Italian priest whose biography had been used by Fr. Kentenich with the boys to promote the ideals of sanctity.

¹⁰ To be a priest and Pallottine Father.

¹¹ "For those who *love* God, *all things* work together unto *good*" (Rom 8,28, emphasis added by Fr. Kentenich).

¹² Franz Hafeneth (1890-1965?), native of Aachen-Burtscheid, the oldest student during his studies in Schoenstatt and a key figure in the External Organization, 1916-19. Fr. Kentenich is giving Joseph Fischer an update on other sodalists, all from the original group that made their consecration on April 19, 1914, and of which Fischer was the prefect.

Konder – infantry volunteer – is already approaching the end of his training in Bendorf. In three weeks he hopes to be used for communications behind the lines. He seems to have found a good friend. Last Sunday they both went to Communion. In addition to you and Salzhuber¹³ these have also been called up to the *infantry* (but not yet in training): Eisenbarth¹⁴, Kaufmann¹⁵, Theele¹⁶, Heinrich¹⁷; to the *navy*: Zeitz¹⁸; to the *artillery*: Keil¹⁹. Krämer²⁰ also wants to volunteer for the artillery. Ott²¹ has become sacristan in his home parish. Schoenleber²² wants to help here in Schoenstatt in the field hospital²³.

That is enough for today. How things are here and in Limburg, and what is new with the Fathers, seminarians, and Brothers, will wait for a later date.

In the meantime friendly greetings to your parents and to Vogel. Have you already initiated and informed the latter...?

With sincere love and sodality greeting

J. Kentenich, P.S.M.

¹³ Franz Xaver Salzhuber (1894-1925), born in Ransbach.

¹⁴ Otto Eisenbarth (b. 1896 in Arzheim).

¹⁵ Bernhard Kaufmann (1898-1915), born in Beberstedt. He would become the first Schoenstatt sodalist killed in the war.

¹⁶ Norbert Theele (b. 1893 in Halle).

¹⁷ Sebastian Heinrich (1893-1915), born in Niederumelsdorf. He would become the second Schoenstatt sodalist killed in the war.

¹⁸ Wilhelm Zeitz (b. 1896 in Niederberg).

¹⁹ August Keil (b. 1894 in Bruchhausen).

²⁰ Franz Krämer (b. 1897 in Würzburg).

²¹ Julius Ott (1896-1916), born in Wiesbaden.

²² Karl Schönleber (b. 1895 in Frankfurt).

²³ Namely the house of studies which had been transformed into a military hospital for the war.

1915

Letter to Joseph Fischer, February 9, 1915

N.c.P.p.
b.V.M.

Vallendar, 9. II. 1915

My dear Prefect!

I see that my letters *did* reach you. I'm glad. It seems that for now you are still out of danger to your life. I'm glad about that too. But what makes me most happy is that you have remained faithful to your principles and ideals in spite of the difficult and mundane circumstances. This makes me all the happier to fulfill your wish and diligently and constantly tug at the sleeve of our dear heavenly Mother until she – if for no other reason than to be rid of me as a pest – hears your and my prayer.

When in spite of the difficult circumstances of our time she brings you with your [noble] attitude to your goal¹ – which I confidently hope – then you can be convinced that you will become someone who makes a difference, perhaps even what you strived for last year when you jokingly suggested that the Eucharistic Section wait with choosing its patron saint until you were so far...² Your striving in this regard most certainly does not need to wait until the war is over. You recall the life story of Fr. Doss³ and the teaching he gave his young typesetter... [Remember the] good intention...

What you write in the second part of your kind letter was not new to me. And the way that I judge the whole question will not be new

¹ To be a priest and Pallottine Father.

² A humorous moment in the context of June 1914 (see *New Vision and Life*, p. 88) when the desire to become saints overcame many of those in the Marian Sodality, including their prefect, Joseph Fischer.

³ Fr. Adolf von Doss (1825-1886), German Jesuit, author, and advocate of Catholic youth. His life story was among those which Fr. Kentenich included in his instructions to the boys at the minor seminary.

to you either. The solution for the problem of a double-Sodality⁴, etc., etc. is not difficult for someone who knows the entire organism. Without going into details, I want to remind you of my conviction that our Marian Sodality has providential significance. This significance may reach far beyond the walls of our school. At least it seems that way to me. Perhaps you had the opportunity in the novitiate to become familiar with the history of our society⁵ – not only of the German province. Since the death of our venerable founder⁶ things came to a complete stop for decades. Why? You can study the whole development later, but then you will see our strivings here in a new light. “*Erit societas haec benedicta a Deo, et hoc dico non tantum cum fiducia sed cum certitudine*” is what our venerable founder once said⁷. Contrary to all human expectations his word has come true. Are we not also a special bearer of this blessing? Then we, like Pallotti, must also make the Madonna, “who will work miracles⁸” the patron of our interior life...

I intentionally express all of that in dark terms. But now lift up your head again and courageously continue. We are used to difficulties. I could present you with a choice selection [of what we are going through right now]. From that you can conclude that our Sodality is doing well.

(....)

With my priestly blessing and Sodality greetings

with sincere love,
J. Kentenich, P.S.M.

⁴ Half in the Schoenstatt seminary and half in the military.

⁵ The “Pious Society of Missions” or Pallottines.

⁶ St. Vincent Pallotti (1795-1850), canonized in 1963.

⁷ Shortly before his death in January 1850, St. Vincent Pallotti made the following statement: “This society will be blessed by God, and I say this not only with confidence, but with certitude.”

⁸ An allusion to the famous saying of St. Vincent Pallotti about Mary: “She is the Great Missionary, she will work miracles!” See note on p. 14 of J. Kentenich, *Mary, Our Mother and Educator* (Waukesha, 1987) and p. 19, 33, 72.

Letter to Joseph Fischer, probably April 1915

N.c.P.p.
b.V.M.

Vallendar

My dear Prefect!

I don't want to write much today. Otherwise you would get too much mail.

I am glad to hear that my letters finally reached you. As you know so well, since starting my work with the Sodality, Mary has rarely, if ever, left my prayers unanswered. In response to your complaint about receiving no letters from me, on several occasions I asked my heavenly Mother to make sure my most recent letters would arrive – and now they have reached you.

I gladly send the enclosed head-guard⁹ to you, dearest child of Our Lady. Please return it once the war is over. How is the food? The laundry? I will try to take care of the things you asked for as I am able.

But more than that, I am interested in your soul. When I heard about the dangers you faced, I gave heartfelt thanks to our Queen that she protected you and prayed sincerely that she will continue to protect you. And I envied you. When dangers overcome someone with *a religious heart*¹⁰ they cannot help but leave deep furrows in the life of the soul. Add to this the seeds of your deep, fervent, practical love of Mary! Just think of when these seeds sprout...! I truly envy you! It would almost seem that our “interceding omnipotence”¹¹ [the MTA] wants to apply all the force she can to shape you after your chosen ideal. Although I recently reminded you of this already, I feel

⁹ Some item of personal gear. Fr. Kentenich was interested in the personal well-being of his boys.

¹⁰ German: *ein religiöses Gemüt*.

¹¹ Latin: *Omnipotentia supplex*, a title used (among other places at the Shrine of Our Lady of Pompeii) to describe Mary's powerful intercession with God. See *Mary, Our Mother and Educator*, p. 90, and Pope John Paul II, homily during his visit to Pompeii, October 21, 1979, in *This is Your Mother* (Athlone, Ireland, 1981), p. 112f.

compelled to do so again.

*Sanctus est qui sancte agit!*¹² Holiness requires action! It goes without saying that I trust that you will use everything that happens in this spirit as part of your plan to grow in holiness.

