

In the language of love diversity does not create distance or separation but makes us enter into communion

HOERDE – AND NOW WHAT?, *Prof. Dr. Alejandro Blanco Araujo, La Plata, Argentina* •

Dear Schoenstatt Family!

Today's reflection begins with our experience in the Federation of Priests, which today has reached a goal for which we all have longed for a long time.

Today, exactly 100 years to the day after the foundation of the first Apostolic Federation of Schoenstatt – and only now – the priests of various regions of the worldwide Federation of Priests have formally and officially decided to found the International Federation of Schoenstatt Priests. That was a few hours ago in the Original Shrine, some of you were present as witnesses.

We have prepared for this event in a long process of more than ten years: We have connected our regions with each other, we have got to know our territories at the annual delegate meetings in different countries and we have shared our lives and work with each other.

It was an exciting task to get to know each other, respect each other and appreciate each other in our differences and wait for each other when our speeds were different. We now know our variety of customs; we have experienced our variety of landscapes and have absorbed our diverse lifestyles.

In the end, however, we have experienced the action of the Holy Spirit, who forged among us a communion that was not achieved through integration techniques, dynamic exercises or didactic means; we do not even speak a common language to communicate with one another. The community achieved is something completely different, because it was about learning to open our hearts to receive the other in his true otherness. This was above all a grace, a power of the Holy Spirit.

Hoerde, Pentecost of the Covenant of Love

The unique and original thing about the Apostolic Federation is that it plants the seed for the task of evangelization – the apostolate – in the form of an international, intercultural network that does not impose a single culture – European, Western – as a vehicle for the gospel, but rather allows itself to be enriched by the many ways in which the gospel is enculturated in the various cultures of the world.

Here in Argentina, in preparation of the Jubilee of Hoerde, a word appeared that inspired life during these years. It's called: "Hoerde – Pentecost of the Covenant of Love". It is no coincidence that the house of our Federation of Priests, our beloved Marienau, a beautiful representation of Pentecost – with Mary and the Apostles – dominates the house chapel. This is what the Apostolic Federation was from the beginning. Five years after this intimate event, in the silence of the small Chapel of the Marian Congregation, an eruption of the Holy Spirit opened to all men and women and flourished in a movement marked by unity in diversity of nationalities and living conditions. Hoerde is the beginning of this Pentecost, which will extend throughout our Schoenstatt movement throughout the world, in all our Home-Shrines that are deeply rooted in the peoples in which they were born.

Humanity must finally discover – of course I say this from a Christian-theological perspective – that according to the laws inspired by the Trinitarian mystery, in the dialectic of Love diversity is not what separates us, but what makes us Communion. The more affirmation of diversity and caring for it, the greater is communion, the greater is unity. It's the law of Trinitarian Life. We have experienced it as a grace of the Holy Spirit in this more than 10-years process that proceeded today's founding act.

From the outset, we believed that the basic norm for the development of our community should be to go through a process so long that regional autonomies have achieved a certain identity of their own and a certain local community maturity in order to constitute themselves as self-confident and autonomous federations. And that the development of these different autonomous poles and originals would at some point move towards the formation of an international federation united by autonomous decision of the regions.

We are convinced that this original way of organizing oneself internationally is in reality a fundamental mission, first for the church, then for the various socio-political structures of today.

The church must „synodalize“ itself. As we know, Pope Francis always insists on it, but of course he cannot do things alone. Synodalizing means learning, walking together, enriching oneself and respecting cultural diversity. Therefore, the church must be de-romanized, de-Europeanized. This does not mean denying the values of Roman and European traditions but integrating them into a culturally plural world that promotes various processes of inculturation.

In this sense, the Federation of Priests wanted and wants to continue to be a laboratory in which we can experiment this synodality.

Of course, the goal that we share is the same. In the founding of the Federation, this goal was named by the word “apostolate”, the word “Apostolic Federation” clearly marks this goal.

But in 1919 the church was still awakening that the apostolate was not the exclusive task of the clergy, but the task of every Christian. This awareness was only slowly awakened, and just at the moment when the Apostolic Federation was born, this awareness of apostolate of all began to spread, especially for the lay faithful.

It is necessary to remember that the Church of 1919 is not the Church after the Second Vatican Council. The Church today is no longer defined primarily as the community of baptized believers. “The Church is like a sacrament, i.e. a sign and instrument of communion of men with God and of men with one another”, says *Lumen Gentium* clearly.

Today the whole Church is clearly aware of the task of evangelization is the task of the whole community and of every Christian, as Paul VI says in *Evangelium Nuntiandi*: “The Church exists to evangelize”.

For this reason, we can say that the evangelizing conscience, the apostolic conscience is now the property of the whole Church.

The unique and original thing about the Apostolic Federation is not that it is “apostolic”, because that applies to the whole Church. In our family the “League” is apostolic par excellence, the Schoenstatt Institutes are apostolic also. We cannot imagine a Christian who is not an evangelizing Christian.

What is unique and original about the Apostolic Federation is that it understands the evangelizing task – the apostolate – in the form of an international and intercultural network which does not impose any culture –European, Western – in order to spread the Gospel, but is enriched by the manifold forms in which the Gospel is enculturated in the different cultures of the world.

This network cares about originality and diversity as a prerequisite for community and unity and commits itself to the difficult effort of walking together. Not like cattle of a herd following a direction, just one style and common habits imposed by a few. This is not the “free man” that Fr. Kentenich wanted to educate. That’s more like the “herd man”, as the Philosopher Nietzsche says.

Walking together means training patiently in the exercise of dissent, consent, concession and consensus. To always cultivate the Spirit, as our Father and Founder thought us, is the guarantee that our hearts are open to appreciate each other's originality.

