



54. Organic Thinking and Loving

The literary form of the following text is unique in Fr Kentenich's writings: a dialogue between Peter and Paul. It is obvious that he is using "Paul" as a pseudonym for himself. Throughout his life Fr Kentenich identified in a special way with St Paul, and he used this name as a pseudonym also in Dachau.

In the meantime it has transpired that "Peter" was the pseudonym for a former student in the founding period, who later became Novice Master and Pallottine Provincial – Fr Heinrich Schulte. This dialogue can be found in the third of the five instalments that make up the "Epistola perlonga", and is connected with 31 May 1949, even though this extract was only written in July 1949. Fr Kentenich's basic thesis is the confrontation between an organic and mechanistic mentality. He points out that in our present times a levelling mass culture has spread rapidly, a development which is decisive in preventing people from growing soundly within an organism of natural and supernatural bonds. What matters above all is to see earthly realities in their inner context, and to reflect on them as a symbol of the supernatural reality. Methodologically this results in the law by which supernatural and natural realities are reciprocally transferred and transmitted.

The dialogue applies Fr Kentenich's fundamental conviction to two practical instances in the context of love:

- 1. How are we to understand that a foundation such as Schoenstatt may see itself as God's "favourite occupation", and human beings as God's "favourite children"?*
- 2. How, and to what degree – especially with celibate people – may the heart be involved in personal relationships, especially from the point-of-view that in the end God has to be the supreme value that should make us independent of earthly bonding?*

The text is taken from "Epistola perlonga", Part II (Moriah Patris 9/II), Berg Moriah 1996, S. 181-194.

I would like to express what has to be said in this regard in the form of a conversation. The two people involved will be called **Peter** and **Paul**.

Peter: Schoenstatt's ideas and terminology are so watertight that they can survive any criticism. There is only one point that presents me with a problem. ... Schoenstatt calls itself "God's and the Blessed Mother's favourite occupation and creation". To me this seems exaggerated and presumptuous. If Schoenstatt would be more modest and simply speak of being one of God's favourite occupations, there would be no objections. I am convinced that no one would have any difficulties with that. ...

Paul: Schoenstatt has never wanted to say anything else. From the beginning until today the statement in question has always been understood in an affirmative sense, never exclusively. It has never stressed the little word "the", but has always spoken it in the same breath and with the same emphasis as the other parts of a sentence. It is only too well aware that it cannot compare itself with other communities in the Church. To use a saying of St Francis de Sales, they form a huge and glorious ship. In comparison, we are only a tiny boat. They can, far more than we, claim the honourable title mentioned before. Some have proved themselves for centuries; they have borne outstanding fruit for the Church ...

Whoever studies them and their expressions of life will soon discover that although the conviction that they are God's favourite occupation has been ineradicably alive in them, they have hardly spoken about it. They did not find it necessary to do so, because their whole attitude to life⁹³ was permeated by it. The situation was different at the beginning of their history. The things that are a possession and function today were a radiant idea at that time, a great task for the first generation – in a way that is similar with us today. It took quite a time before this idea had become so much part of them that it functioned as an immanent motivation. By the way, this process is very similar to the one undergone by the early Christians.

Whoever takes the time to follow up the history of the Church and religious communities will find that God always awakened great leaders when this attitude was endangered. These leaders had the task to renew the founding history, as it were; they had to awaken a distinctive founder-awareness in the individual members, and tap the graces of the foundation, while applying both to the new circumstances of the times. Whoever has gained an insight into the inner life processes of the Orders, will know how seriously they have tried at all times to awaken an awareness in their members that they had been chosen and given a mission for the present moment. They had to arouse new forces and new enthusiasm, in order to overcome the tendency to rest upon the laurels of their glorious history as though on a comfortable cushion. If the general process of dissolution of all life continues, which has already begun, all the Orders and religious communities which do not want to fall victim to the storms, will be faced with the same question. The same applies to the Church. All without exception have to reach back to the praxis of the founder generation. They have to see to it that the clearly grasped original idea again becomes a function. So what we are doing in this regard will sooner or later become universally applicable.

