

BUILDING THE CHURCH OF OUR TIMES

1. Things are moving!

Things are moving fast!

Many things are moving fast in the catholic Church and also in our international Schoenstatt movement

50. Anniversary of Vatican II

20. Anniversary of the Catholic Catechism (October 11, 1992)

Resignation of Pope Benedict XVI in February 11, 2013

Election of Pope Francis in May 13, 2013

On the Schoenstatt field:

Donation of the Original Shrine by the Pallottine Community to Schoenstatt on September 22, 2013

Worldwide Opening of the Jubilee Year in October 18, 2013

October 18, 2014 Celebration of the 100 years of Schoenstatt

All these “things” that are nothing else than powerful signs of the Divine Providence for us, are challenging us and questioning us in our thinking, being and doing as movement of the catholic Church in this present time. We believe that we are living in times of change and we are invited to face this new chapter of the history creatively and timely as committed people of God. We could say that we are on the edge of a new time that is imploring a new image of Church that has the mission to be the soul of the world.

Let us briefly share some lights and inputs that are coming from Pope Francis at the beginning of his pontificate and then compare them with the vision that Fr. Joseph Kentenich had about the same epochal challenge in what we are living in the post conciliar Church. This will not be a comprehensive study but only suggestion to keep in mind in order to be alert and act with a new criterion and mentality especially in our apostolic work as schoenstatter.

The goal of this short talk is to get some tools, fresh ideas and impulses to help to build a Church for our times with the thoughts and words of both Pope Francis and Fr. Joseph Kentenich.

2. Pope Francis

Church is the faithful people of God

Pope Francis interview given to Fr. Spadaro from La Civiltà Cattolica, August 2013.

“The image of the church I like is that of the holy, faithful people of God. This is the definition I often use, and then there is that image from the Second Vatican Council’s ‘Dogmatic Constitution on the Church’ (No. 12). Belonging to a people has a strong theological value. In the history of salvation, God has saved a people. There is no full identity without belonging to a people. No one is saved alone, as an isolated individual, but God attracts us looking at the complex web of relationships that take place in the human community. God enters into this dynamic, this participation in the web of human relationships.

Church that is merciful and heal wounds, that is mother and shepherdess

“I see clearly,” the pope continues, “that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up.

“The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of mercy above all. The confessor, for example, is always in danger of being either too much of a rigorist or too lax. Neither is merciful, because neither of them really takes responsibility for the person. The rigorist washes his hands so that he leaves it to the commandment. The loose minister washes his hands by simply saying, ‘This is not a sin’ or something like that. In pastoral ministry we must accompany people, and we must heal their wounds.

“How are we treating the people of God? I dream of a church that is a mother and shepherdess. The church’s ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel. God is greater than sin. The structural and organizational reforms are secondary – that is, they come afterward. The first reform must be the attitude. The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people’s night, into the darkness, but without getting lost. The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials. The bishops, particularly, must be able to support the movements of God among their people with patience, so that no one is left behind. But they must also be able to accompany the flock that has a flair for finding new paths.

Church has to show the heart of the message of Jesus Christ

“We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods. This is not possible. I have not spoken much about these things, and I was reprimanded for that. But when we speak about these issues, we have to talk about them in a context. The teaching of the church, for that matter, is clear and I am a son of the church, but it is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time.

“The dogmatic and moral teachings of the church are not all equivalent. The church’s pastoral ministry cannot be obsessed with the transmission of a disjointed multitude of doctrines to be imposed insistently. Proclamation in a missionary style focuses on the essentials, on the necessary things: this is also what fascinates and attracts more, what makes the heart burn, as it did for the disciples at Emmaus. We have to find a new balance; otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel. The proposal of the Gospel must be more simple, profound, radiant. It is from this proposition that the moral consequences then flow.

“I say this also thinking about the preaching and content of our preaching. A beautiful homily, a genuine sermon must begin with the first proclamation, with the proclamation of salvation. There is nothing more solid, deep and sure than this proclamation. Then you have to do catechesis. Then you can draw even a moral consequence. But the proclamation of the saving love of God comes before moral and religious imperatives. Today sometimes it seems that the opposite order is prevailing. The homily is the touchstone to measure the pastor’s proximity and ability to meet his people, because those who preach must recognize the heart of their community and must be able to see where the desire for God is lively and ardent. The message of the Gospel, therefore, is not to be reduced to some aspects that, although relevant, on their own do not show the heart of the message of Jesus Christ.”

