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THE UNION: A MISSION FOR THE FUTURE

1. - Introduction

- We have come to the end of our Congress. And now it may be good and sound to turn our thoughts and attention to the origins: towards those forces which brought to life this great and important rank within Schönstatt: the Apostolic Union, “der Apostolische Bund,” and from there, look into the future horizon that is before us.

What may have dwelt in the thoughts and in the heart of our father and of the first members on that August 20, 1919? Perhaps, on the one hand, it may have been deep gratitude for all which the MTA had cared for, formed and worked in those daring, tested and faithful young hearts. On the other hand, it may have been great expectation before the path which Divine Providence was showing through the great difficulties and in the midst of chaos.

From the time the first seed was planted on October 18, 1914, Schönstatt was gearing itself towards the future and towards a world wide horizon as a totally new ecclesial movement with its own identity. “... [The young men] not only had fought their way through to a workable framework for a new union, they also effectively gave the ”green light” to Father Kentenich to begin his full time work in earnest in fostering the work of the MTA as a new movement in the Church.” (Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, *New Vision and Life*, p. 198)

It was actually with August 20, 1919, with the transformation of the External Organization into the Apostolic Union that, as our Father himself said, “the greatest event in our history since 1914,” had taken place. Hörde brought to a conclusion the first founding stage within our Schönstatt history. The time had arrived to come out of the convent walls and work our way into wider spheres in Germany and beyond. The “secret favorite idea” came to fruition and would begin to shine upon those who would take it in as their own life mission, giving meaning to their lives.

2. - Fulfillment of the educational goal of Schönstatt: “forming the new person in the new community”

Since that time up to now, the different Unions of Schönstatt have, in the meantime, developed and grown within the world according to their diverse possibilities and realities just as we can see it in this congress. There is a great deal that we ought to thank the Blessed Mother, for having formed, built and worked among us.

Since Hörde in 1919 our communities have taken upon themselves the educational goal of Schönstatt. With great longing much strength has been invested in the education of leaders within our ranks – leaders who, as apostles formed in the spirit of the Church, may be capable of transforming the world through Christ and Mary from Schönstatt. That is to say, they should be able to embody and bring into their practical lives the ideal of the new person in the new community.

Today we can say, that in spite of all weakness, we are well equipped to give on to the Church:

- **Christian personalities** with a high sense of personal responsibility, who without greater juridical bonds are able to give on relevant answers within their actual circumstances through their convictions and life of faith.
- **Vigorous and dynamic personalities**, who do not need to be constantly motivated, rather who in freedom, have an impetus of their own towards a magnanimous love of God, his plan of love, and the apostolate in all its possible forms.
- **Personalities willing to form their lives**, under the protection of Mary, to the very last consequences through an unceasing spiritual striving. Personalities who long and seek holiness in daily life.
- **Mature personalities**, who educate themselves and are willing to be educated by others in their Schönstatt community, and from Schönstatt as their nucleus, are able to radiate their light into the Church.
- **Personalities capable of stretching strong community bonds**, interiorly uniting themselves with those around them according to the ideal of a community of destinies, of ideals and of life. Personalities who, from the core of a community experience, wish to carefully embody the Union profile while forming themselves in such a way that enables them to integrate with and among others.

- Lastly, **personalities who, in the Covenant of Love with Mary, strive for sanctity**, knowing that true change in Church and world history has first come about through the saints, rather than through the learned and the politicians.

These sorts of personalities are not found in large numbers nowadays. Our world begs for the formation of the “new person in the new community.” As years have gone by, that which could be somewhat foreseen in 1919, has become a tangible reality. Perhaps, the words Father Kentenich wrote on November 6, 1919 to the leaders of the newly founded Apostolic Union may be of greater validity now than before:

“The spiritual “little work,” that is our glory and greatness! Social democracy sees existing conditions as the cause of the modern horrors at mass misery; its only source of liberation and salvation is a revolutionary change of the external conditions. It will not reach its goal. To be sure, there are many aspects of social and civic life which are corrupt and cry out for reform. But the deepest source of our unhappiness lies in our very selves, in the slavery and lack of redemption of our own souls. Consistent with this insight, we demand and strive for a sweeping moral and religious renewal of the individual and of all of human culture. This is a task we share with all contemporary Catholic organizations, whether societies, confraternities or sodalities.

“...What they lack, or better, what all of Christianity today lacks is the spirit of genuine interior life. Spiritual life is dying out!”

“/.../

“And in the midst of this chaos we establish a program that is tantamount to a solemn declaration of the importance of spiritual life.” (Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, *New Vision and Life*)

3. - Meaning of the Unions in light of the background and challenges of our time.