⁹³ *Lebensgefühl*.

Peter: If that is the case, why don't you express yourself more precisely? If you were to consider expressing the acknowledged facts in more precise language, that is, if you would be satisfied with stating that, like countless other communities, Schoenstatt is God's and the Blessed Mother's favourite occupation, many misunderstandings would from the first be impossible, and many disquieting tensions would never arise.

Paul: In an academic lecture given to the general public we would without doubt have to speak in this way; however, the situation is different if you are speaking as an educator directly to a closed circle of members. Actually it is natural that in such cases you express general truths in a concrete and tangible form. Notice what you yourself do when you conduct retreats for priests and religious.

Peter: That's true. Last night I spent a long time turning over these questions. Yesterday's discussion stimulated me to do so. I am completely baffled. Abstract reflection objects to the formulation: We are God's favourite occupation. So why have I nevertheless used it unconsciously in retreats until now? I suspect that I will continue to do so in the future.

Paul: This disharmony is based on the specific structure of your soul. By nature you are inclined to be one-sided and abstract in your thinking. This tendency was more strongly developed by your professional studies as philosopher. Besides, it could be that you have not yet completely overcome the philosophical idealism of the centuries. That is why you constantly think in universal terms. It is fortunate that unconsciously you have preserved a sufficiently sound instinct, and so much valuable closeness to life, that as soon as you are working as pastor and educator you unconsciously concretise and individualise these universals. ... You are in the habit of saying: I am objective in my approach, while you, Paul, are subjective. You like to compare yourself with Alois.⁹⁴ You examine the relationship you both had to your former educator⁹⁵ and come to the conclusion that Alois is governed by his heart, while, despite all attachment, you remain objective and first examine the idea. – You deceive yourself. If you want to express exactly what has taken on form and life in both parties, you will have to tell yourself: I am one-sidedly abstract. You, Paul, – the same applies to Alois – are oriented to life. In both cases the orientation is completely objective.

Peter: That's true. For me that is a liberating and binding new insight.

Paul: As soon as the sound soul is alone with God, it begins to individualise.⁹⁶ This is always the case when a person is face to face with another person. That person does not then pray, "I am one of ...", but, "I am the bride of your heart". In his book "*Theotimus*",⁹⁷ St Francis de Sales stated, "The soul that is in the state of grace is the (not 'a') bride of the Lord ... If it commits a sin, it faints spiritually."

Paul was enthusiastic about the thought: *Dilexit me et tradidit semetipsum pro me* ... He does not say: *Etiam pro me sicut pro aliis*,⁹⁸ which would have been the right way to put it, seen metaphysically. In his retreat, Ignatius guides the soul to meditate on the suffering of our Lord and at the end

⁹⁴ This probably refers to Fr Menningen.

⁹⁵ Most probably Fr Kentenich himself when he was Spiritual Director in Schoenstatt (1912- 1919).

⁹⁶ That is, a person takes a general truth and sees and expresses it in his or her very personal relationship to God.

⁹⁷ Published in English under the title, *Treatise on the Love of God*.

⁹⁸ He loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2,20) – Not: *also for me in the same way as for others*.

to consider: *Et omnia haec propter me* ... He does not say: *Etiam propter me* ...⁹⁹ You understand what I am driving at.

The immediate community may and must be seen as our extended self. That is why the same principles apply here to community prayer as with individual, personal prayer. That is to say, normally the educator and preacher automatically individualises abstract ideas. Whoever does not do so, or whoever prevents others from doing so, unconsciously helps to depersonalise both God and human beings.

It sounds more personal and has a greater effect if I spontaneously say: I am ... You are ... We are God's favourite occupation, than if I formulate it abstractly: I am .. we are one of God's many favourite occupations. Doing so reminds one of people standing neatly formed in rows; it is an expression of depersonalisation and is also a means to deepen it. In an age when people are increasingly losing their identity, we have to be most careful to avoid everything that will increase this terrible malady of our times. Instead we have to cultivate with great love whatever will help to overcome it. In my opinion, the question on its own is a sign of infection.

Peter: It becomes increasingly obvious to me that I have fallen prey to a certain one-sidedness.