The Pope: How the Church will change.

Dialogue between Francis and La Repubblica’s founder Eugenio Scalfari, October 1, 2013

Your Holiness, you wrote that in your letter to me. The conscience is autonomous, you said, and everyone must obey his conscience. I think that's one of the most courageous steps taken by a Pope.

"And I repeat it here. Everyone has his own idea of good and evil and must choose to follow the good and fight evil as he conceives them. That would be enough to make the world a better place."

Is the Church doing that?

"Yes, that is the purpose of our mission: to identify the material and immaterial needs of the people and try to meet them as we can. Do you know what agape is?"

Yes, I know.

"It is love of others, as our Lord preached. It is not proselytizing, it is love. Love for one's neighbor, that leavening that serves the common good."

Love your neighbor as yourself.

"Exactly so."

Jesus in his preaching said that agape, love for others, is the only way to love God. Correct me if I'm wrong.

"You're not wrong. The Son of God became incarnate in the souls of men to instill the feeling of brotherhood. All are brothers and all children of God. Abba, as he called the Father. I will show you the way, he said. Follow me and you will find the Father and you will all be his children and he will take delight in you. Agape, the love of each one of us for the other, from the closest to the furthest, is in fact the only way that Jesus has given us to find the way of salvation and of the Beatitudes."

However, as we said, Jesus told us that love for one's neighbor is equal to what we have for ourselves. So what many call narcissism is recognized as valid, positive, to the same extent as the other. We've talked a lot about this aspect.

"I don't like the word narcissism", the Pope said, "it indicates an excessive love for oneself and this is not good, it can produce serious damage not only to the soul of those affected but also in relationship with others, with the society in which one lives. The real trouble is that those most affected by this - which is actually a kind of mental disorder - are people who have a lot of power. Often bosses are narcissists".

Many church leaders have been.

"You know what I think about this? Heads of the Church have often been narcissists, flattered and thrilled by their courtiers. The court is the leprosy of the papacy."

The leprosy of the papacy, those were his exact words. But what is the court? Perhaps he is alluding to the curia?

"No, there are sometimes courtiers in the curia, but the curia as a whole is another thing. It is what in an army is called the quartermaster's office, it manages the services that serve the Holy See. But it has one defect: it is Vatican-centric. It sees and looks after the interests of the Vatican, which are still, for the most part, temporal interests. This Vatican-centric view neglects the world around us. I do not share this view and I'll do everything I can to change it. The Church is or should go back to being a community of God's people, and priests, pastors and bishops who have the care of souls, are at the service of the people of God. The Church is this, a word not surprisingly different from the Holy See, which has its own function, important but at the service of the Church. I would not have been able to have complete faith in God and in his Son if I had not been trained in the Church, and if I had not had the good fortune of being in Argentina, in a community without which I would not have become aware myself and my faith. "

Church that must go out!

Pope Francis addressing leaders of ecclesial movements in Rome, May 18, 2013

Times of crisis, like the one we are living through — you said earlier that “we live in a world of lies” — this time of crisis, beware, is not merely an economic crisis. It is not a crisis of culture. It is a human crisis: it is the human person that is in crisis! Man himself is in danger of being destroyed! But man is the image of God! This is why it is a profound crisis!

At this time of crisis we cannot be concerned solely with ourselves, withdrawing into loneliness, discouragement and a sense of powerlessness in the face of problems. Please do not withdraw into yourselves! This is a danger: we shut ourselves up in the parish, with our friends, within the movement, with the like-minded... but do you know what happens? When the Church becomes closed, she becomes an ailing Church, she falls ill! That is a danger. Nevertheless we lock ourselves up in our parish, among our friends, in our movement, with people who think as we do... but do you know what happens? When the Church is closed, she falls sick, she falls sick. Think of a room that has been closed for a year. When you go into it there is a smell of damp, many things are wrong with it. A Church closed in on herself is the same, a sick Church.

3. The vision of Fr. Joseph Kentenich about Church and its mission

Features of the New Image of the Church

With great sureness of touch Joseph Kentenich evaluated the controversies surrounding the image of the Church and the Constitution on the Church as the heart and core of the Council that had just ended. He was certain that at the Council the Church had arrived at a new image of itself, and that this image differed radically from earlier manifestations of the Church and its understanding of itself. He expressed the difference in the image of a rock that does not remain motionless. The rock has begun to move. The rock has become a pilgrim rock. Suddenly the ancient image of a ship takes on new meaning. The Church is setting sail and is daring to make for the high seas. Joseph Kentenich noted this new experience of the Church. He welcomed the fact that the Church was setting sail, and that at the Council it had arrived at a new understanding of itself and a new fundamental attitude.

