

**My dear union members,  
Schoenstatt Family and guests,  
brothers and sisters in faith,**

Today, five years before the great Golden Jubilee of our Schoenstatt Family we celebrate the founding of the Apostolic Union 90 years ago, at the Sodalist day in Hoerde, 1919. It is fitting that we meet here today. It seems to me that the Blessed Mother is now preparing us through this celebration for our jubilee in five years time.

By looking at Hoerde and all it means, the founding of the Apostolic Union can help us to ask the right questions in order to find and faithfully apply the answers we need as we emerge into the next century.

The sodalist day and the founding of the Apostolic Union means setting out and moving towards the future in difficult and challenging times. The end of World War 1 was not only a blow but it was the end of the German Empire with a great loss of territory.

Millions of people were disappointed, there was no leadership nor direction, only political fights on the home front. However, a completely different experience was also being made at that very same time:

We have the Sodalists from the Marian Congregation in Schoenstatt.

Not only did they continue to live their religious life, make efforts towards self-education and holiness on the battlefields and in the trenches, but they also developed new groups - the so-called external organisation. Trying to live an intensely religious life and sharing in groups saved them from isolation and inner withdrawal. They spoke to others. Their words rubbed off on them and gave them great encouragement. True religious life is infectious and leads to the apostolate.

Whatever they lived and experienced, what was given to them and what they understood, they wanted to pass on to the new times and apply all this to a new form fitting to the present times which would lead them into the future. Some of the fire which Jesus had was burning within them: "I have come to set the world on fire. How happy I would be if it were already aflame." (Luke 12:49)

So they decided to get together and found the Apostolic Union, which demanded from its members: "The serious striving towards the greatest amount of perfection possible according to their status in life and never – ending apostolic activity in all areas available."

Fr. Kentenich watched over everything very carefully from a distance as of 1916. Once he had worked through the idea from St. Vincent Pallotti very intensely for himself, he searched for a way to apply this vision: The Apostolic World Federation.

He was convinced that it was now necessary to take decisive steps to continue and further the work already done in the Marian Congregation and in the Pallotti community. Even when he made a virtue out of an emergency and had to cancel his participation at the Hoerde Conference, it all fitted **his** vision and concept. He already asked to be released of his other

duties in order to work freely and with more spirit for Schoenstatt on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1919 one month before the founding of the Apostolic Union.

One directive towards the founding of the Apostolic Union was also very much a second fundamental experience of our founder and the founding generation. Joseph Kentenich had already entrusted himself to the Blessed Mother at the age of nine. He admitted himself that she had led and formed him from that very day onwards. There is no other person in his life who had such influence on him. She was his educator. What made deep impressions on him and helped him form his life is what he passed on to his students. This is why he then began with his “programme” as Spiritual director to the boys: “Under the protection of Mary we want to learn to educate ourselves to be firm, free, priestly characters.” The boys were with him. They consecrated themselves to Our Lady. They made their covenant of love and they experienced how Our Lady became their Mother and educator. They felt the power of her education in their own personal lives. At the same time they soon felt how the chapel belonging to the *Congregation* in Schoenstatt became their home, a place of grace and at the same time the cradle of holiness. It was a living centre, a biotope of faith, a source of strength for their religious life and for all their commitments to Jesus Christ.

To them Mary was more than just a model and protectress. She was more than a mother who gathers everyone around her to protect them. They experienced her as their educator and guide in life in all their efforts. The first thing that Mary did when she heard she was to be the Mother of God’s Son was to set off. She set off over the mountains to help her cousin Elizabeth. She brought Christ to others before she even gave birth to Him. She is the first of her Son’s apostles. She is the woman of emergence. Our Lord entrusted his favourite disciple to her under the cross. (John 19:27). She was in the midst of the apostles when the Holy Spirit entered the upper room after Our Lord ascended into heaven. (Ap. 1:12/14). She is a very dynamic woman. It is only fitting therefore that we call her the Queen of the Apostles. This is also how the sodalists and the soldiers in the external organisation saw and experienced Our Lady as Queen. All of this streams forth into the founding of the Apostolic Union. Therefore it is very clear why Our Lady was the protectress right from the start and why Schoenstatt with the shrine and Our Lady are the central issues. This we are all of course very much aware of.