By doing this you do a great service for those of us back here¹³. As children of one great family of Mary, each of our deeds has an effect on all the others. All the good that we do here – and it is no small amount – comes to your aid. And vice versa: Every one of your moral and religious trials and triumphs are endured and won for us. I therefore confidently hope that this May will lead to a great and *permanent* advance in the love of Mary in us all – present and absent sodalists alike. We work, pray, and sacrifice in this sense for you, and you – of course?! – for us.

How are things going with regard to a field chaplain? Is there one nearby? Perhaps you will have the chance now and then to help the dying pray the *act of perfect contrition* and perfect surrender to the will of God. A plenary indulgence is connected with the latter. One can already pray it in times of good health (after Holy Communion), but the indulgence is only received in the hour of death.

Formula: My Lord and my God, already now I accept from your hands, willingly and calmly, the death ordained for me however it happens according to your will, with all its fear, pain, and suffering.

You can also use it yourself. I am sending you some scapular medals, too. According to the new regulations, it is enough for the soldiers to receive them (they are already consecrated) *in order to be received into the [benefits of the] five-way scapular*. After that it is requested that the names of those received be sent to me. To the medals are also attached the indulgence in the hour of death, i.e. whoever *possesses* one or for whom one is used (in the hour of death), gains a plenary indulgence in the hour of death, if he devoutly commends his soul to God and is ready to accept death as submission to the will of God. If one is not able to go to confession or receive communion, it is enough to contritely speak out loud the name of

¹² Quote from St. Vincent Pallotti: Holy is he whose actions are holy.

¹³ At the Schoenstatt seminary.

Jesus, or barring that, to speak it in one's heart. In practical terms: teach others or at least the dying to pray: "Jesus, I am gladly ready to accept everything, even death, if your heavenly Father has so ordained." Or in a similar manner. If the dying are not able to repeat the words you speak, they only need to listen.

All of this is if the worst comes to pass. Keil tells me he has had the chance to assist the dying. The main thing is always: *perfect contrition* – for you too! Every night!

Now it is time to finish this letter!

With sincere love, heartfelt Sodality greetings and my priestly blessing,

J. Kentenich

Letter to Joseph Fischer, April 30, 1915

N.c.P.p.

Vallendar, 30.IV.1915

b.V.M.

My dear Prefect!

I just gave Fr. Rector [Wagner] a letter to be sent to Wallbrunn¹⁴ and Heinrich – and received your kind letter in return. The envelope is marked, "Delayed for military reasons." There is the answer to my question. I thought as much when nothing came from you for such a long time. You must have become impatient as well. Hopefully this letter will not suffer a military delay.

Your letter is dated Low Sunday¹⁵. Yes, we had a beautiful celebration that day. I was warmed by the sight of the candidates – about 20 – who stepped forward one by one, placed their hand on the banner, and solemnly declared: Yes, this is the banner I have chosen,

¹⁴ Franz Wallbrunn (born in Nuremberg).

¹⁵ The Octave Day of Easter (in 1915 it fell on April 11). This was the liturgical first anniversary of the founding of the Marian Sodality at the Schoenstatt Seminary. In 1915 the date was marked with the consecration of the next group of candidates, who were solemnly admitted to the *Congregatio Minor*, or Junior Sodality. Among them were Joseph Engling (see *New Vision and Life*, p. 167).

I will not abandon it; I swear it to Mary. The chapel gathering was followed by an academy which was most uplifting. Keil spoke on behalf of the absent sodalists, Kastner¹⁶ as candidate, Müller¹⁷ as representative of the *Congregatio Maior*¹⁸. In short: your Sodality continues to flourish and prosper to the glory of our heavenly Mother. Our chapel is also looking more and more worthy of its dignity. Just before the beginning of May, we received a beautiful altar picture from Father Huggle (Madonna with Child¹⁹). Here in the chapel we want to implore a truly special blessing from Mary for all loyal sodalists. This shall be one of the tasks we want to work on during this month of May. I am certain that our prayer will be heard.

And you? What are you doing to honor Our Lady in her month of May? Draw still closer and to her and love her more tenderly; entrust to her your *health, life and death, body and soul*. This month we want to meet often at Mary's throne.

(...)

Enough for today. Might you still have a wish that can be fulfilled? Until next time – with heartfelt Sodality greetings and my priestly blessing – with sincere love – J. Kentenich

¹⁶ Ferdinand Kastner (b. 1896 in Tassau, Silesia)

¹⁷ Wilhelm Müller (b. 1896 in Kanstein)

¹⁸ The Senior Sodality.

¹⁹ The picture now known as the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt. See *New Vision and Life*, p. 112-114.

Letter to Joseph Fischer, May 12, 1915

N.c.P.p.
b.V.M.

Vallendar, 12 May 1915

My dear Prefect!

Thank you so much for your last two letters. I think I have now received all of them, including those you recently thought were lost. Let us both give heartfelt thanks to God, to him and to our heavenly Mother for the special protection they have bestowed on you thus far. I can feel with you how, under such circumstances, your love for Mary must grow and prosper. If only you could give a talk on this to our sodalists. But in this regard, too, the progress we have made is so obvious that you would scarcely recognize us any more²⁰.

Now you find *my* position desirable. So your perspectives have changed a little! Should we change places? To the extent my physical strength permits, I would gladly do so. Who knows if I might not soon be called to military service, too. School ends the middle of July. Then I joyfully stand at the disposition of the state. For quite some time now [new recruits] are not being accepted as field chaplains. Otherwise I would come to you – and you would have to be

²⁰ In a letter written the same day to another sodalist (probably Ferdinand Kastner), Fr. Kantenich described some of the outward change going on at the time (Ferdinand Kastner (ed.), *Unter dem Schutze Mariens* (1940), p. 336): “In the short time that you have been away, our little chapel has taken on quite a different look. St. Michael has had to give way to a beautiful picture of Our Lady (Madonna and Child) – a gift from Rev. Fr. Huggle. He [St. Michael] has been given a pedestal on the gospel side up front in the sanctuary. He is enthroned there as guardian of the Blessed Sacrament. The wide sanctuary arch sports a fine embroidered work: *Ave Maria*. Brother Franz worked on it in his free time for 1½ years. The woodworker who framed it for us (for 17.50 Marks) estimated its worth at 300-400 Marks. That may be a bit exaggerated. But we are pleased with our chapel and feel more at home there than ever. You should feel equally at home. You, of course, receive a high rate of interest on the capital of grace which we are gathering here this May – provided that you contribute something to the capital on your part. You understand...”

my aide. Fine illusions! We want to take the situations as they come.

And for you right now they include your fear of getting bogged down. Slow down a little! I know my prefect much too well for that. Nonetheless, I will share with you some of the thoughts that you requested – in part out of my own need.

You sign your name with *specialiter Mariae mancipatus*. This expression is found in Gregory XIII’s first letter of confirmation²¹. The words express your attitude quite accurately. In Latin, *mancipatus* denotes the most perfect form of being a servant. It wishes to say that a person (especially a slave) or an object, “has gone over into someone’s formal, irrevocable, permanent juridical possession.” And now add to that: *specialiter mancipatus*... [I am not only her servant in a perfect way, but also in a *special* way.] In other words it sums up in short form the little prayer, “My Queen, my Mother...” which in turn captures the essence of the long consecration formula which is found in our Sodality Manual and was composed by St. Francis de Sales²². There we read, “*Eligo te hodie in Dominam, Advocatam, Matrem*” [I choose you this day to be my Queen, Advocate, and Mother].