Paul: Observe what you do as educator. It could not have been easy for you to lecture in philosophy while at the same time being an educator. Nevertheless your educational activity met with great success. Have you ever given yourself an account of the reason for this? It is because you always proclaimed clear ideas, and tried with extraordinary selflessness to serve others. The object of your educational work was an extremely highly striving elite that was hermetically sealed off from the world by circumstances. Your style is excellent for leading life that is there, preserving it from going astray, and showing it clear goals. However, I do not think you would be able to create a movement and keep it alive, unless you managed to move away from your philosophical abstractions and enter more deeply into life, to formulate what you have to say more graphically, tangibly and concretely, and through your own spontaneous – albeit tamed – fullness of life to awaken a similar fullness in your followers.

Peter: Our conversation brings me to another question that has bothered me for a long time. What would you say if I told you that I could never have described myself personally as the favourite child of my parents?

Paul: Does that mean that your parents neglected you and preferred your brothers and sisters?

Peter: No, I wouldn't say that. My sister, as the youngest child and only girl, was a special favourite of our parents. However, this does not mean that they did not love me. Nevertheless, I cannot say, also when I am on my own: I am my parents' favourite child. I simply can't bring myself to say that.

Paul: A bit of imbalance in your character breaks through again in this instance. By the way, I was also like that in the past. I was too strongly oriented to ideas and tasks, so I could not bear it if someone gave me their heart, or if I noticed that I wanted to love them. At first sight this looks like virginal integrity, but it is by no means the case. On the contrary, it is completely impersonal love; it is a one-sided cult of ideas that is alienated from life; it is a sign of a heart that is buried alive; it

⁹⁹ And all because of me – Not, also because of me.

shows a lack of spontaneity and maturity; it is proof that in large part I suffered from an impersonal mass-mindedness so that I could not manage to say “I” clearly and consciously, but preferred to use an impersonal “one”, and hence was disposed to being compelled by ideas and obsessions unless life had brought about a change at the right moment.

If you look at yourself more closely, you will have to come to a similar diagnosis of yourself. That is why your nature lacks fresh and bubbling life. There is a slight compulsion about all your movements. You are still far too little open towards values that are foreign to you; you do not absorb them naturally, you do not allow yourself to be enriched and complemented by them... Although you love, you primarily love ideas, not people. Your love of God is the same. You love an idea in God far more than God himself. Your calm is, far more than you know, philosophical and stoical in nature, but not so much the result of being personally embraced by a personal God. It is not easy to preserve and cultivate the fresh and sound life of the soul. Yet it is so necessary if we do not want to fall prey to the secret and open enticements of Bolshevism.

Peter: I deeply love all whom I was allowed to educate, but I don’t dare to admit it even to myself. I am even less prepared to let others notice or know it.

Paul: There you have the confirmed bachelor who compulsively hangs on to ideas! Again this is a new proof that my diagnosis is correct. I know that it is dangerous today to talk in public about love. You always expose yourself to the danger of being misunderstood. Love and sensuality are usually seen as the same thing today.

Many years ago, when I enlarged on St Francis de Sales’ ideas of perfect joy and perfect love in a course for priests, a worthy retired Dean said to me, “You can’t say such things from the pulpit. It is always interpreted as sensuality.” So pedagogical writers prefer to talk about kindness rather than love. ... All this shows how rare a sound organism of bonding is. Here you find too few personal attachments, there insufficient attachment to ideas, places or forms. ... That is why collectivism has such an easy time. Unfortunately the minority of educators see the inner connections. What will be the end result?

In its first stage, every form of love is shy. It deliberately avoids giving visible signs. Once it is more mature, it can behave simply and naïvely without danger ...

From this you can understand the pedagogical testament of Don Bosco. He admitted, “My pedagogy is a daughter of love”. That is why he admonished, “If you want someone to obey you, see to it that you are loved. If you want to be loved, good, then you must love. That on its own is not enough. You have to take a further step. You must not just love your pupils, they must also become aware of it. How? Ask your heart, it knows exactly.”