He then engagingly worked out for his audience those features of the Church he had encountered in the documents of the Council. He began to sketch the features of the renewed Church in the spirit of Lumen Gentium.

- *“It is a Church that, on the one hand, is profoundly and wholeheartedly bonded to tradition, although, on the other hand, it is extremely free, it is detached from rigid, traditional forms.”*
- *“It is a Church that is profoundly united in a fraternal sense, while at the same time being hierarchically governed and directed in a truly fatherly way.”*
- *“It is a Church that has the mission to become the soul of our present-day and future culture and world.”*
- *Then he drew the Marian features of the Church with particular love. The new Church will be a Marian Church. Mary is the “Mother and Model of the Church”.*
- *On 2 February 1966, in a talk dealing with the image of the Church after the Second Vatican Council, he added to his characterization of the renewed Church. For him it was important that it is “a poor Church” that “increasingly takes leave of customary pomp”, “is a friend of the poor, and not constantly begging the state for benevolence and friendship”.*
- *A Church that does not rely on riches and political power will be open to the working of the Spirit in a completely new way. So he described “a Church that is governed by the Holy Spirit at every level”.*
- *Finally, he described the ideal of a “humble Church that confesses its guilt and has the courage to ask for forgiveness”.*

From Peter Wolf (ed), Joseph Kentenich’s View of a Renewed Church, Selected Texts, Translated by Mary Cole

1 The Pilgrim Rock

We know how long and how vehemently the Council discussed the features, the new features of this Church. So let us ask ourselves: How can we describe this Church when compared with that of the past?

The answer? It is a Church with a new and original identity. It is a Church that, on the one hand, is profoundly and wholeheartedly bonded to tradition, although, on the other hand, it is extremely free, it is detached from rigid, traditional forms.

It is a Church that is profoundly united in a fraternal sense, while at the same time being hierarchically governed and directed in a truly fatherly way.

It is a Church that has the mission to become the soul of our present-day and future culture and world.

Would it be worth our while to dwell upon the details to some extent? I really don’t know what I should stress in a special way. Should I remind you that the ancient concepts of the Church now retreat more strongly into the background in favour of the new features of the Church?

For us it is particularly significant that the Council liked to say that the present Church sees itself as a pilgrim Church. That is to say, it is not finished, it is not completed, it is a pilgrim Church. What does it mean when we say it is on pilgrimage? It has to take up the most varied elements to the left and right of its pilgrim way, its pilgrim existence, its pilgrimage through history. It has to see to it that these elements set their stamp in an essential way on its features, its time-bound features. It is a pilgrim Church.

From: J. Kantenich: Address at the symbolic laying of the foundation stone in Rome, 8.12.1965.

2 Fraternally United

The second characteristic of the Church – let me put it this way - this Church is meant to be united by the extremely tender, deep, and fervent love of brothers and sisters. It is the relationship of brothers and sisters, and it is united in a way that at the same time acknowledges a hierarchical government and hierarchical leadership.

If we once again compare this second characteristic with the image of the Church in the past, we know what the Church was like formerly, we know how we have experienced it ourselves to a large extent. It wasn't the love of brothers and sisters that united the people, or united them with the leaders of the Church. It was, on the one hand, a rigid mastery, a hierarchy that possessed an all-comprising responsibility and authority and, on the other, a people – I would almost say – that was debilitated, that lived from a lack of responsibility, a lack of co-responsibility. That is how crass the contrast was.

From: J. Kantenich, Address at the solemn laying of the foundation stone in Rome, 8.12.1965

3 Making the Church present in the world

The future of the Church essentially depends on whether, and to what extent, the members of the Church manage to make this Church present in the world today. We probably won't understand that statement immediately. Can we see to some extent how it differs from what I said just now? I said that in itself the Church was a single, great block. People had to come to it. And now? The Church has to make its presence felt everywhere. Where? Wherever the members of the Church find themselves. That is where it must be present. So, the people do not have to come to the Church, the Church has to go out into the world. When we talk of the Church, who is meant? I am the Church! Wherever I, a member of the Church, find myself, there is the Church! Wherever I am I have to make the Church present.

So how can we describe the world today? It is a world that is torn to and fro by dreadful needs. We may think of the underdeveloped peoples, of the tremendous famines spreading all over the world. I have to go into the world; the Church has to go there! Not

the Church as an organization, at least not in the first place - the Church goes there in me if I have a task to carry out there, or if I want to find a task there.