Genuine love of Mary thus meditates on Mary’s dignity (*Dominana*²³), power (*Advocata*²⁴), and motherly love (*Mater*²⁵). This evokes in us a threefold act: reverence (corresponding to her dignity), trust (corresponding to her power), and love (corresponding to her motherly love). All three acts must be together if love of Mary is to bear in us the attributed fruits. I demonstrated this at last Sunday’s meeting in the context of the virtue of our state in life – holy purity. One’s

²¹ Pope Gregory XIII (1502-1585), reigned 1572-85. In 1584 he gave papal approval to the Marian Sodality with his bull *Omnipotentis Dei*. The expression *specialiter mancipatus Mariae* (Mary’s special servant, or, Mary’s very own), was in circulation in the Schoenstatt Sodality and, for instance, became part of the personal ideal of Joseph Engling (1898-1918).

²² For the text of the long and the short form of the Sodality consecration, see *New Vision and Life*, p. 78.

²³ Latin: Queen.

²⁴ Latin: Advocate.

²⁵ Latin: Mother.

Marian devotion will be greater or less depending on the degree of the three acts. The mixture of the three acts (in one, more reverence, in another, more trust or love) will vary from person to person and determine its individual flavor. Here are a few thoughts from the talk:

I. Reverence for her dignity. Her dignity includes, among other privileges, her most immaculate purity, even freedom from concupiscence. Hence the *ideal of purity*. Does this really help us children of dust, who suffer so much from the life of the lower drives? Yes.

a) Only an absolutely pure ideal can create *uncompromising clarity* (the lower drives like much too much to enter into negotiations and compromises; the *Zeitgeist*²⁶ resists, in part consciously, in part unconsciously, any notion of moral absolutes). There is therefore a great danger that false concepts will be created about the essence and content of purity... No other saint can create such clarity through her example, because no other saint was absolutely pure. Of course, we shall never reach the ideal. This impresses upon us all the more the necessity of constant self-denial.

b) A cold law can also give the intellect clarity, but it does not *enthuse the heart or ignite the will*. Only the vision of an ideal can do this. The higher it is, the more our higher faculties are attracted, even the lower appetites, which are unimpressed by little demands.

True Marian devotion therefore includes reverence for Mary – for her dignity and therefore for her immaculate purity. Here is where the resolution of a difficult problem begins to happen: the relationship with the opposite sex. In God's plan, the magnetic attraction between man and woman is supposed to ennoble both. But as a result of our corrupted nature the ennobling aspect is too often pushed aside; what remains is the animal life of the drives, is sin... *We must, on the one hand*, be protected from such dangers, and *on the other hand* acquire the ennobling features of this relationship (motherliness). Both happen through Marian devotion. Reverence for Mary becomes reverence for all the members of her sex. It is therefore a protection!

²⁶ The negative spirit of the times.

Mary, too, is a woman, the most noble of all... We, too, will be ennobled by constant contact with her!

This also solves the problem: Why don't we have a male patron saint? 1. Because none are as immaculately pure. 2. Because Mary as a woman is a protection for us and a completion of the harmony of our character (other reasons don't belong here)...

[Sceptics will say] Mary may be able to teach and accompany us *for a time*. But in the long run? She towers much too high above us as a *super-human* being. The *struggling* will not feel understood, the *fallen* will be discouraged by her unapproachable greatness and purity. But Mary is

II. our *powerful* (III.) *Mother*. What does this mean in this context... Understanding... Love... The struggling can tell her whatever is troubling them; her eyes and blessing and helping hands accompany them. And the fallen? A mother never gives up on her child; on the contrary, precisely the poorest and weakest child stirs all her motherly love...

When you grasp the ramifications of these thoughts, you will have much to talk about.

I will soon be sending *Our Banner*²⁷ and the book you requested.

With heartfelt Sodality greetings and my priestly blessing with sincere love,

J. Kentenich, P.S.M.

P.S. Kaufmann²⁸ was killed in battle in Ypres.

²⁷ *Unsere Fahne*, one of the prominent magazines of the Marian Sodality with circulation throughout German-speaking Europe, published in Vienna.

²⁸ The first Schoenstatt sodalist to die (April 23, 1915) in the war.

Letter to Joseph Fischer, June 26, 1915

N.c.P.p.
b.V.M.

Vallendar, 26. VI. 1915

My dear Prefect!

Your long awaited letter, dated the 15th, was delivered to me today, the 26th. For what reason? Once more the envelope was marked: military delay. Might you already be in the trenches?

Regardless, I firmly trust that our dear heavenly Mother will take all our sodalists who have a true vocation and lead them to their goal even when it seems impossible. *Mater ter admirabilis* – we have given her²⁹ the name Mother Thrice Admirable. In the future this will be the title under which we venerate her in our Sodality chapel. For she has, without any doubt, shown herself [1] admirable³⁰ to our soldier sodalists, not least of all to you; [2] admirable to those of us left behind³¹ (“God’s blessing plainly rests on your sodality. May it continue to grow.” This is what the editor of *Our Banner* wrote me the day before yesterday. Recall the words of our venerable founder, which I wrote to you at the beginning of the war: *Erit societas haec benedicta a Deo, et hoc dico non tantum cum fiducia, sed cum certitudine*³². Our Marian Sodality, as I told you back then, will receive this blessing in a special way. Was I not correct? *Mater ter admirabilis*); and [3] she will show herself admirable to and in our sodalists during the long vacation³³. In the future our battle cry will be: *Mater*

²⁹ That is, the image of Mary in the Shrine.

³⁰ German: *wunderbar*. The German word also resonates with the meanings: remarkable, wonderful, even miraculous.

³¹ The sodalists still at the Schoenstatt seminary, and therefore not in the military.

³² See note on letter of February 9, 1915.

³³ Summer vacation (mid-July to mid-September), during which the students returned home. It was viewed by the sodalists as a particularly important time to test the genuineness of their vocation by living their Catholic faith and ideals outside of the regimen of the boarding school in Schoenstatt.

ter admirabilis, ora pro nobis!

Konder has sent us a beautiful statue of the Sacred Heart. At the base there is a lovely frame on which we have written: “Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, bless and protect Your dear fellow sodalists³⁴ during vacation and on the battlefields of 1914-15.” As the first child of Mary, Our Lord is the first and best sodalist – our fellow sodalist. In the future a Holy Mass will be said every Saturday before the *Mater ter admirabilis* for the intentions of our sodalists and for all the intentions that have been entrusted to their care. Since we will not be able to serve at the court of our Mother Thrice Admirable during vacation, a burning candle shall do it for us. Are you satisfied? One more thing. During these days a soldier donated 200 Marks for our chapel. We will probably also be given stones to use for the floor³⁵. Isn’t it true: *Mater ter admirabilis!* Just think: all of that during the war!

You are amazed at the development of our Sodality as is recorded in the annual report. That isn’t the half of it. For understandable reasons it was written as soberly and briefly as possible – and in spite of that Fr. Boejle still published the whole thing, even adding the title halfway through the text: The Student Sodality in the Pallottine Mission House at Schoenstatt (Vallendar, Rhineland). But if I would someday want to unpack [what I know as] spiritual director regarding 5 or 6 of our students³⁶..., then, yes then, you would understand the title *Mater ter admirabilis*.

You regret having missed the one-year promotion. That does not seem so dangerous to me. I think that the newly baked lieutenants are primarily used to lead the charge. I would much rather that you remain a lower rank and reach the goal, than be mowed down in a lieutenant’s uniform. Our *Mater ter admirabilis* is weaving the

³⁴ German: *Mitsodalen*.

³⁵ The stone floor could was not installed right away, but perhaps in 1916. See Heinrich Hug, *[Welt]Geschichte eines Heiligtums* (Vallendar-Schoenstatt, 2003), p. 84.