However, there is one more other point which I find is very important and has perhaps taken a back seat over the last few years. The Apostolic Union had its own slogan from the very beginning: *Caritas Christi urget nos* – The love of Christ impels us. (cf. 1 Cor. 5:14) This was used because of the link to the St. Paul and reminds us that St. Paul is the second patron of the Apostolic Union. This is why the theology student Fritz Ernst gave a very enthusiastic talk at the sodalist conference in Hoerde about St. Paul as the modern pastoral worker, the model apostle who stands his ground. (cf. H. Hug p.72, 89 German– Hörde) A report from Willi Waldbröhl describes him as the *pièce de résistance* of the conference. (Hörde p.89) This past year has brought St. Paul very much to mind once again. He can be a model and a guide for us in all our reflections for the next century. Now is the time for us to look to him once again. Just like Our Lady he stands for all that is apostolic in the Apostolic Union.

So what does all this mean for us today? What does this all mean for our future? What prospects do we then have for our entire Schoenstatt Family, as we go into the future? We are living in a time of progressive individualisation and growing individualism. Today it is all down to the individual. He/she is spoken to personally by God as an individual and God has called him/her by name. (cf. Isaiah 43:1). Through our covenant of love each one of us replies to this call. We gave our yes to our own way of faith, to self-education and to strive for

holiness. It is of course very clear to us that our efforts for holiness is always by following Christ and serves at the same time the aims of the apostolate, to stand up for Jesus Christ and help build his kingdom here on earth. Yes, for the love of Christ impels us! However it is not only about bringing the Christian message to our pluralistic society which offers so much, but about doing this in an enthusiastic, creative, confident and winning way. It is all about opening our hearts and the hearts of others, about showing ourselves from the best side, how we live and why our lives are so worthwhile.

This new, growing and aggressive atheism demands from us to stand up for our beliefs. It sees us as a very provocative and serious opponent. We do not want to provoke and fight but we do have to accept the challenge.

It is therefore very good that we are not alone, that from the union we live in this union, that we are united with each other. We live out of our covenant of love with the Blessed Mother and are at the same time united with each other. We are taken very seriously and supported by God in the covenant not just as individuals, but are also in complete indissoluble solidarity with each other. We are there for each other, strengthening each other, supporting each other. We share and support each other in our faith as well as in our apostolic activity.

In the covenant of love we talk about an exchange of gifts and tasks. We are courageous enough to say this of Our Lady and ourselves because we believe in the reality of our covenant and we make this experience time and time again. Union, our covenant, also means looking at the exchange of our gifts and tasks within the union and its members, who are our brothers and sisters in the union and in the covenant of love. This is an amazing and great source of strength for us.

Behind all this we can also see the great thoughts of St. Paul the Apostle who was transformed by Christ and was willing to serve Christ, live and die for Him as an apostle. That is why he says: "I no longer live but Christ lives in me!" (Gal. 2:20)  
Jesus Christ works through St. Paul and St. Paul is His "*dealer*". Whoever has been chosen and transformed by Christ cannot do anything but stand up for Him and proclaim the Gospel (Yet when I preach the Gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! cf. 1 Cor. 9:16)  
He also knows that Jesus is behind him all the way and so, full of trust, he can then say: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phil 4:13)

My dear unionists, members of our union,  
90 years have passed since that particular sodalist conference in Hoerde and the founding of the Apostolic Union. During all this time our family history has developed. The Apostolic league and the Institutes are now in play too. The Apostolic Union with the various union branches has lost nothing of its worth, quite the opposite! If I look at the challenge of this hour then I see the challenge not only for the unions in the future, but for a new beginning within our Church. This new beginning demands new seeds to be sown, new missions within our own countries. We have to become new apostles and set out on new initiatives just like St. Paul. With gratitude and joy I see how our Family Union is growing. The family is "foundation and crown" and point towards the future. At the same time so too does Our Lady. The development and growth of the Pilgrim Mother shows us just how much Our Lady is Mother of emergence and Queen of Apostles, willing to set out again today and take us with her. If the unions, our unions are the actual leaders and leading communities within our family in accordance with our founder's conception regarding our apostolic efforts, then we have a great many challenges before us as a union. Now let us set out anew!

In 1956 our father wrote that a very decisive moment for the founding of the Apostolic Union in 1919 was belief in the reality of the covenant of love. (Hörde p. 13) Our belief that God works in our world today and wants to use us as His witnesses, our belief in the reality of the covenant of love, that we are the covenant partners of the Blessed Mother and instruments in her hand, in the hand of the Queen of Apostles awakens tremendous gratitude in our hearts when we look back at our history and it gives us trust to dare a new beginning for the future. Our covenant Queen proceeds ahead of us and accompanies us. Let us set out anew!

Dr. Robert Zollitsch  
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