

The Pre-Founding Document

October 27, 1912

(*excerpts - see New Vision and Life for complete text*)

1 What is your reaction to my appointment as spiritual director? You are astounded and disappointed. What was our former relationship?¹ We had nothing to do with each other. I wished to hunt down the so-called “Easter lambs.” It was my greatest priestly joy whenever one of these came to confession, so heavily laden with the old refuse he had collected over the years that the confessional creaked.

2 Then came my appointment as spiritual director. It was entirely without my doing; hence it must be God’s will. I now place myself entirely at your disposal with all that I am and have—my knowledge and ignorance, my ability and inability, but above all, my heart. Only the time left over will be used for the fulfillment of my favorite idea.

3 I hope we will get along with each other; I hope that we will do everything to achieve our common aim as perfectly as possible.

4 What is our aim then? Our future relationship depends on it. I will therefore state it, short and to the point:

Under the protection of Mary

we want to learn to educate ourselves

to become firm, free, priestly personalities².

The fulfillment and practice of this fundamental idea will occupy us for the course of the entire year. Today I only want to explain a few aspects.

5 *We want to learn. Not only you, but also I. We want to learn from each other. For we are never done learning, especially not the art of self-*

¹ Until appointed Spiritual Director, Fr. Kentenich was a German and Latin teacher in the school.

² Firm: men of real character. Free: not enslaved by inordinate drives or by what other people think. Priestly: bridgebuilders between this world and God.

education, which represents the work, the activity which will absorb our whole lifetime.

6 We want to *learn*, not merely in *theory*: this and that would be good, or nice, or even necessary. No, we must also learn in *practice*, we must put our hand to the plow every day, every hour. How did we learn to walk? Can you still remember how you learned to walk? Or at least how your little brothers and sisters learned? Did your mother give them a long lecture: Look here, Tony or Mary, this is how you have to do it. If that were so, none of us would be able to walk yet. No, she took us by the hand and we started. One learns to walk by walking, to love by loving; therefore we have to learn to educate ourselves through the constant practice of self-education. We certainly do not lack for opportunities.

7 We want to learn *to educate ourselves*. That is a noble, a royal activity. It is an imperative for religion, an imperative for youth, an imperative for our time. I do not want to elaborate on these thoughts now, but merely touch on the last point.

8 ***Self-education is an imperative for our time.*** One does not need much knowledge of the world to realize that our time, with all its discoveries, cannot remove our inner emptiness. All our attention, all our activities are exclusively directed to the macrocosm, to the world at large, to the world outside ourselves. truly, we do not hesitate to pay tribute to human genius with our admiration. Human genius has conquered the mighty powers of nature and taken them into our service. We have spanned the globe, explored the depths of the ocean, penetrated the mountains of the earth, and flown through heights of the heavens. The drive to explore urges us even further. We have reached the North Pole and unlocked dark continents. With X-rays we can see through to all our bones. The telescope and microscope uncover new worlds daily.

9 However, one world, one that is eternally old and yet eternally new, remains unknown and unexplored—the microcosm, the world in miniature, our own interior world.

10 There are no, or at least no new methods of penetrating the human soul. “All the realms of the intellect are cultivated, all capabilities enhanced, only the deepest, the most intrinsic, the most essential realm of the immortal soul is all too often untilled soil,” as even the newspapers complain. That is why our age is so terribly poor and empty on the inside.

And even more. Some time ago an Italian statesman described as the greatest danger of our modern development that the primitive and half-civilized races are gaining more and more possession of the technical means of modern civilization, without receiving the intellectual and moral culture which would enable them to make correct use of these achievements.

At that, however, I would rather turn the tables and ask: Are even our more developed nations able and mature enough to make proper use of the enormous exterior advances of our age? Or has not our time rather become a slave to its achievements? It has indeed. Our command of the gifts and powers of nature around us has not gone hand in hand with the subjection of the elemental and animal forces in our own human breast. The powerful discord, this immeasurable cleft, is becoming ever greater and wider—and in that state we will stand before the spectre of social justice, before societal bankruptcy, unless we invest all our strength in initiating a change soon. Instead of becoming masters of our achievements, we are becoming their slaves; we are becoming slaves, too, of our own passions. Either—or! Either forwards or backwards!

11 Well, then backwards! So, let us return to the Middle Ages, tear up the railroad tracks, cut the telegraph lines, leave electricity to the clouds, return the coal to the earth, and close the universities! No, never. We do not want that, we may not and cannot do that.

12 Then forwards! Yes, on with the exploration and subjection of our inner world through dedicated self-education. The greater the exterior progress, the greater the deepening of our inner life. That is the call, the slogan which will be transmitted everywhere, not only in the Catholic, but also in the enemy camp.

We, too, want to join with these modern aspirations—as the level of our education allows.

In the future we can no longer allow ourselves to be ruled by our knowledge but must rule our knowledge. It can no longer happen that we know foreign languages with the proficiency expected in class but remain purest midgets in the knowledge, the understanding of the language of our hearts. The deeper our insight into the mysteries of nature, the more we have to be able to stand up to the demonic powers within ourselves.

Our progress in knowledge must be matched by our progress in spiritual growth, our spiritual development. Otherwise an immense emptiness will exist in our soul, a mighty cleft which will make us deeply unhappy.

13 We must learn how to educate ourselves. We must educate *ourselves*; ourselves with *all* our faculties. We will later discover which are the faculties we must educate.

14 We must educate ourselves to become **firm** personalities. We took off our baby shoes long ago, when our actions were determined by how we felt. But now we must learn to act on the basis of firm, clearly recognized principles. Everything within us may waver. Times will come when only one thing will help: our principles.

15 We must be **free** personalities. God does not want galley slaves. He wants free rowers. Others can grovel before their superiors, lick their feet and be grateful when they are trodden upon. We are fully aware of our dignity and rights. We submit not out of fear or force, but because we freely want to. After all, every act of reasonable submission makes us interiorly free and independent.

16 We want to place our self-education under **Mary’s protection**. We promised this on Sunday. Now we must put our hand to the plow. Yes, in this connection there is a great task awaiting us. Our statutes tell us to foster a community love of Mary. It is already there in the externals,

in the beautiful banner and medal. But the main thing is still missing: an internal organization fitting our situation in the style of the sodalities.

17 We want to create this organization. We—not I. For in this regard I will do nothing, absolutely nothing without your full consent. Here it is not a matter of a momentary work, but of a foundation which can be useful for all future generations.

18 With this I wish to bring my introduction to an end. You have surely understood me. You know why I was so reserved; you also know my plans for the future. We want to learn to educate ourselves to become firm, free, priestly personalities. For that may God give us the blessing. Amen.