³⁶ Fr. Kentenich is alluding to the heights of spiritual growth being attained by some of the Schoenstatt sodalists. Later on, three of those who died in the war would especially come into the spotlight: Max Brunner, Hans Wormer, and Joseph Engling. For short biographical sketches, see *New Vision and Life*, p. 166-176.

threads of your future with tender motherly hands.

With sincere love, heartfelt Sodality greetings and my priestly blessing,

J. Kentenich, P.S.M.

Letter to Joseph Fischer, July 17, 1915

N.c.P.p.b.V.M.

Dernbach³⁷, 17.VII.1915

My dear Prefect!

You longingly desire a letter. I hope that your wish has been fulfilled in the meantime. For immediately after you reported about your “promotion” I wrote you.

At the moment I am here in convalescence. Since my last illness I have lost 26 pounds and must look horribly bad. Now our heavenly Mother, in whose service I have spent my strength, will certainly take care just as she has taken care of you in much more difficult circumstances.

Our boys are now scattered in every region under the sun. It is a great consolation to me that in Mary I have given you to an educator who always remains with you. You may still hear a thing or two about the fruits of this education.

Before the end of the school year, Lieutenant Wallbrunn was with us and donated 20 Marks. Just think: the bills of our Sodality are about 250 Marks. But in spite of this there is some left over. If it is God’s will, we want to have the floor of the Shrine done [in stone] so that at their return our Sodalists will find a lovely, inviting home waiting for them. Have you already heard about Heinrich? A letter written to him was returned with the annotation “Died a hero’s death” on envelope. But the letter had been sent to his old address on the Western Front, while Heinrich has long been on the Eastern Front,

³⁷ Fr. Kentenich spent all of July and August in St. Joseph’s Hospital in Dernbach in the Westerwald region east of Schoenstatt. He was recovering from another severe lapse in his poor health.

from where he recently sent us 9 Marks. So there is a well-founded hope that some mix-up has taken place³⁸.

Theele considers his [Sodality] medal an “Iron Cross.” When Zeitz looks at his medal he is transported to earlier times and receives new inspiration. He seems to be holding firm. Hafeneth is done with his furlough and will probably be sent to Aachen. And what else? Perhaps a wish? Might you not have more opportunity to be apostolic at your new post? I would be glad to send you all kinds of material.

In addition, take the enclosed booklet as a letter from me and your heavenly Mother. You will understand that in the next weeks I must be sparing with my letter writing, on the one hand out of regard for my health, on the other hand – think of the many sodalists on vacation who do not want to be treated like step-children. But you can write me all the more.

With heartfelt Sodality greetings, with sincere love and my priestly blessings,

J. Kentenich, P.S.M.

Letter to Joseph Fischer, August 2, 1915

N.c.P.p.b.V.M.

D.³⁹, 2 Aug. 15

My dear Prefect!

Heartfelt thanks for the holy card. To make sure something like a true saint is the end result, a few hurried lines.

The dangers are increasing around you. If you want to swim against the stream with still more success in the future, you must have strong arms and muscles. Hence – especially since you have the time – strive more deeply for the realization of our sodality ideals: Marian

³⁸ In spite of the delay in communication, there was no mix-up. Sebastian Heinrich was killed in action on the Eastern Front (in Galicia) on June 20, 1915. He was the second Schoenstatt sodalist to die in the war.

³⁹ Dernbach.

devotion, self-sanctification, apostolic activity. May I gently ask what you are doing on these points?

I would also be interested in knowing about your experiences. I will soon send you a true holy card: the Mother Thrice Admirable.

With heartfelt sodality greeting and my priestly blessing,
with sincere love,

J. Kentenich

Letter to Joseph Fischer, August 12, 1915

Cancellation mark:
Dernbach, 12.8.15

My dear Prefect!

Many thanks for the long letter which you have promised. I am sure it is already in the mail. Or don't you have anything to write about?

Yesterday I received a letter from Fr. Bogle⁴⁰ in which he writes, "If one of your good sodalists is killed, we would be glad for a nice obituary." You understand. You knew our *Heinrich* especially well. Wouldn't you like to write a thorough and reliable report about him for me? Fitting parts can be used [for Fr. Bogle]. An opportunity for apostolate!

You are waiting for a picture of the Mother Thrice Admirable? You must first earn it. On the 15th we will hold a day in Vallendar for the sodalists living in the area. General Communion for all without exception, if possible with medal. If I manage, you should get a report in the near future about how the meeting went.

Once again, thank you for the coming letter.

With sincere love,

J. Kentenich

⁴⁰ Fr. Bogle must be connected to one of the German-language Sodality magazines like *Our Banner*.

1916

Letter to Joseph Fischer, April 11, 1916

N.c.P.p.
b.V.M.

Vallendar, 11 April 1916

My dear Prefect!

Our letters missed each other again. It doesn't matter. Or didn't you receive the answer which your successor Gross¹ wrote to Salzhuber's suggestions? There you will find the answer to most of your questions: new aims – means and ways, how you can be working for your Marian Sodality. By the way, already some weeks ago I asked your close friend² to tell you about our grand plans: Vallendar-Ingolstadt³. He must have done so. For the moment that will give your exemplary zeal for action enough to work with.

What urges me to write you is my joy over the degree and kind of your genuine sodality Marian love. Reading your dear letter it seemed to me as if you had listened in on my talks last year. What you have *accomplished* for yourself, is exactly what we are *striving for* here in the community. You have, or rather your love of Mary has, kept pace with our Sodality's development. So don't complain any more that you are out of touch with our Sodality.

Of course, you are probably unfamiliar with some of our outward structures. But they spring from the same spirit which animates you and us all, so that you will quickly grasp them.

To be sure, you will be convinced that the Marian love which you possess is no ordinary grace; it offsets all the disadvantages which the war has brought you and is bringing you. Yes, the war was for you – not only outwardly, but also *inwardly* – a pilgrimage to the Mother

¹ Rudolf Gross (b. 1897 in Albendorf), prefect of the Marian Sodality from March to November 1916.

² Latin: *Intimus*.

³ The "Ingolstadt-Schoenstatt parallel," see *New Vision and Life*, p. 121f.

of God. Could there have been a better means to growing the planted seeds and raising them to maturity, so that you have the best and most certain guarantee for a fruitful life and greater glory in heaven? I don't think so. As a result, you are obligated, always and everywhere, to be an apostle of Marian devotion. In order to lighten your obligation of thanks, this May a series of articles will begin in our *MTA* [Magazine]: *At the hand of our Mother*⁴. They are excerpts from your letters, beginning with the mobilization until --- There you can trace the ways which our heavenly Mother has led you and indelibly imprint them in your memory. *Miraculum es Matris ter admirabilis* [You are a miracle of the Mother Thrice Admirable]. Later, God willing, excerpts from the letters of other Sodalists will appear in a similar way. For you are not the only one, who ---

Do you like the *MTA*? I'm glad. May it always succeed, more and more, in achieving the proven principle of our Sodality to mobilize the slumbering energies and put them in interaction with one another: awakening, promoting, urging, also giving them a showplace in our little magazine, so that it not only reaches its goal now but also becomes, as a historically incontestable document, an eternal fountain of youth for genuine Sodality spirit for our successors. Thus our energies will be correctly used to the full.

