



*Pontifical mass at the 40th death day of Fr. Kentenich  
Pilgrim's Church, Schoenstatt  
September 14, 2008*

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Dear Schoenstatt Family, brother and sisters in the community of faith,

Not only do we in Schoenstatt look back over the last 40 years. Many others in our country and in all Europe do the same. In numerous television programs and in many articles in magazines and newspaper, this anniversary year is being discussed. For the year 1968 marks a clear turning point. For us in Schoenstatt is this turning point the homegoing of our Father and Founder, the completion of his earthly life and the fact that we had to continue on the journey into the future without direct and immediate contact with him.

For our country and for all of western Europe, the year 1968 means a marked and incisive turning. The protests and rebellion of the 60's generation dramatically changed our country and society, even the whole western world.

We were all extremely surprised, not only by the unexpected home-going of our founder, but also by the eruption of unrest, the student revolutions, and the kidnappings and murders of Red Army Fraction(RAF). And yet, Fr. Kentenich who had his hand on the pulse of the time and understood how to interpret the voice of the times, had already been pointing out for years that an old world was breaking up and a new world becoming. He foresaw the religious upheaval, the revolution, even the revolution in the order of being and strove for years to prepare his family for it. Yes, he was convinced that he had already given the answer, had anticipated it in his family.

It was on the evening of September 12, 1964. I found myself in Milwaukee with the Founder on a long walk in a personal conversation. We spoke about the marked point in the history of the family and soon landed at the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 1949 and the question of the theology and psychology of secondary causes. Very quickly I sensed that I had asked about Fr. Kentenich's sense of the past history. What occupied Fr. Kentenich more at this moment and what he wanted to pass on to me was something different. For him it was clear that the second Vatican council was the great turning point. He was convinced that Schoenstatt would now be understood; now would come the great challenge for us. He spoke about how Pope John XXIII had opened wide the doors and windows of the church so that the church could penetrate the world and recognize the questions of the present. He laid out what it

meant that the church, this apparently unshakable rock, had moved into action; he spoke of a “moving rock.” A rock that sets into movement and begins travel brings powerful jolts with it. Fr. Kantenich wanted to sharpen my view for the “*kairos*” and direct it toward the future. The glance to the past is for assurance and gratitude. It has to lead to the view to the future, and that is decisive.

This distinguished his attitude after his return to Schoenstatt and his statement in the last years of his life make this clear. So he clearly says in April 1968, “We are experiencing a revolution that we have hardly experienced before. Everything is wavering.” (April 30, 1968) And he casts a look ahead, to that which is becoming. He did leave i tat observations. He was always concerned to draw consequences in order to give an answer to the challenges of the present and to discover the future. Trusting in the working of the Spirit of God he looked to how the church of the future could take shape. So, shortly before his death he said, “We are all called to help in our way with building up, which at the same time gives us a new church, a church renewed in many dimensions. (to priests, Feb 17, 1968) For him, it was clear that the church has to set out on the way to something new if it wants to shape the world and society in the future. Set out on the something new, setting out into a new, yes, the newest time. That is a legacy of our founder, not just in his address to the Day for Catholics (Katholikentag) in 1968 in Essen. It is an imperative of his testament for us today. And when look at the situation of our Church in Germany, then we would say, exactly for today.

So many of our contemporaries – even those who are baptized and call themselves Christian – live today as if „etsi deus non daretur“ – as if there were no God. They do not reckon with the working of God in this world, in their lives, in the daily affairs. We in Schoenstatt, proceed from the God of life. We reckon with him and his working day by day. We have learned and practiced to seek out his traces in faith in providence. We make the experience that the living, almighty God works amongst us. He does not only work today. He want to show us the way into the future. It is necessary for us personally; it is necessary for us as a Schoenstatt Family; it is necessary for the way of the Church into the future and the contribution of our family as a movement of renewal. It is necessary to proclaim the God of life and to make what is given to us through our faith in providence and in the covenant of love tangible, to pass it on and to bring it into our church on its way into the future. The way of our family – past the walls of Schoenstatt - occurred in 1919 in Hoerde through the founding of the Apostolic Federation: the renewal of the church through the engagement of her members, apostolate for the laity, the universal call of every Christian to work for the kingdom of God.

From the beginning, the founder laid the foundation for this in his family as a commission from God. Since Pope Pius XI and Catholic Action and especially since the second Vatican council, we speak of the “maturity of the laity”. And some peddle the catch phrase, „the hour