With these longings and with this program, we members of the Unions gather here today and now, facing the enormous challenges and demands of today’s world. Yes, be that as it may, we particularly emphasize in an organic manner the moral and religious formation, not only for ourselves, but so that we can properly serve the Church and collaborate with the necessary changes needed in our surroundings and in the world as a whole.

The document put together at the end of the last Conference of the Latin American Bishops in Aparecida, Brazil, speaks about the new Areopago and place of great decision for the world. It states:

“We must congratulate and exhort so many disciples and missionaries of our Lord, who with their coherent ethical presence, continue to sow values based on the gospels in their own surroundings and the new Aeropago: the world of communications, the building of peace, the development and liberation of the peoples, above all of the minorities, the empowerment of women and children, the ecology and the furthering of natural resource projects. And the vast Aeropago of culture, of scientific investigations, of international relations...” (Document of Aparecida, Brazil, 2007, par. 491, translated from original Spanish version)

Perhaps, what I just read may seem a nice way of expressing a wish. However, we do know that it is not so, that these new Aeropago Islands wait for the intervention of Christian personalities capable of, reverting processes of deterioration and tendering new options to modern challenges.

It is true that most of us do not move within our situations in which the great relevant decisions of our time are made; albeit, we do know and we are convinced about the effective influence exerted in our surroundings by our original, human and Christian vocation.

“Life is kindled by life,” our father used to say and he continues, “We are in one another in order to kindle one another,” and in order to kindle that light in each one who is close to us. Therefore, life in itself, in all its dimensions is the field where we must exert our influence as our main mission. Hence, we do have a calling to bring that influence through our, “coherent ethical presence,” as the Aparecida Document states, in the new Aeropago Islands of the modern world.

The question must be made as to which are the contributions we are able to present from the standpoint of our education and mission, taking into consideration the background of the challenges of our time. I will mention just a few:

3.1.- The presence and action of authentic Catholic personalities in the Church and world

In the face of a world distanced from God we may appreciate the presence of Catholics convinced of their identity and who live up to their values and ideals, as a challenge we must stand without halting and as a task demanded by love and charity. It is not *without reason* that “Caritas Christi urget nos” is the great motto and guiding idea of the Union from its beginning up to our days.

We live in a historic period of admirable progress which humanity has accomplished in many fields: morality, science, law, culture, communications, technology, and so on... However, and, at the same time, these have brought about confusion and have rejected God or have tried to antagonize God and humanity. “Without a clear conception of the mystery of God, the loving, fatherly plan of God for a life worthy of all human beings becomes obscure.” (Document of Aparecida, par. 35)

From this we may conclude that, from our experience of the Covenant of Love with Mary, it is our task to show: God is love and he wants goodness and happiness for every person. We have the duty to manifest in a free and magnanimous way that the moral law handed to us, and which manifests itself through the voice of our conscience, does not have as final aim to oppress us, rather it is there to free us from evil and help us reach bliss.

The everyday saint which the MTA wishes to form in us knows how to blend in a healthy way: personality and world, moral conscience and human progress, the correct use, enjoyment and renunciation of material goods.

3.2. - The truth, instruction for life (*no to relativism*)

In our time, a cult of relativism opposes the question of the truth, which was one of our father’s greatest concerns since his youth and which is intimately linked to freedom and to an organic way of perceiving reality.

On October 10, 2005, Benedict XVI, then Cardinal Ratzinger, spoke to the College of Cardinals and among other things told them:

“The ideological trends sway to and fro, from one extreme to the other: from Marxism to liberalism up to licentiousness; from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism. Having a clear faith is often times ruled out as fundamentalism, while the relativism which, ‘allows itself be tossed to and fro by any doctrine’ is considered today as the only proper attitude of our epoch. That is how the dictatorship of relativism comes about, the one which does not recognize anything definitive and which as a criteria only the self with its wants and whims.”

This dictatorship of relativism does not allow for any kind of basic premise, conviction, or properly established truth. And yet, the words of our Lord resound in our ears. “You shall come to know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” (Jn 8, 32)

Today, there is a great deal of appreciation for freedom, for human dignity and for due respect for conscience, however, somewhat out of proportion. In fact, this constitutes the greater part of the conquest of modern culture. Although many of its diverse expressions move farther and farther away from the universal truth about the human person, overlooking the transcendent aspect of the human person or being downright atheist. The total autonomy of reason is accepted, giving way to a moral subjectivism which excludes the order willed by God, emptying truth of its essence and invalidating the authentically lived and understood concept of freedom.