Might this not open wide the door to ambition? Ambition is good and I have constantly given it a prominent place in my educational system, as long as it is religiously anchored and ennobled. And that much is abundantly secured. How many heroic deeds are now being done in the war! It is often the only driving force. Ambition – a powerhouse! We make use of everything good and useful, without fear or anxiousness – ennobling and purifying. See how the enemies of our world view are joining together, so that they can act against us! Should we withdraw into ourselves out of fear we would be proud or vain? To learn humility I must first do something of which I can be proud. And who among us sodalists has reason to be proud! For us the principle applies: We take it for granted that everyone will do

⁴ German title: *An Mutterhand*.

whatever good which opportunity affords him. Whoever does nothing lacked the opportunity. We follow this principle here⁵ in such a way that we don't think anything of it when someone has done something good. It would only be strange if he didn't do it despite the opportunity. Beyond that, your soldier sodalist does not stand alone. Even our sodalists here – in the Senior and Junior Sodality – are hard at work. That is how it should be. *All* our strength must be harnessed and *made stronger* by practice, so that our Marian Sodality will reach its goal: to contribute as much as we can to the moral and religious renewal of the world. Goal in sight – apply your might (Tirpitz)⁶. Therefore ---

We already had the plan to use the *MTA* picture for stationary when we set it up⁷. Don't you think it would be better to wait until after the war? Then our sodalists here would receive new motivation. Or do you see particular advantages now from [using] the picture? It depends on whether you soldier-sodalists will be writing a lot to outside people. Then we would be glad to already have the stationary printed. To the extent it depends on us, we are ready to take up the battle *now*, even if it is with small means – and yet with all our soul.

In [issue] No. 3 read several times what Pius X says about Marian devotion. In addition, you can be proud of your fellow sodalists in the field who are fighting for the same ideals as you are. Please also pray a little for me.

With heartfelt Sodality greetings and my priestly blessing
with sincere love,

J. Kentenich

⁵ In the Schoenstatt seminary.

⁶ A saying from Alfred von Tirpitz (1849-1930), grand admiral of the German navy: *Ziel erkannt - Kraft gespannt* (could also be translated: Once you know what you want, you must take action).

⁷ The suggestion must have been to make the masthead for the *MTA Magazine* available to the sodalists as letterhead stationary.

*Letter to Joseph Fischer, May 22, 1916*⁸

N.c.P.p.
b.V.M.

Vallendar, 22 May 1916

My dear Prefect!

I am happy to hear that you can stay where you are. I understand your agitation at the prospect of having to return to the trenches. Perhaps a sign, an unmistakable bit of encouragement from our heavenly Mother to dedicate the time now at your disposal to her service and thereby to that of her divine Son. What should this service be?

Here I must make a lengthy digression to inform you of my still largely tentative plans and ideas and more precisely define the range of your work.

Starting point. A significant task of the sodalist is apostolate. In order to find a form that fires the imagination and spurs the will on to action, we proposed the following plan last year: a moral and religious renewal of Germany must go forth from our sodality chapel in line with the example of Ingolstadt. The work towards self-sanctification took and still expressly takes on the character of the “contributions to the capital of grace of the MTA,” which should be made for the benefit of the above-mentioned goal. Our vacation apostolate was made fruitful by the same ambitious idea. In part heroic efforts have been made in both areas – as my files, which may come out of hiding some day, prove. If our sodalists retain this spirit and later on continue to work in the same direction as priests, then our high sounding aim will be reached. – And yet, my intentions go further: Vallendar should really become a second Ingolstadt.

You know the world now and know that evil begets evil with extraordinary fruitfulness. Nonetheless you have kept so much optimism and initiative that you work with all your strength on a counter-current. Every bit of strength, even the tiniest – none may be over-

⁸ A text often cited by Fr. Kentenich in connection with the “supplemental founding act” of integrating Pallotti’s mission into Schoenstatt’s mission. For explanation, see *New Vision and Life*, p. 125-130; for above text, p. 130-134.

looked – should be mobilized. In that we are in agreement, that the piety for which we strive in *our* sodality is capable of bringing together the ancient faith with the modern soul – without cowardly concessions – and to form the life and cultural values of our holy religion. You will also admit that we sodalists together, while a vanishingly small group against the apostles of unbelief and immorality, can nonetheless accomplish something as instruments in the hand of our heavenly Mother (cf. “MTA,” p. 15), if each but invests all his energy wherever he is at and through the organized striving for common aims sees to it that good continues to bear good as well, despite the many difficulties. On this common foundation *an idea* should be mentioned.

1) How the planned organization for those who have left the community (see “MTA,” p. 20) can be built on this foundation and which successes can be expected in time are easy to see.

2) For a unified education in the above indicated sense and – in my estimation – in the spirit of our venerable founder [Vincent Pallotti] it would really be worth the effort to transplant our efforts into Limburg. One of the main purposes would have to be leadership training, not only in order to be able to successfully guide the steadily growing sodalities of diocesan priests (N.B. 1. Fundamental idea of our venerable founder: through his Society to preserve and promote the diocesan and religious clergy in the spirit of apostolate. N.B. 2. *Qualis rex, talis grex* [As the king goes, so goes the flock]... moral and religious renewal... draw on your experiences in the war), but also to be ready for the rapidly growing youth movement. We must work with the youth; otherwise... Unfortunately there are many educators and directors of youth who are useless, who as youth themselves came under false spiritual influences, and who therefore fall out of or only come half in consideration in the great battle for the youth. He who has the youth has the future: religious and moral renewal! Renewal of our Society PSM [the Pallottines].

3) Not only our sodalists, but also high school and college students show enthusiastic interest in our “MTA.” Is that an indication from our heavenly Mother to go searching in this direction after the wishes of Divine Providence, [to follow] the gathered – if still

uncertain – inklings to slowly, carefully, and perceptively influence the entire movement and then to probe further? If our Queen wants to gather the educated youth around her through us, a thought that is too all-encompassing to be held for immediately tenable, but also too sympathetic and – in light of the present course of things – not too fantastic, not entirely impossible, so as to be rejected out of hand. In my mind’s eye I see an organization – similar to the way that our venerable founder wanted to sub-divide the whole world – that could offer our studying youth an alternative to the outlawed confraternities [because of restrictions imposed by the *Kulturkampf*], a bulwark and counterweight to the monistic⁹ youth movement. Dreams! Of course! And if they are ever to become reality, a whole lifetime will be needed to carry them out in a wise, purposeful, and properly organized manner.

Enough of that. Let’s get back down to earth. We only want to be instruments of our heavenly Mother. The weaker and poorer the instrument, the brighter the light of Mary’s fame shining through our works. And that our patroness will have and must have a central share of the religious and moral renewal of things by virtue of her position in the Kingdom of God, is something which not only theological arguments convince me of, but also historical facts. She is – just as God himself is by virtue of divine ordinance – dependent on human cooperation, a fact which is obvious to anyone reasonably familiar with the present economy of salvation. To be sure, Mary is not obliged to use this or that instrument – it is a great grace to be chosen and used by her. And I think that as sodalists she chooses us with special predilection. Through the *consecration* we have made a special covenant¹⁰ with her that *obligates both* sides – not only us, no, also our Covenant Queen, for our promise was accepted by the priestly director approved by the Church, and whatever he does in

⁹ The monistic youth movement was built on the principle of “monism,” which holds the universe to be made up of only one substance – matter. If carried to the last consequence, it denies that God or the spirit can exist (unless materially) and is therefore atheistic.

¹⁰ German: *Bund*.

this capacity is and remains valid in heaven. If we are obligated to strive for an outstanding love of Mary, for a more-than-average self-sanctification and for an all-encompassing apostolic attitude and deeds, so, too, is *Mary obligated* to educate us towards these ends and to use us – she, the *Virgo Fidelis* [Virgin Most Faithful], if only we do what she intends. If we don’t do that, then she’ll simply have to look for other instruments. We want to follow her intentions. In your case and for other reasons we can add your oft-renewed promise, to place your life which [she] saved and your strength at the disposal of her service. This service is and remains service to Our Lord. I think the decrees on Holy Communion¹¹ would be better carried out if our clergy would place itself and the flock more under the influence of Mary. (New point of view for the usefulness of founding and leading sodalities for priests.)

