



# SCHÖNSTATT INTERNATIONAL

## GENERALPRÄSIDIUM

Fr. Juan Pablo Catoggio, President

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### **General Presidium of the International Schoenstatt Work** **Statement on abuse accusations against Father Josef Kentenich**

This statement was prompted by accusations against the founder of the Schoenstatt Work, Father Joseph Kentenich, first in an article by Alexandra von Teuffenbach in the weekly newspaper "Die Tagespost" on July 2, 2020, and in subsequent press releases worldwide.

**The information contained in this article, allegedly "not yet evaluated", is not new to us; it was fully included in the documentation about the Founder of Schoenstatt in connection with the temporary separation from his Work (1951-1965) and is being thoroughly studied by the ecclesiastical authorities in the context of the beatification process for Kentenich.**

Alexandra von Teuffenbach, Church historian, who among other things edited the Council Diary of Fr. Sebastian Tromp SJ, reports in the "Tagespost" with allegedly sensational news: Based on her research in the Vatican archives, which have now been released for Pope Pius XII's term of office, she wants to discover "why Father Joseph Kentenich had to leave the Schoenstatt community that he founded. In short: "sexual abuse". In the article, one learns that the "true reasons for Kentenich's exile" have not been mentioned until now, but that "the files now released can clarify the situation".

The two visitations of the Institute of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary (1949 by the then Auxiliary Bishop Bernhard Stein of Trier and 1951-1953 by the Jesuit Fr. Sebastian Tromp SJ, who was commissioned by the "Holy Office") are viewed entirely from the perspective of the visitors, especially the Apostolic Visitor Tromp. Thereby an image of the Sisters of Mary emerges, the palette of which ranges from extreme dependence, incapacity to judge and decide to childish dependence and slavish subservience to an all-dominating founder.

It is astonishing that the author - based on the reports of Fr. Tromp - makes his view of the community and its members completely her own. From this perspective, she interprets all the other documents, including the letters of some sisters to Pope Pius XII in defense of the exiled founder, negatively as "evidence of a pathological relationship with the founder". These letters can also be understood as a sign of the courage of some of the members of the Institute at that time who, not at all weak, were women who stood up against measures of the Church that in their eyes had done wrong to the Founder and the entire Apostolic Movement of Schoenstatt. What the author does not mention is the loyalty of the Institute to the Church; in the more than 14 years of his exile, neither J. Kentenich nor the Sisters of Mary made the Church's examination the subject of a critical press release.

It is also astonishing that Tromp is honored as an understander and liberator of women, as a defender of freedom of expression and conscience, because he listened to certain (few) critical voices (which was part of his task) and believed them - usually without open consultation with the founder himself. The members of the Institute, whom Tromp received for conversations during his visitation, did not experience him as a liberator, but suffered from his repressive questioning style, his outbursts of temperament (also known elsewhere) and attempts at intimidation, the threat and imposition of ecclesiastical punishments and the extremely negative judgement of the founder and the community.

That the sisters "were (forced) to confess to the founder" can be refuted by other testimonies. In addition, J. Kentenich was at that time almost continuously on journeys abroad - not least in order to make the leaders of his communities independent. It remains a mystery how the compulsion to confess should take effect during such a prolonged absence.

The most massive accusation is that Fr. Kentenich abused his founding authority as "Father" towards the Sisters and demanded sexual services from them.

Here the statements become very broad. First of all there is talk about "a" Sister who "resisted" (against what?). Then a few paragraphs further down "six to eight others who also wrote" (what?). Finally, at some point in the text, there is the assertion that "the sexual abuse, which was initially denied, was later explained with the statement that Kentenich had only wanted to resolve the sisters' sexual tensions through the 'method of depth psychology'.

Such vague statements, coupled with the researched allegation of sexual abuse, do not testify to a critical examination of the files. Blanket assertions with evaluative adjectives merely play on the keyboard of the current abuse debate without knowing and communicating "the whole story".

That there were accusations from the ranks of the Sisters of Mary is not new to us. Fr. Kentenich himself gave a detailed account of his actions to his superior after an accusation became known. In this context, however, there was no mention of sexual abuse, neither literally nor in content. Also in the Roman proceedings of the separation of Fr. Kentenich from his foundation, the charge of sexual abuse was not brought. The author of the article argues: "The Roman Congregation did not expose the sisters and did not use the report of the sister in the justifications" (for the exile). This interpretation seems to be laborious. It is probably meant to nevertheless somehow justify the thesis of sexual abuse. Moreover, the "Holy Office" was, as is well known at that time, not exactly reserved when accusations of abuse were made. Ms. von Teuffenbach does not explain why the "Office" spared Fr. Kentenich or its foundation. On the contrary, it was repeatedly stated: The separation of Fr. Kentenich from his work is not a punitive measure, but an administrative order, i.e. a prudent measure taken through administrative channels.

**We firmly reject the accusation that Joseph Kentenich was guilty of sexual abuse of members of the Institute of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary. His behavior toward other persons - especially women - was always marked by a pronounced reverence and esteem, as well as by the principle of physical intactness, which he also impressed upon his communities.**

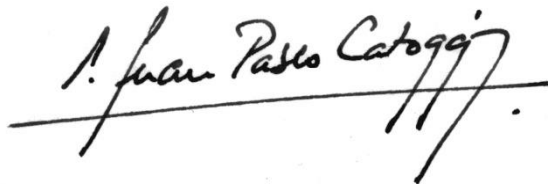
P. Kentenich responded in detail to the Visitor and his superiors regarding the accusation of abuse of power and explained his thinking, principles and behavior.

Joseph Kentenich was allowed to return to Schoenstatt in 1965 and 1966, respectively, after a 14-year exile. The decrees that separated him from his foundation were lifted, and the founder's case was returned to the Congregation for Religious of that time. Thus he could once again assume his founding position in the Schoenstatt Work. De facto, the accusation of abuse of power was thereby also invalidated.

**Before a beatification process is opened, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith must issue a so-called "nihil obstat" (declaration of no objection) based on the files in its archives. If there is a well-founded suspicion of moral misconduct on the part of the candidate for beatification, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does not give the green light for the beginning of a process. In the case of the founder of Schoenstatt, Joseph Kentenich, the "nihil obstat" was granted.**

All the documentation from the time of the visitation and the exile goes into the files of the beatification process. Thus, all critical voices and accusations are also subject to thorough study and serious consideration of all the facts in an appropriate historical and spiritual context. The final judgement in these proceedings is entrusted to the Church.

In the name of the International Presidency of the Schoenstatt Work,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "P. Juan Pablo Catoggio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

P. Juan Pablo Catoggio

Schönstatt, July 2, 2020