When truth is not correctly understood is also divorced from the organic totality of values such as: love, justice, beauty, life... It is not without reason that the Encyclical of the Holy Father begins with the words: “Caritas in veritate.” And, in article #3 it continues: “Without truth, charity falls into mere sentimentalism. Love becomes some kind of empty entanglement which is filled up randomly. This is the fatal risk of love in a culture without truth.”

Besides, what can be said about the value of life presently threatened by a number of scientific manipulations. Abortion, homosexuality, gender trend feminism, deconstruction, poliform sexuality... they are all manifestations of the cultural changes, a counterculture of death for a culture of life.

If we look at our Unions against this background and recall that the decisive factor is freedom, then we see that magnanimous freedom, the kind that allows our intelligence to surrender to truth, and our way of surrendering the heart to all that is good, our being and acting to God and his plans, is totally challenged at present.

Our great motto: “Free through love, faithful in freedom,” is not only relevant, it has come to a radical junction in our days, transformed into an apostolic demand which may not be delayed any longer. New men and women who can carry this feeling for life are urgently needed in our Church and in the world of the future.

3.3. - The question about the person and human relationships (saying no to individualism and massification)

The great goal of Schoenstatt, “the new person in the new community,” sees the human person integrated and in its complete integrating dimension. The human person realizes itself when sustained in its interior nest by a network of attachments and binds itself with the world beyond, with the “we” and with the surrounding reality...

In 1959 Father Ernst said as witness and participant of Hörde:

“From the beginning our community had a close knit character... Our common warm love for the Blessed Mother created a family atmosphere. From the start, we saw the need for community. The higher the goal, the more united those who aspire to reach it should remain... because a community is perfect to the extent that its members aspire to perfection. The fundamental power of love united us, the great goal and the common experience of shelter found in the shrine of our Blessed Lady.”

It is precisely the ties which bind us together as human beings that are the great builders of togetherness. The common frames of reference serve as guidelines for shared values. Nowadays, values are not shared. Each one chooses his or her set of values, or none at all. If we are not able to share the “ethical totality,” we are left with just, “an individual conscience” (concepts from Hegel taken from Belardinelli, Italian philosopher). Then, even evil can be shared and communicated. Freedom of the lonely is empty freedom, senseless and without meaning. It will end up alienated from the crowd. Freedom alone can live among the others without submitting – that is the freedom of those who love without allowing others to dominate them.

By forming among its members one soul and a common feeling for life through the same ideals and demands in every day life, the Union places at the service of the Church and of the world a spirit imbued community that strives to overcome massification, capable of moving forward and of sheltering while anchored in the supernatural world.

3.4. - Apostles, disciples and missionaries, in all possible fields

The signs of the time and the voice of the Church are at present speaking from different angles, yet in a consistent manner about the apostolic needs of our time: the urgency, “of

announcing to our peoples that God loves us, that his existence is not a threat for the human person, that He is near with his saving and liberating power for the sake of his Kingdom, that he is with us in all tribulations, and that he keeps up our hope in the midst of all trials. We, Christians, are bearers of the good news and not prophets of misfortune.” (Document of Aparecida, Brazil, 30)

The present cultural and social condition has transformed the whole apostolic action into something urgent, something that can help men and women through all possible means to share in their fullness the treasures of grace, of holiness, of charity, doctrine, culture, and other words that involve the giving on sound Catholicism. The new generations expect in their hearts this bid of truth and happiness in order to steer their lives towards a destiny that is not misleading, rather, one that is worth risking and surrendering everything.

The Church reminds us with motherly persistence that in virtue of our Baptism we are called to be apostles, disciples and missionaries of Our Lord, we are to follow him, living in intimate union with him, imitate his example and give testimony accordingly. We should remember the number of documents and exhortations through which we are summoned to accomplish this task and fulfill this mission.

Was this not the great purpose and mission of Hörde? Was not Hörde the event which brought to fruition the seed sowed on October 18, 1914, transforming the Marian Sodality into the Apostolic Movement of Schönstatt? In a prophetic way, in 1919, it was said –and now it resounds as spoken directly to us:

“We want to establish a new organization, a Union where leaders can be educated, like the yeast, **and who are concerned about the cultivation of the apostolate.** The spirit of Paul, the living spirit of Christ, must be infused in us. That which Ingolstadt was in the XVI century, Schönstatt must become for our present time through the Apostolic Union.” (L. Zeppenfeld in his circular letter after Hörde)

“... And, against the desolating stream of immorality which threatens to shake the bed rock foundation of political order, family discipline, education, faith and the life of the Church. There is only one harbor which offers us salvation: **holiness.**” (Fr. Kentenich in his circular letter after Hörde)

Looking over our here and now, the Unions not only have relevance, we are also very much needed. The Church expects and needs the realization of our mission and task.