And in the meantime – to return to the idea just mentioned – our Mother demands through the development of things a quiet, prudent propagation of our little magazine. Only circles that are really of the same genre should be approached – elite; if we have won over the one or the other by fall I will be satisfied. I am momentarily considering the question of whether we might not set up a separate fund for this purpose, etc., etc. In any case, one thing will be attained by promotion: a worthwhile way of making our PSM known. Perhaps vocations can be awakened, the worth of timely Catholic education, of the Marian Sodality and devotion to Mary become recognized... Enough. What do you think?

Now for your task.

First of all, you must make the necessary preparations, of the kind described above, in Limburg. For the time being it is sufficient if you send the concerned parties the “MTA” [magazine] and try to get them closer to our ideas with the one or the other word. Depending on the

¹¹ Pope Pius X’s historic decrees *Sacra Tridentina Synodus* (December 20, 1905) which promoted frequent reception of Holy Communion (in contrast to the then current practice of only very infrequent communion) and *Quam singularii Christus* (August 8, 1910) which lowered the age for reception of First Holy Communion from 12 to the age of reason.

outcome comes the next step, which must be a further rung on the way to the proposed goal. You will have to see about the details in each individual case. But I am always happy to talk it over if I am given the necessary information and if it does not unnecessarily inhibit your independence and freedom of movement. With complete trust I leave the whole thing in your hands. If you retain your way of doing things and experience as in the past, then you'll do just fine with these few ideas. *Knight of Mary, not just Mary's child!*

Vallendar must remain at the centerpoint, more precisely, our chapel with the MTA. Persons come and go, but our chapel remains. You would do well to nourish the love of our shrine *in yourself and in others*. If for no other reason than in the interests of a lasting centralization. To be sure, a new task arises out of this: the fitting decoration of our jewel box¹².

Your juridical relationship to me is that of a prefect; you can consider the position of your section¹³ in the whole sodality as that of an independent section and therefore yourself as section head with the rights of a prefect. In this way the unity is preserved: dependence on the chapel, [dependence on] the magistrate. You also see the connection between plans two and three. In the future, educators of youth must be formed who in the case of all cases will become heirs and apostles of the third idea.

If you should get interested *in the other* plans (1 and 3) which are beyond the borders of your present work, then your cooperation is welcome. I leave to your judgment the extent to which you want – or prudently can – influence your people in these directions and whether it is good to inform the others about these goals and their framework, or to guide them on unawares. Follow the principles of the sodality and decentralize if useful. The object is to do much with little manpower.

Perhaps you can also give your self-sanctification the definite goal of the “contributions to the capital of grace” [i.e. spiritual daily order]. It works. All hands on deck. That which we serve will and

¹² German: *Schmuckkästchen*, presumably meaning the shrine.

¹³ German: *Abteilung*.

must be victorious. The surety is God's authority. We experience, after all, only a small portion of the gigantic struggle between God and the devil, between spirit and flesh and world. Even though the spirit of the world storms ahead with many victories – God will be triumphant. We want to help prepare his triumph as apostles of Marian devotion so that in eternity mankind is not exposed to the full brunt of his power, omnipotence and justice. Either something that lasts or nothing at all.

I gladly give you my priestly blessing several times a day.... And ask for your prayer.

With a heartfelt sodalist greeting and my priestly blessing

Sincerely,

J. Kentenich

Do you have the necessary addresses?

Letter to Joseph Fischer, September 2, 1916

N.c.P.p.b.V.M.

D¹⁴. , 2 Sept. 1916

My dear Prefect!

I have probably already answered your questions from the letter that just arrived. One thing is still missing. My heartfelt condolences at the wounds suffered by your brother, which touches me because of my relationship to you. Is there something I can do for him? It is clear that under such circumstances you cannot actively contribute to our fund. Moreover, you have your own memorial to erect at home. Write to her, your esteemed mother – does she also receive the *MTA*? If not, I will send it and give it to her – and give your other brother a greeting from me.

On Monday I will have a number of letters sent to you from Vallendar. You will already have received the other abundant shipment. Please confirm its arrival. From now on, I would appreciate it if you take charge of Wallbrunn getting the *MTA*. By the way, his vocation

¹⁴ Dernbach.

seems in doubt. Would it therefore be advisable to get him in touch with Richarz¹⁵? Perhaps you can talk to Richarz so that he does not read, or read so much, enemy literature. I think that the war brings our sodalists into so much contact with contrary world views that they should, without being narrow-minded, make much more use of all opportunities to strengthen and deepen their own view. As a result, I would be much more careful and strict than during times of peace, when so many means are available to resolve the resulting doubts and difficulties, and when one has a consistent life according to the principles of one's faith provides protection and support. But now the surroundings [bring] the temptation to not take morals and faith quite so precisely ... *Semper aliquid haeret* [something always sticks].

You have correctly grasped your main tasks. I am also happy that you are successfully trying to keep all the connections in your hand. Weber's¹⁶ address changed again. 21st Res. Div. Res. Inf. Regt. 80. 4. Comp.

When I return from the course, I will answer your personal questions. As dear as your soul is to me and as much as I like to help you, do not forget that I must also care for others who cannot take care of themselves as well because they are younger and less experienced. One thing I will never stop doing: to tell our heavenly Mother to please fulfill my duties toward you. In this point I hold a very confident trust, just as I am convinced that her special blessing rests on your work. It is just too obvious that she has chosen you to be her instrument. Hence, it cannot be coincidence that your position is not so certain. In this way you always feel dependent on your Queen and Mother. And this feeling of dependence is of extraordinary importance for the unhindered growth of genuine love of Mary.

How is your health? What is your close friend¹⁷ doing? At one time you offered to let me see his letters. I would gladly do that. But

¹⁵ Theodor Richarz (b. 1898 in Lohmar/Siegburg).

¹⁶ Alfons Weber (b. 1897 in Höhr).

¹⁷ Latin: *Intimus*.

please use an envelope that is not as old as the last one. Two pages were totally open. I hope that none of the letters were lost.

Hafeneth's group will probably get stuck, since the leader must go into battle. *Mater curam habebit*¹⁸.

With heartfelt sodality greetings and my priestly blessing,
with heartfelt love

J. Kentenich

P.S. Are you thinking of Zeitz? If you agree with my suggestion, please take up direct contact with him.

Letter to Joseph Fischer, September 14, 1916

Dernbach, 14 Sept. 1916

My dear Prefect!

A short conversation on internal affairs. I am currently reading the life of the cardinal with your name, the late Cardinal Fischer¹⁹. It would be something for us. "Mary, the most blessed Virgin and Mother of God was the constant joy and sweetness of my life." This was the concluding chord of his life. Mary once saved his life. It is recorded in a poem he composed himself. There are so many things that resonate with your own emotions and interior experiences that I don't know which sample to write down. It would be best if you read the whole book. But for now I can't loan it to you because I plan to use it for the table reading for our boys. It inconspicuously but irresistibly warms the heart for the main point of my program for this year, for the ecclesial attitude²⁰ into which genuine Marian devotion

¹⁸ Latin: Mother will take care.

¹⁹ Cardinal Antonius Fischer (1840-1912), archbishop and cardinal of Cologne, Germany. Fr. Kentenich would have had a personal interest in his story, since then auxiliary bishop Fischer had confirmed him in 1897.