Compare this with your own attitude of soul. Can you notice the strong contradictions?

Francis de Sales was fighting against the spirit of Port Royal,¹⁰⁰ which suspected that every heartfelt feeling was an expression of concupiscence. Hence it demanded cool inner and outer distance in everything. I am almost inclined to think that some of this spirit is in you. How difficult it must, therefore, be for you to understand Francis de Sales, who at the height of his life made use of expressions that seemed objectionable to many readers. Listen to what he wrote to Madame de Chantal, “Nothing or God! Because everything that is not God is either nothing or worse than

¹⁰⁰ A convent to the southwest of Paris which was the centre of Jansenism.

nothing. So remain wholly in him, my dear daughter, and pray that also I may remain wholly and entirely there; there we want to love each other tremendously, my daughter, because we can never love too much or enough. What a joy to love without fear of exaggeration! However, we have nothing to fear if we love in God.”

It is fortunate that St Francis de Sales is a saint and Doctor of the Church, otherwise many would be inclined to reject him at the outset, or draw the conclusion that he engaged in dangerous sensuality. You can read in *“Everyday Sanctity”* on page 250¹⁰¹ how strongly he had himself in control, and how much his love for God and others was characterised by natural and warm emotions.

There we read among other things:

“At the death of his mother Augustine forcefully tried to hold back his inner feelings, but he didn’t manage it. ‘For a brief hour’ he simply had to weep. He felt that this was perhaps a fault, but nevertheless forgivable. Francis de Sales thought and acted quite differently. He talked quite spontaneously about how profoundly he was touched at the deathbed of his beloved mother. Then he continued, ‘I had the courage to give her the last blessing, to close her eyes and mouth, and to give her the final kiss of peace at the moment of her passing. Then, however, my heart harried me so much that I wept for this good mother more than I have ever wept since I belonged to the Church. Yet this happened without any bitterness of soul.’

He received the news of the serious illness of his brother in a similar, genuinely human way. ‘My brother is happy, I suppose,’ he said. ‘But I cannot on that account stop myself from weeping for him. ... I cannot set aside the feelings of pain that nature excites within me.’

He described the different attitude of some saints as more to be admired than emulated. He quoted, for example, St Angela of Foligno, who declared that the loss of her family was a great consolation to her. His ideal is and remains different.

He once praised a young widow for her submission to God’s will, but added as a sign of special recognition, ‘She testified to this piety in the midst of her tears and sighs’.

Madame de Chantal’s young daughter, whom she loved greatly, died. When he received word of the child’s death he replied, ‘Our poor little Charlotte is happy to have left this world before she had touched it properly. ... Yet, oh, we must still weep a little, for do we not have a human heart and a sensitive nature? So why not weep a little about our dear departed since God’s Spirit not only allows it, but even draws our attention to it?’

He was afraid that Madame de Chantal could educate herself to become inhuman through her striving for holiness. So he admonished her to show her children the normal signs of affection of that country and place. On one occasion he wrote to her, ‘How sad I am that I cannot witness the caresses Celse Bénigne receives from a mother who has become insensitive to all the feelings of natural motherly love. I believe that they will be dreadfully mortified caresses. Oh no, my dear daughter, don’t be so cruel! Please show poor, young Celsé Benigne how happy you are that he has come.’”

Peter: Since we have already spoken about a community of souls, allow me to mention a further lack of clarity. In the January Letter¹⁰² you point out that a Province of Sisters has understood the

¹⁰¹ German 1974 edition, p. 195; English edition (Waukesha 1998) p. 209f., (Johannesburg) III, p. 20f.

¹⁰² Fr Kentenich’s letter to the leading Pallottine Fathers and diocesan priests in the Movement on 1 January 1949.

meaning of the 20 January 1942 in the following way: "We expect the Miracle of the Holy Night through Father, for Father, with Father, in Father; we wish him a similar miracle – but through his children, for his children, with his children, in his children." I can't do much with this whole way of expressing it, which you obviously endorse. To be quite honest, I have to admit that it disturbs me; it may be justified, but it seems to me that what is expressed is far too intimate for publication.