Let us ask again: How can we describe the world? It is a world that is reaching out towards a tremendous unity, something that has never happened before. Unity! In what does it want to be united? And what is my task in this world that is struggling to bring about this powerful unity? I have to be a stone, a living, Christian, Catholic stone in this present-day struggle for unity, because the Church cannot exclude itself from it. It may not remain in the background, otherwise the world will go its own way, and the Church will go its own way, and the two will increasingly tear each other apart.

Can we now understand to some extent what the first principle means: The future of the Church depends on all the members of the Church, each in his or her own way, making the Church present wherever they are?

From: J. Kentenich, Sermon for the German Parish of St Michael in Milwaukee, USA, 8.11.1964

To put it another way – it is an expression Pius XII used – the Church must again prepare itself to be the life principle of the world today. Not the life principle of a world in the past, but of today! The world has separated itself from the Church; indeed the world looks upon the Catholic Church today as an ancient memory, something left over from ancient times that will be destroyed if not tomorrow, then the day after. And now? The Church has become aware that it has to be the life principle, that is, the soul of the present-day world, the world that is the enemy of the Church and of God, that flees from the Church and from God. That is the changed attitude.

From: J. Kentenich, Sermon to the German Parish of St Michael in Milwaukee, USA, 15.11.1964.

4 The Church for our times a Marian Church

Mary is a member of the Church and
Mother of the Church

If we would now like to go into details, if we would now like to ask: Well, how did the Council see the position of the Blessed Mother in relation to the Church? We will first have to note briefly what we have discussed together in such detail. It first of all depicted the Blessed Mother as an original member of the Church, and then as the Mother of the Church.

She is an original member. Let us briefly recall for a moment the powerful and important expressions it used in this regard, because they are so filled with meaning. The Blessed Mother is, they said, an original member of the Church. She is a member of the Church just as we are, so she is on our level, but she is an original member of the Church.

Actually we take this for granted. If, according to the mind of the Church, we have to learn from her how to participate actively in Holy Mass, this will be most effective if we are convinced that she is also a member of the Church, just as we are, although naturally she is an original, unique member.

The three expressions, which were new to us, but which we can understand to some extent, are: The Blessed Mother is, first of all, the archetype of the Church, secondly, she is the original image of the Church, thirdly, she is the ideal image of the Church. ...

So if the Blessed Mother is the archetype and image of the Church, it is as though we are on the same level, we are equals. Hence the well-known saying: the "Mother Church" and our "Mother Mary". Our Mother Church – so the Church is also a mother, just as the Blessed Mother is a mother.

It is highly significant what this implies – the Blessed Mother is simply the archetype of the Church, the image of the Church. They share the same: Mother and Mother. They are inwardly connected both with regard to their function and their fruitfulness.

Secondly, she is also the original image of the Church – not vice versa! The Church is not the original image of the Blessed Mother, but vice versa. *Ecclesia imitatur matrem ecclesiae, matrem Mariam.* What does that mean? The Church imitates the motherhood (the Mother Church) of the Blessed Mother. So who is the original image? It is the Blessed Mother as we have described her. This is true not only with regard to the historical sequence, but also according to her value. We have coined the classic saying: In the Holy Spirit the Church lives not only from the fullness of Christ, but also from the fullness of the Blessed Mother. A very important statement.

Finally, the Blessed Mother is the ideal image of the Church. St Augustine repeatedly taught us this, using the very same words. He stressed that she is the pre-eminent member of the Church. We have proved this by using the new formulation of the Church as it saw itself at the Council: The Church is the People of God. So the Church distanced itself from a purely juridical understanding of the Church, and instead depicted its innermost nature from the point of view of the "People of God". What is the Blessed Mother in this People of God? She is the pre-eminent member of the People of God. If we look at the Church from the point of view of Christ's mystical body, what is the Blessed Mother? The heart of this mysterious body of Christ. If we look at the Church from the point of view of the Bride of Christ, we feel that in every respect it is true to say that the Council saw the Church more profoundly in the way it understood itself. The image of the Blessed Mother takes on a new form each time, it is always radiantly in the first place.

From: J. Kentenich, Sermon for the German parish of St Michael in Milwaukee, USA, 27.12.1964.