²⁰ German: *eine kirchliche Gesinnung* – one could almost translate it: a love for the Church.

must flow. By the way, you are in touch with Fr. Lucas²¹, who reviewed this book for *The Catholic World*. He would gladly send it to you if you ask. That way you can most easily stay in spiritual touch with us.

Bishop Ketteler²² once said: “It was *holy* bishops, *holy* priests, *holy* monks, *holy* laity who overcame the world and extended the kingdom of Christ. And so it will be in the future, too. We must break with ease and comfort in everyday life if we want to spread the kingdom of Christ.”

To become a saint is our goal, too. If this ideal is to exert real influence on your practical life, it is absolutely essential that you make the *longing* for its realization truly great and strong through fervent prayer for the rare grace of this longing; through frequent, if possible, fiery *renewal* of the resolution (especially when rising); and through constant clarification of what sanctity means – in theory by reading, and in practice by following the divine promptings. Of course, we are talking here of individual sanctity, in the way God demands it of you based on your natural disposition. But this takes me too much into theoretical considerations.

The little work through the particular examination needs to be brought, often and explicitly, into the great context of your ideal of sanctity²³. In order to reach this goal, I want to take a closer look at this point today (I presuppose that you know the entire system of the particular examination as a battle method, not merely as a theory). How to make Marian devotion the root of the individual acts is something you have already practiced. It only remains to determine which point you should take as your object. From a distance that is hard to say, especially since you have not written about your spiritual affairs in a very long time. Nonetheless, I can draw your attention to a small

²¹ Fr. Joseph Lucas, b. 1875, ordained a Pallottine 1901, was another teacher in the Schoenstatt seminary.

²² Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel Ketteler (1811-1877), German bishop and Catholic advocate of social reform.

²³ In other words, one’s particular examination should be frequently brought together with the renewal of one’s personal ideal.

matter, to your awkward manner which you like to show to others. A knight of Mary must try to acquire a knightly, noble manner. Why? Importance for our priestly activity? Context with my image of sanctity? Difficulties which come from my education, my state in life? Ways this natural failing shows? Which means could lend themselves to overcoming it today? Written control. No self-imposed penance for every mistake. Connecting the particular examination with visits to the Blessed Sacrament, with confession, and Communion, with spiritual reading – and how often to do it? Which temptations and inclinations?

Regarding the question of going to the theater: I approve of the principle. But the application? To what extent can it be reconciled with my striving for sanctity? On the one hand the arousal of sensuality, with its unnerving consequences, on the other hand the firsthand knowledge of the *individual* plays. Where is the greater disadvantage! Perhaps you can find a middle way. For the purposes you desire, is it really necessary to see every play? Then you would have to remain a zealous theater-goer as a priest, too!! But it can practically only be a matter of a more or less specialized judgment. I therefore think: Be moderate. After all, you must not forget that constant turning in on self can greatly increase sensuality. As a result, be more careful than in times of peace. Of course that should not give room to any fears. The middle way is the best. Don’t make it a principle to stay away from every showing – under normal circumstances – but neither should you deceive yourself and think you must be at every showing. Of course I cannot give you the practical application to the individual case. Our heavenly Mother can and will do that, and I totally commend you to her.

Still one more bit of news. Fathers Dumm, Rieg, Franke, Nudler, Spieler have been called to report for duty the 19th. *Vivant sequentes*²⁴. (...) Hafeneth has written to say he was wounded, but not seriously. Heartfelt thanks to our heavenly Mother.

I am still waiting for the confirmation of a larger shipment.

²⁴ Latin: We will see what follows.

Enough for today.

With heartfelt Sodality greeting and my priestly blessing.
with sincere love,

J. Kentenich

Letter to Joseph Fischer, October 8, 1916

N.c.P.p.b.V.M.

Vallendar, 8 Oct 1916

My dear Prefect!

Allow me to let you know right away that my military days are already over. They lasted from Saturday to Sunday²⁵.

I have received your letter regarding the matters of your soul.

For now a heartfelt sodality greeting and my priestly blessing
with sincere love

J. Kentenich

Letter to Joseph Fischer, December 11, 1916

N.c.P.p.
b.V.M.

Schoenstatt, 11.12.1916

My dear Prefect!

Your short note compels me²⁶, even to put aside all other work, to write you a few lines. Not out of fear, but out of concern and lively interest. Since I received your letter I have prayed a great deal for you, both here in my room and down below in our Shrine, in private as well as with the Junior Sodality after yesterday's General Communion. Fortunately a sodalist still came to ask for a penance for a failing against the particular examination. He is praying with outstretched arms in front of the image of our MTA. Of course, he knows neither the reason nor the name. On the next general confes-

²⁵ That is, from Saturday, September 30 to Sunday, October 8.

²⁶ Based on Fr. Kentenich's response, the note from Fischer must have been a distress call, probably about a crisis regarding his vocation.

sion day you should receive still more.

It is only too bad that you did not speak up sooner. We could have been imploring new strength for you for a while. New strength, but not liberation from your difficulties. With that I immediately state my position. On the one hand I am naturally sorry to see you suffer and struggle so much, on the other hand – do not take this the wrong way – you could not bring me more joyful news. Your entire past but especially the most recent past is certain proof that our heavenly Mother has taken you completely into her school, that she has educated you to be a warrior for her kingdom and honor and that of her Son, and that she wants to *continue to educate* you.

If you doubt this, please read the article “At the Hand of our Mother²⁷”, which will be continued. Your earlier, more superficial difficulties have prepared you to be victorious in these incomparably greater and more difficult battles. Your total helplessness solidifies the foundation which must be unshakably present in all true men of God, in great apostles of Mary who must totally orient their lives on “Behold the handmaid of the Lord...” I mean the spirit of the child, humility. Whether I am happy and satisfied is not what matters. If only God and Mary are more recognized and loved. I am ready to endure all torments, all suffering, even death – if possible even hell – for the salvation of souls... *Da mihi animas et cetera tolle tibi* [Give me souls; keep all else for yourself]²⁸. This is the selfless, humble attitude which our heavenly Mother apparently wants to and must raise up in you through her educating hand if you are to fulfill the promise which you have so often made in most urgent fear for your life, and if you are to be made capable to putting it in action to its full extent. For only then will you be a trustworthy member, a reliable instrument, to whom she can unhesitatingly entrust the care for her God-willed tasks.

That is *one* reason for my joy at the agony in your soul. And the other reason? You have done well in establishing the outward contact

²⁷ The article “An Mutterhand” in the *MTA* magazine.

²⁸ A line from Fr. Kentenich's prayer “Hail Mary, for the Sake of Your Purity.” See *Heavenwards* (Waukesha, 1992), p. 172.

with you group. But if you want to be of still more service to it, then you first put yourself to the test, preferably fight to the blood. Through your courageous battle you may save other of our soldiers similar struggles. It is interesting that at almost the exact same time as your letter reached me, the news came from Limburg that the theology students²⁹ have begun to take their own religious and moral initiatives. One does not need to be superstitious to think that the devil will now raise his head and see how far he can get by attacking first the leader of the entire work³⁰. (....)

All of this sounds so cold and theoretical. May I remove the veil a little from my own past? From my entrance into the novitiate until my priestly ordination and even a while longer I had to *constantly* experience the most horrific struggles. Not the least trace of inner happiness or satisfaction. My spiritual director did not understand me and my supernatural support was very thin because of my unhealthy rationalistic and skeptical way of thinking. I went through horrible interior and exterior, that is, mental and physical sufferings. Perhaps I can tell you more about that later. If I had not gone through this totally abnormal development, I could not have become what I should be, and try to be, as spiritual director. Apply this to your own situation and future. But you understand that you have my full and inner interest in the phases of your struggles.