Paul: I know it was daring of me to send this text out into the world in this form. It is a good sign that you see it as a lack of tact. Our Sisters felt the same. Their sound feelings objected to it; they protested not against the way it was expressed, but against the way it was being quoted and passed on to outsiders.

Peter: If you know that, and even anticipated the protest, why did you nevertheless do it? You don't do things without a deeper reason; you consciously trace everything back to ultimate principles.

Paul: Allow me to distinguish between the facts, the expression and the proclamation. The facts referred to here are a profound interweaving of life and destiny, that is, a triumph of the "new community" as it was drastically expressed on 20 January 1942. For us, the new person in the new community is the "Miracle of the Holy Night". The same thing is always at stake, that is, living heart and soul in one another, for and with one another, in a way that is not satisfied with merely living next to one another, no matter whether childlike love, friendship, the love of brothers and sisters, bridal love, or paternal or maternal love are involved. Forms can change depending on the degree of inner attachment, however the crux of the matter is always the mysterious awareness of identification between autonomous personalities.

World literature, everyday life, the Scriptures, as well as the life and teaching of the saints, clearly speak the same language in this regard. Beethoven began his only love letter with the words, "My angel, my all, my self"; he closed it with the confession: "Eternally yours, eternally mine, eternally ours." Richard Wagner has Tristan and Isolde say, "You Isolde, Tristan me; no longer Tristan, no longer Isolde Conscious that we are endlessly, eternally one." – In everyday life people like to talk about their "better halves". That is more than a joke. It reflects in a very simple way what the poet meant when he said, "Two hearts, a single beat." The Apostle to the Gentiles preached, "Whoever loves the Lord is one spirit with him." And St John declared, "Whoever remains in love, remains in God and God in him." Francis de Sales wrote to St Frances de Chantal, "We want to belong to God, you as me and I as you."

This characterises a life process without which a true and inner community is impossible. It works spontaneously like a mysterious motivation, it rests like a veiled mystery on the ground of the heart, it avoids the busy streets and public life. For a long time it develops unconsciously, recoiling from every visible expression at first, as already described, but the more it takes possession of the hearts and souls, and unites them, the more reverent the forms of expression become. They try to hide themselves from the gaze of every stranger, and feel that every open revelation is improper.

It is not difficult to apply what has been said to the form of expression found in the January Letter. This way of living in, for, through and with one another is, at the same time, both the expression of inner fatherly, childlike and sisterly bonding ...; and a demonstration of an ideal community.

Peter: I agree with you completely. So why did you nevertheless hurt the feelings of the Sisters?

Paul: You may not forget that we are living in an era when all the bonds uniting hearts and souls are being completely destroyed. Today values are an empty shell and become increasingly empty day by day.

Peter: That is true. Not even promises and vows are taken seriously today. Look at how many religious have become tired of their chosen and solemnly accepted way of life. Although they ask for a dispensation, they are at the same time determined to change their state if there are difficulties with granting a dispensation, or if it is not granted. That is how little holy promises are considered really holy. In South America there are a shocking number of priests who simply lay aside their soutane almost overnight. Ever since I have observed these things I have had a better understanding of the fact and terrible tragedy of the crisis of marriage and the family today. But I also understand why you have wanted only the minimum of outward obligations for your Institutes, while placing great emphasis on the cultivation of the spirit, and putting heart and soul into everything.

Paul: As long as an idea works as a function, as long as it has taken complete possession of people and gives them no rest, you don't need to say much about it. It is meaningless to proclaim it again and again as a task to be carried out. However, it is quite a different matter if life as a whole – including a life based on love, the inner life of a community – is exposed to the laws of disintegration. Then no other course remains than to proclaim the idea of the interweaving of souls in all its purity, with precision and great warmth, until the idea has again been awakened to life and secures a constant improvement. For better or worse one has to take the disadvantages connected with such a way of doing things into the bargain. It is all the easier to do this if what is at stake is saving a sinking world from the abyss of collectivism. No matter how much this makes sense for the psychologist and pedagogue, for the time being its realisation is connected with special difficulties in practical life, because our present-day culture is rocking to and fro between two shores. The old shore has left us and is disappearing more and more from our view. However, there are many leaders with their circles of followers who are trying compulsively to hold onto it. We have not yet landed on the new shore. That is why there is so much lack of clarity and insecurity everywhere. That is why the present-day educator and pastor needs more courage, but also more tact, than in other eras. Whoever lives and works between two contradictory eras has to reckon with it that neither will really understand them – neither the old era nor the new. What was called progressive by the old is rejected by the new as conservative. An educator has to be prepared for both “the old and the new” to stone him, or grind him to dust as though between two millstones.