of the laity“. We know that it isn't about the „hour of the laity“ because we have too few priests. The lack of priests is at best God's cue to us that challenges and compels us to think more deeply about the dignity and task of every Christian. As a lay movement, this has been given to our family from the beginning . We can pass on long years of experience and a constant path of faith with God as to what the laity can actively bring, engage in and responsibly shape in our Church. Therefore, we may experience how many men and women in our family take on responsibility in their branches and parish councils. I am amazed time and again how many give of themselves for our shrines and Schoenstatt centers and care for their life and fruitfulness. In no way do they do so as a stopgap, but rather based on their own vocation to family and society. If we look to everything that is already possible, then we may really be amazed. I am impressed when I hear how the Schoenstatt Boys Youth of Austria for some years have pulled off a number of summer camps without the accompaniment of a priest. What dynamism is alive in the Hungarian family movement, or how the pilgrim Mother, through the initiative of numerous laity, finds her way into the homes and residences of many people and receives a place there, many of whom would not have found their way into the Church without this action. Here we have a valuable service to provide our Church when it's about showing the church the way into the future, to express and live the collaboration between priests, religious and laity in a good and mutually appreciative way. It becomes clear that vocation doesn't first begin with ordination to the priesthood or consecration in a congregation. Rather every Christ has his vocation and calling. Precisely today, on the 40<sup>th</sup> death day of Fr. Kentenich we may be grateful to him that he showed us this was so early. We may be glad about many things of this nature that are alive in our movement. At the same time we are challenged to question about where this path goes on, how we fill it with life today. Above all, how we in the church can contribute to continuing going courageously in this direction. If we take a look at our surroundings with an alert eye, we see increasing individualism, the fact that more and more lifestyles are possible and stand next to one another. Without wanting to sanction this uncritically, while point out the meaning of community in contrast, we must acknowledge that individualism and the plurality of lifestyles shapes the feeling of life of people in our day. People do not like to be prescribed what to do and not do. While in many parishes these people find a home only with difficulty, Fr. Kentenich laid the foundation for a valuable approach to help them experience the beauty of the faith.

For Fr. Kentenich ascribes central importance to the spiritual process of each individual when he says, “Please do not take anything from me indiscriminately. Please review and take only that which you yourself have experienced.” He includes the experience of the individual in his spirituality. Not from the outside are the unshakable truths brought home; he trusts that the trace of God is foundational to the human person. He knows that what lives in me and what I

myself experience can establish a relationship with supernature. Life enkindles life and doesn't begin with what is proclaimed in the dogmas as true and certain. The life history of the individual counts. The covenant of love becomes visible in an exemplary way. It's about my personal vocation and calling, my individual expression of faith. There is no pre-prepare attitude that one has to conform to; what is decisive is how each individual personally fills the covenant of love with life on his path of faith. Fr. Kentenich takes the promise of God through the prophet Isaiah seriously, „I have called you by name. You belong to me. (Is. 43:1)

With this basic attitude he strikes the feeling of life of our day and simultaneously leads it further. For, precisely in the covenant of love we are invited to seal this covenant with each other and establish ties with one another, to network and bring us into community. Fr. Kentenich knows that with all the emphasis on the individual lifestyle, the human person has a great longing to develop enduring and deep relationships. This attachment through the covenant of love with the Blessed Mother is therefore so valuable because it touches the inmost layers of our souls. It is the individual and personal approach that doesn't confine, that leaves and esteems individual freedom that makes this way particularly attractive. "As much freedom as possible." This premise of our founder, in which he expresses his esteem for the calling of each individual, decisively shows how to bring people in touch with the faith. If they first see commandments and prohibitions, they are less approachable. Where they are personally addressed and where the deeper layers of the soul are touched, where they are taken seriously with their religious questions and welcomed without force, there pathways to faith in the living God open up, a great opportunity that is given to us in our movement through the personal path of faith in the covenant of love and the appreciation of one's own calling.

Dear sisters and brothers,

these pointers and experiences that we recall at the 40th death day of our founder make it clear that Schoenstatt can bring its rich treasure to the church. We do not need to hide and can help shape the future of the church proactively. It seems to me that we forget at times that Schoenstatt has been mustered as a movement of renewal. Fr. Kentenich challenges us with his greeting to the "Katholikentag 1968" in Essen as a legacy to look at the future. He calls to us with the words, "with Mary, full of hope and sure of victory into the newest time!" Not for the first time since I have become bishop have I heard from many people in charge in the parishes of their appreciation for the collaboration of the Schoenstatters. They are reliable, uncomplicated and loyal. They can be relied upon and are often the pillars in the parishes. What I hear about less is the innovative strength that Fr. Kentenich had as a basic

intention when he spoke of his vision of the church. Let us have the courage to tackle this intention of our founder! Yes, we have a modern, even challenging message to offer the church today. Precisely that was the intention of our father and founder. Not to wallow in the past, trying to conserve everything that was, but rather to see to it that the content of the faith is carried into and translated for the new time.

That led to a conflict with the Church without ceasing to love the Church. And that was how he saw Schoenstatt's task of helping to build the church on the new shore and help the second Vatican council's vision of the church become reality. The challenge and commission of the 4<sup>th</sup> milestone has become a concrete opportunity today. The doors stand wide open for us. We may see – with faith in providence – that in our time the international Schoenstatt center in Rome, in the heart of the church, can be built and become a reality as Fr. Kentenich long desired.

Dear sisters, dear brothers,

It depends on us to take up the possibilities that open up today! Let us be ready and have the courage to bring our many treasures into the church of our day! Let us be ready to go on this trip and also as Schoenstatters to go new ways. Let us have the courage to lead the way into the future and so inspire people for the faith anew. As decisive and foundational as the impetus is that our father and founder gave, so, above all, it depends on how we take his spirit and attitude into our time. Not what was contemporary during his life is what is timeless. But it is his fundamental attitude which is given to us as a legacy and enduring task. We have to carry this into our time always anew so that we do not answer new questions of our time with answers that fit forty or fifty years ago. Let us look, with a view to our great jubilee in 2014, where the doors are opening today and where we can carry Fr. Kentenich's commission further! Let us go courageously and with self-assurance through these doors in order to provide an expected and valuable service to the church for the renewal and deepening of the faith!

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