One last thing: rest assured that I gladly keep you in my prayers, and that is enough for today. You will receive practical indications in the next letter. It would be good if you would now sit down and try to write away all the struggles in your heart. I will then be able to more easily and surely give you advice, not to mention the truth that shared suffering is half the suffering. I look forward to your visit more than usual. But from the end of December until January 5 or 6 I will be in Düsseldorf to take part in a conference³¹. Before that I

²⁹ Of the Pallottines.

³⁰ Fischer is obviously meant here as the first prefect.

³¹ January 2-4, 1917, was a first-of-a-kind conference in Düsseldorf on the pastoral care of youth. One of the lecturers was Prof. Dr. Arnold Rademacher, with whom Fr. Kentenich had an important exchange of letters in the months after the

must make my retreat.

Friendly greetings from our MTA. Mother-true will be eternally new.

Heartfelt Sodality greeting and my priestly blessing,
with sincere love,

J. Kentenich

Please verify as soon as possible with a short note that you have received this letter. The address of Draken³² is unknown.

conference.

³² It is uncertain who is meant here. No Draken is found on the rolls of the Schoenstatt Sodality.

1917

Postscript to a letter to Joseph Fischer, January 26, 1917

My dear Prefect!

Continue the present course of your development. It seems to me that your progress is shaken every time you accept a new task for the Sodality. Could it be our dear heavenly Mother, using it to make you more keenly aware that you belong to her and that you only do your *duty* when you dedicate your advantageous position and your free time totally to her service?

She probably has the same purpose this time. At the very least you will do well to place yourself entirely at the disposal of the MTA again if she hears your prayer. It can't hurt to promise her, out of gratitude, to do the particular examination and the other points in the way we recently discussed and to win over others for it when the opportunity presents itself.

Other than that, hold fast to this: *Mater habebit curam*¹. I pray for you.

Heartfelt Sodality greeting and my priestly blessing,
with sincere love,

J. Kentenich

Letter to Joseph Fischer, April 18, 1917

N.c.P.p.
b.V.M.

Vallendar, 18. April 1917

My dear young friend and Prefect!

(...)²

¹ Latin: Mother will take care.

² The first part of this letter deals with a conflict which has broken out between the Pallottine novice master (Fr. Rösch) in Limburg and the Schoenstatt Sodality. A number of misunderstandings have also caught Fischer – not yet a novice because of the war – in the crossfire.

This time the *MTA* took a long time to get finished. Mr. Hartmann can no longer print it and I don't want to have it typed any more. So I have been looking for a new printer. Negotiations are in progress. The format will be somewhat handier, every issue have eight pages, and will appear every 14 days as before. The paper is somewhat poorer, but in exchange we get twice as much text as before. We want to keep the subscription price the same, 10 cents. Then I can let the high school boys have something to say. All in all: a great step forward on the way toward our desired goal. Our efforts have turned into a movement which reaches larger and larger circles. I am therefore thinking of asking Fr. Provincial for someone to help me. I am thinking of your cousin, Fr. Schneider³.

The work has grown twice and three times over my head. Whether my request is approved, remains to be seen. You see, all of this and much more which I must temporarily keep to myself, is largely a result of Fr. Novice Master's decree. As you can imagine – even though I was bedridden – I was very distressed. *Per crucem ad lucem*⁴.

We therefore want to hold fast to our ideals. We fight until we die. The weaker and more miserable we feel, the more useful we are in Mary's hand. "Today's times need men who let themselves be nailed to the cross for an idea..."

So how are you doing? I would be glad if your service travels would start again soon. Don't forget my *ceterum censeo*: particular examination...

And write again soon. One more thing! Would it not be good if you explained to Salzhuber objectively – without any recriminations – about the situation⁵ so that he knows what is going on, just in case?

Until the joy of meeting again!

Heartfelt Sodality greeting and my priestly blessing,
with sincere love,

³ And indeed, just two weeks later, on May 1, 1917, Fr. Karl Schneider was assigned to help Fr. Kentenich with his work. See *New Vision and Life*, p. 145.

⁴ Latin: Through the cross to the light.

⁵ That is, the tensions with the novice master in Limburg.

J. Kentenich

Letter to Joseph Fischer, September 29, 1917

N.c.P.p.b.V.M.

Schoenstatt, 29. 9.1917

My old, dear Prefect!

Many, many thanks for your quick response. Life is not treating you as you would wish. Yes, for some months now already I observe the changes going on in you. You have not yet reached the end.

Next week, Wednesday and Thursday, Hafeneth and his brother will be here. You probably cannot move up your service travels a week. Too bad.

Did you receive my letter from Berlin? Schuler and Schillmöller⁶ are here at present. Many greetings to Fr. Nassmann. Perhaps he can make a few suggestions for the *MTA*. Until we have the joy of meeting again! I pray for you and your intentions.

Heartfelt Sodality greeting and my priestly blessing,
with sincere love,

J. Kentenich

Letter to Joseph Fischer, December 8, 1917

Postmark:
Vallendar, 8. 12. 1917

My dear *old* Prefect!

Now, how high do you want to climb? Well then, Mr. Lance Corporal⁷! Or did you miswrite your title? If not – I congratulate you! Also for the likely [furlough]. Come by and see us again.

Heartfelt Sodality greeting and my priestly blessing,
with sincere love,

J. Kentenich

⁶ Karl Schillmöller (born 1899 in Rheine).

⁷ German: *Gefreiter*. Fischer has advanced one rank higher in the army.

Letter to Joseph Fischer, December 19, 1917

N.c.P.p.
b.V.M.

Vallendar, 19. 12. 1917

My dear Prefect!

The approaching feast of Christmas gives me the courage to write something to get it off of my heart which has bothered me for quite some time. Do not take it badly if I get right to the point.

The object of my anxious concern is you. It is not as if I knew you were going bad ways – that might be the lesser evil – but rather, that you have gradually abandoned yourself to the influence of your surroundings. To be sure, it is not possible nor necessary to maintain the youthful fire of enthusiasm through all the tragedy and comedy of everyday life. I also understand how the hard blows which struck you in March and April⁸ could eat at the root of your soul and your idealism. I also understand that going to the theater, reading novels and other interesting books has a narcotic and calming effect on you. If you put all these symptoms together, do you not also find that a thick veil is gradually forming around your soul, and that you are being swept away with irresistible force by a current whose final end cannot be doubted?

I do not write this as if all I cared about were engaging all your strength for our organization. On the contrary, precisely the thought that you would view my warning this way kept me from writing this sooner, even though I clearly see and can show the pernicious effect of your passiveness on your sodalists. Do you want to bid farewell to your earlier ideals, in whole or in part, because your practical experience in life has taught you a different lesson? Then do so on your own responsibility. But at least use the current opportunity to do good in human concourse – before self-centeredness plays mean tricks on you.

If you want to pass honest judgement on yourself, then you must

⁸ The by-product of the tensions between the novice master in Limburg and the Sodality in Schoenstatt.

admit that your main task cannot consist in getting to know the times and the world through theater, novels, etc., but in stepping back as much as you can from their pernicious influences, which – even though you are a lance corporal – make you, interiorly, their slave. *Nequid nimis!*⁹ Under ordered conditions the standpoint would be flexible, but now I know of no better New Year's wish than to wish you an honest examination of conscience and a courageous self-critique and a frank improvement of the points which you determine need to be addressed. Take the Child and his Mother! That is my prayer which I make for you at the manger.

Heartfelt Sodality greeting and my priestly blessing with sincere love,

J. Kentenich

⁹ Latin: Let nothing be too much (that is: everything in moderation).