Because I was aware of the implications of my actions, I have so far only given the other Institutes access to more intimate expressions on two occasions: once in the Africa Report and the other time in the January Letter. This is the method used by Noah when he carefully allowed doves to fly out of the ark, and waited for them to return and bring him something.

After we have tried for years to bring about the new person, we have to push ahead with forming the new community. The chosen expressions were meant as a signal for this ...

Peter: I am slowly beginning to understand what you are driving at. You are making use of every means at your disposal to overcome the Bolshevik person in the Bolshevik masses. You live in the future far more strongly than many others, and so never tire of separating ultimate principles – as here the principle of community – from existing forms, and proclaiming them strongly. In this way

you help to create new and durable forms for the future Church and society. All this is to your credit. Everyone who understands the inner context will acknowledge your work and gladly place themselves at your service. Perhaps they will feel as I do. However, I still have one reservation. The expression quoted reminds me of the liturgical "*per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso*".¹⁰³ "Besides the danger of being misunderstood and being in the wrong, allow us to remind you of the sacred character of this terminology and of its very specific use until now."

Paul: It is acknowledged everywhere in the Church that the cancer damaging our present times is constantly advancing secularism. There are many causes of this dangerous illness. Is not at least one of them to be found in the fact that we people of today, especially the liturgically minded, separate the sacred from the profane too strongly? Isn't the inner community of Christians also something sacred? Through the liturgical text two things are obviously meant to be expressed: the *unio mystica*¹⁰⁴ between Christ and his members, which has no parallel, and at the same time the mysterious way in which Christ lives in the souls of his followers, and vice versa. This clearly offers the starting point from which a comparison can be made between the way Christ and his followers live in one another. It also applies to every other noble, inner community. The comparison is not only possible, but exceedingly desirable. When someone seriously wants to pursue the Bolshevik spirit of our times to its last hiding place, he will take hold of every opportunity with great self-surrender in order to connect the profane with the sacred. If he attracts accusations on that account, he will console himself with St Francis de Sales who was taken to task because of his modern, too secular language. It is, finally, not quite correct if people think that the *per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso* has only been used clearly and exclusively until now for the relationship between Christ and his members. From the start the psychologist considers this unlikely, because the life process by which people live heart and soul in one another recurs on countless occasions in a similar form in literature and life. In actual fact Grignion's devotion to Mary uses exactly the same words and applies them to the loving relationship between the Blessed Mother and her children. It occurs according to the law of *communicatio idiomatum*.¹⁰⁵

A town in France or Belgium – I can't remember its name any more or where it is situated – solemnly chose the *per ipsam et cum ipsa et in ipsa* for its coat of arms. So you will find a transfer from Christology to Mariology, and to what is generally Christian and human, everywhere. The latter occurs at least where an organic way of thinking reigns and people look for effective contact with the sacred, the supernatural. I believe that the time is not far off when a great many groupings will find the way out of a compulsive entrenchment of words to a meaningful softening of concepts, greater closeness to life and a deeper connection between nature and grace.

Peter: This will only be possible if a mechanistic mentality has been completely replaced by an organic mentality. If this is dominant, the danger of misunderstanding will be excluded, or it will be so small that it will easily be overcome.

¹⁰³ Through him, with him and in him ...

¹⁰⁴ Mystical union.

¹⁰⁵ Literally: Exchange of concepts. This technical term is based on the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas about the "*analogia entis*", which implies that the realities on the different levels of being correspond, or are analagous. It follows from this that what a word "grasps" on its level of being can be transferred to another level.