I believe that on this anniversary of Hoerde, when we are founding the International Federation of Priests of Schoenstatt, the Blessed Mother expects a threefold matter of our Federation and of the Schoenstatt Federations as a whole:

1 – Within the Schoenstatt family

Let us begin with our traditional task within the Schoenstatt Family: We have to continue to fulfil our function as Pars Motrix. But watch out! This does not mean simply to compete with the League or the Institutes in our "degree" of apostolate, so that one could say that a federation member is more apostolic than a League member; this is a misunderstanding of our specific task. We must all be fruitful in our task as evangelizers, no one and no community or organization in Schoenstatt or in the Church as a whole must feel liberated from the task of being an evangelizer as far as possible. Therefore, it is not our task as pars motrix to be more apostolic, to do more than others, but to take care of the peculiarity of our federal vocation: that is that the whole movement lives as a great Federation, that the whole movement is a great network that cultivates the community in originality and diversity perpetually. This is the specific task of the Federation within the Schoenstatt family.

In the heart of the Schoenstatt Family, the Federations must be the guarantee for communion in diversity. It is important to avoid two extremes. On the one hand, the uniform imposition of a style and behavior by a central organ that goes beyond its function. And on the other hand, the segregation, the lack of community. Not common walking –synodality – but separate walking, dispersion, decomposition, has made us suffer so much in the Church. This should be the art that the Federations practice in the Schoenstatt Family: to cultivate the community in the diversity of originality of each person, each region, each people.

2 – Within the Church

The second task seems to me to be more oriented towards the Church: The Church must continue in a process of "synodalization" and overcome the imposition of style, Roman, European. In this sense, there is still a lot of tinsel to be removed from the liturgy and the customs in the Church as a whole. There are many habits to be changed, especially in the clergy. Not only the horrors of sexual abuse, but all forms of abuse, beginning with the abuse of power, and excessive accumulation and use of goods by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. These are princely forms of life which do not correspond to the style of the Gospel or even to the time in which we live.

Authoritarianism deserves a chapter on its own because Fr. Kentenich's struggle in the Church has a great deal to do with defending the respect for freedom and dignity of the human person.

He was particularly sensitive when individual freedom was disregarded. He knew how to hear the voice of God in people's most free and noble inner desires. This characterizes his high esteem for freedom as the way to fulfil God's desires. The voices of the soul as well as the voices of time are the means to distinguish the divine will. No less than the order of being.

This idea of personal freedom as a way to realize God's desires must be deepened by us, his disciples, and recognized in the Church. His special conception of freedom is the death certificate of the rule: "He who obeys never errs".

In our Federation of Priests in Argentina we have called this concept of freedom of Fr. Kentenich "prophetic freedom".

With this, Fr. Kentenich opens the way to an obedience of the heart that goes beyond obedience to the superiors. It is this law that is written in the hearts and of which St Paul speaks, the conscience (Rom 2:15), that allows St Peter to proclaim:

“It is necessary to obey God and not man” (Acts 5:29).

What is new about Fr. Kentenich is that “with his hand on the pulse of time and with his ear on the heart of God” he creates a sensitive balance between the voices of the soul, of time and of being.

The order of being was trapped in a labyrinth of moral and legal rules. As St Paul already warned, “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6).

That was an impoverishment in the understanding of what order of being is. This could happen because the voice of time and the voice of the soul were ignored or at least considered less important than the order of being to recognize the divine will.

“Prophetic freedom”, on the other hand, seeks a balance among the three in order to recognize the voice of God (discernment) and to decide for him. If we are unable to do this because we have not learned to educate ourselves to be free characters under Mary’s protection (miracle of our shrine), then we remain on the ancient shores of time.

Father Kentenich relies on the factor “time”: that is, God speaks in persons, communities and cultures in the long life processes.

And he is betting on the “soul” factor: God speaks through the intimate, free and noble desires of men. So, what a person does what he wants in his innermost, out of freedom, ennobled and educated, he effectively does what God wants.

This freedom sometimes requires bold crossing of extreme boundaries, just as Fr. Kentenich did in Dachau or Milwaukee.

Pope Francis clearly spoke of the overcoming of “clericalism” as a disease in the Church: There are habits that are not genuine traditions, but, (to use an expression from the famous Romano Guardini), it is simply a matter of “sweeping away” the habitual dust that sticks to us.

We must be open to the many creative ways in which cultures receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is essential for us, the Federations and members of Schoenstatt in general, to participate in every initiative, international or regional effort aimed at integrating diversity into pluralistic ecclesial unity, as Pope Francis desires for the Church.

3 – Within culture

The third challenge we face is to offer our model of international integration of culture in general and the current socio-political moment in which we live.

Today the world goes to a dangerous ledge. There is a return to nationalism that is disintegrating the community among the peoples. The walls are strengthened, the migrant, the other, is despised. Together with this, we see the re-emergence of xenophobic expressions, which we thought had been overcome.

The most worrying aspect of all this is the scepticism of the average citizen, who doubts the effectiveness of institutions for the integration of cultures and peoples.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations, efforts to create regional integration bodies that respect the dignity and sovereignty of their members, in short, modern democracy are like flags that we are not prepared to hand over. We are not a movement indifferent to these values, to the true conquests of modernity.

Fr. Kentenich's high esteem for the freedom and dignity of the individual, the human being, does not make us indifferent to the fall of these values into a pseudo- postmodernism.

We are not a pietist movement! We are not monarchists either. Definitely not!! This is not the Kentenich-School. We do not doubt authority, but we exercise it democratically. We are not anarchists and much less monarchists.

On the threshold of the world in which we live, these flags belong to Schoenstatt, and the Federations must be their special guardians.

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Original: Spanish, 22 August. Translation: Schoenstatt Priests` Federation