4. - The Union and the third goal of Schönstatt (heart of the Church, soul of the world)

What I just said brings to our awareness the third goal of Schönstatt: the universal apostolate. As Father Ernst said:

“It was not Vincent Pallotti who called us to Schönstatt. /.../ Only later did we know about Blessed Vincent Pallotti and **his great ideal of a universal apostolate**. It was a pleasant finding: our movement could be the new evolution of this great ideal, and its realization as well in this very time... We came to appreciate and take into consideration Blessed Vincent Pallotti and we thought **that the Covenant of Love with the Mater Ter Admirabilis, could become the realization of the universal Catholic apostolate** as a means to overcome the anti-divine forces which menaced the world of today.” (Fr. Ernst, Hörde. Reflections of a participant, Buenos Aires, Sisters of Mary; 1982, p. 37-38)

We all know that this ideal is still in the beginning stages and sometimes it seems unreachable; however, many signs of contemporary development help us to think about the realization of this great goal. Among others I quote: world wide globalization, the internet, communications, outer space stations, the development of a technical civilization, world organizations, economic situation in the whole world, the associations and international movements... These signs make the engagement of all apostolic forces within the Church necessary. Only men and women filled with God and united to him will become humanized, divinized and transformed personalities capable of making history.

We should also recognize the voice of the last Holy Fathers, their documents, and international trips, their many apostolic works, world youth days, international encounters on Pentecost of 1998 and 2006, the progress in ecumenism, among other things, all of these are part of the universal apostolate and are also a sign of hope in this regard.

“It is no coincidence that the document (Christifideles laici) recognizes and enlivens ‘a new epoch of the associated laity of the faithful’ sign of the ‘richness and versatility of the resources which the Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial tapestry.’ (n. 29), indicating the ‘criteria of ecclesiality’

which are necessary, on the one hand for the discernment of the ministers, and on the other, for the growth of these associations of the faithful, of the ecclesial movements, and of the new communities. (Benedict XVI, Discourse to the Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 15-XI-2008)

The Encyclical “Caritas in Veritate” tells us in n. 42:

“The truth of globalization as a process and its fundamental ethical criterion are given by the unity of the human family and its development towards what is good. Hence a sustained commitment is needed so as to *promote a person-based and community-oriented cultural process of world-wide integration that is open to transcendence.* /.../ globalization, *a priori*, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it.” (Caritas in veritate, 42)

Our father said already in his circular letter of November 1919:

“ We want... unanimously, to gather under the banner of the eternal victory **a united Church** and in utmost faithfulness and surrender **keep to our unifying center, to the invincible rock of our faith, to the furnace of our Christian life, the hierarchy, the Roman See.** No weapon has reckoned with greater dangers of social problems and so much success...”

Believing in the charism of our father and prophet, we could say that from the beginning we were founded and prepared with a federative character in order to unite in an integral manner the apostolic forces and, at present, are willing to collaborate with the great goal of Schönstatt, that of a universal apostolate.

5. - Conclusion:

If we now review in just few words all that has been said, I think we would conclude using the same words of Father Ernst from 1959 about Hörde:

“Precisely, why did [the Union] have the results it did? Why did certain things happen after Hörde? How come the seed did sprout? Humanly speaking, we couldn’t expect much, taking into consideration the inexperienced men which participated in the convention and who made Hörde’s program their own plan for life.

The answer would be [that] four aspects came together giving good results

- The right time
- The right message
- The right man, as founder and prophet
- The right graces.”

Today, we can say exactly the same. The present time, with all its challenges and possibilities, with its needs and demands is a new “kairós”, for us at this *our* right time. We possess precisely the universal message of the Covenant of Love with our Mother Thrice Admirable just as it was construed at the International Conference in preparation for 2014. The right man, our father and prophet, who blesses us and helps us from heaven, and the right graces, flowing from the cosmos of our shrines with the royal treasures we possess as Schönstatt Family.

All we have left, then, is to move forward [with impelling force] into the future once again, “joyful in hope, sure of victory into newest times.” We may not forget that our father, your father, my Father was a prophet and that from heaven his words echo in our souls:

Family of Unions!

Family of Schönstatt!, be not afraid, move forward securely, “joyful in hope, with Mary into the newest times.”