5 Poor Church and Friend of the Poor

Secondly, what has the Council promised? We can all remember this well, and we still hear about it now and again today, or read about in the literature. The Council wanted a renewed Church that deserves to be characterized as *a poor Church*. So it wanted to give up the pomp it inherited from the time of the Renaissance, and that has been generally accepted since the time of Constantine. So this is not just a Church that is marked by poverty, but also a friend of the poor, a friend of those who are not given preferential treatment by the society of the Church, or society as a whole.

From: J. Kentenich, Address to the Province of St Michael of the Institute of Schoenstatt Priests in the Marienau, 17.2.1968.

6 Trust in the breakthrough of the Spirit

It should be and become a Church that is governed through and through by the Holy Spirit. So it is a Church that does not trust so much in the protection of the state, it is a Church that does not trust so much in its own laws, in safety laws. This does not mean that all these things have to be radically excluded, but they should only be called upon in the second place. The heart and centre of the Church is that is governed by the Holy Spirit, it has exposed itself unconditionally to the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit.

Allow me at this point to draw your attention to a point that has been very much in the foreground of our whole Schoenstatt history, our Family history. The first retreat course we held together concluded with a thought that recurred repeatedly in the following months: God has broken into our Family history! The breakthrough of the divine! Please do not forget that the great promise – I will prove this later – the greatest promise, was what the Council has given the Church and world. Trust in the breakthrough of the divine into the Church! Stand in divine light!

We could now repeat all that has been said in this context. Not in human light! That is to say, all that is human, all that is earthly, indeed, all help on the part of the state, has to be strongly restrained. Ultimately we have to stand in divine light, in divine confidence, in divine strength, in divine security!

Please do not forget how strongly the promise John XXIII gave to the Church and world tended in this direction through the Council. We may even admit, when we again look back and ponder on all that has come into existence, when we recall many situations during the Council, that Pentecost has been renewed. I think we have to admit most gratefully that there were times and situations when we really could say that the Holy Spirit came down upon the Council, and through the Council in every respect on the new Church, or the Church that has again to be renewed.

From: J. Kentenich, Conference for Priests, 10.2.1968.

7 A Church that is thoroughly humble

To continue, how must the Church appear today in contrast to the Church of yesterday? A Church that is humble through and through. A sinful Church. That is to say, it is a Church that confesses its sinfulness; it is a Church that freely and openly asks for forgiveness on account of all the sins it has committed in the course of the millennia. You can already feel that this is quite a different picture. You can already feel that the features have changed. What will these features be in detail tomorrow or the day after? It is obviously easy to sketch these features quickly, however it is not so easy to realize them.

From: J. Kentenich, Address to the Province of St Michael of the Institute of Diocesan Priests in the Marienau, 17.2.1968.

8 Prophetic Pilgrim versus Settled Church

So let me repeat: The settled Church has secured its existence by means of a host of laws.

Secondly, the settled Church depends on things going well, that there is enough to eat and drink. Of course, this does not mean that the Pilgrim Church doesn't have to do this as well. But in this instance it is a central aim and purpose. Settled – everything has to be fixed and secure!

Of course – to paraphrase this somewhat – a member of this settled Church wants to be well off not just here on earth, but also up in heaven! And if what the Church has to say about the bliss of heaven is correct, and if I want to become a citizen of this new, settled Church, it is natural for me to listen to what is required and then carry it out by the skin of my teeth. The only thing is that it may not shake me, it may not unsettle me. I want to be well off here on earth in the settled Church, and I also want to be well off up in heaven in the settled Church. Can you understand what all this implies? Every bit of daring is dying.

I want to put it even more harshly, I want to emphasize it even more clearly, so I think I will have to say that in the long run faith has to become consumptive in a settled Church. Genuine, supernatural faith has to become consumptive. Why? Because life – may I call it a bourgeois lifestyle, also a religious bourgeois lifestyle? You can play around with expressions. What matters is to capture the whole life process correctly. In such a bourgeois lifestyle faith has to lose an essential characteristic – its daring! I don't dare any more! I don't dare to give up anything, for example, this or that bourgeois item, if the faith, or if God's Spirit demands this or that of me. I don't dare to live the spirit of Christianity; I am happy if I manage to uphold the laws by the skin of my teeth. I don't dare any more!

So when we lament today because the faith has become consumptive everywhere, or is going that way, and when we look for reasons, we will find an important reason here: The faith that we cultivated for centuries was a false, consumptive faith. It has lost the habit of daring in every respect.

From: J. Kentenich, Retreat for the Schoenstatt Fathers, 4-11.1966.