



47. The Personal Ideal

In our spirituality we speak of having five guiding stars of our pedagogy: covenant pedagogy, a pedagogy of bonding, a pedagogy of movement, a pedagogy of ideals, and a pedagogy of trust (1950 Pedagogical Conference: Education and the Challenge of our Times – Perspectives for Catholic Educators, Cf. Text 56.)

It is probable that the pedagogy of ideals is one of Fr Kentenich's most original and forward-looking teachings: the teaching on the personal ideal. So a representative text on this subject may not fail to appear in our Reader. It is taken from a duplicated edition of a course on the redeemed person given in 1935, p. 90-101.

The teaching on the personal ideal is self-evident, so we do not need to comment on it here. However, we would like to draw your attention to how clearly structured Fr Kentenich's explanation is. In order to emphasise this point, Arabic numerals have been used to mark the disposition. This way of structuring his explanations is typical of Fr Kentenich's method in the 1920s and 1930s if he was conducting courses for priests, even if they were retreats. So his talks were at the same time training material on the subject for that year for the leaders of the Movement. The cultivation of the spiritual life ran parallel to this, mainly during private conversations that usually extended into the night.

Although the text presents the teaching on the personal ideal in great detail, it should not be overlooked that Fr Kentenich incorporated examples from actual life or the main interests of the audience. An example of this is the inclusion of this teaching in the general subject of the course (the redeemed person) at the beginning. Another example is the mention of the practical dangers for a priest who is exclusively engaged in the pastoral care of young people.

It hardly needs to be emphasised that the teaching on the personal ideal, which is here applied to priests, is equally valid for all Schoenstatters and everyone in general.

We may not only accept the divine life with gratitude, we must also try to help it to break through into our human nature. Our two theses follow from this: God's activity is the main thing. However, we may not overlook our supporting role. So we ask four questions about the nature, the sources of knowledge, the effect and the method of work of the personal ideal, to which we want the philosophy of nature¹⁹ and psychology to give an answer. This means that for now we will set aside the supernatural to some extent.

The essence of the personal ideal

1. The essence of the personal ideal in the framework of our course:

I shall explain the essence of the personal ideal from two points-of-view. First of all, in the context of our course. You will quickly understand two definitions.

1.1 The personal ideal is an original depiction and imitation of God's perfections to a high degree:

1.1.1 An **original depiction**: Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect!²⁰ I see God before me. I have been created in his image and likeness. So in my whole being, in my whole structure, I exemplify some of God's perfection. So I am a depiction of God's perfection. However, I have also to emphasise another concept: I am also an original depiction: Each person is an incarnation of one of God's original thoughts; each differs from the others and possesses an individual character.

1.1.2 An **imitation**: I have added this word in order to indicate that I have to develop within myself the divine perfections I embody: firstly, God's knowledge, secondly, God's love. One person embodies God's thinking more strongly, another his love, but each of us embodies both. God wants me to develop both seeds he has planted into me. – Remember what I said last year about love.²¹ "Human beings are social beings, so that they can give and receive love." This is how Kolping sees it. According to him the family is a hearth of intense, reciprocal and active love. What is the reason for the limitations of others in relation to myself? It should enkindle the force of my love. This love has to be that of a member – I have to see myself as a member of a large community and develop my inner riches in it.

1.1.3 A depiction to a high degree: We may add this concept. What we depict and imitate is also, and must be, to a high degree. If we are priests, we are one of God's distinctive, original and incarnate ideas, so we have to develop a high degree of likeness to God!

Look at the same idea from a somewhat different angle, that is, in organic connection with what we have worked out previously.

1.2 The personal ideal is an intense and original depiction and imitation of the perfections of the God-Man:

That is a key thought of St Paul. The God-Man is the heart and centre of world history. God sees us in connection with Christ, and in the Mystical Body of Christ each member has its own function to

¹⁹ *Naturphilosophie*.

²⁰ Cf. Mt 5,48.

²¹ He is referring here to the priests' retreat on "perfect, priestly joy in life".

fulfil. I have to carry out the task of the God-Man in a very personal and original way. So every task shares in the tasks of Christ. Every task can be read from his example.

2. The essence of the personal ideal outside the framework of our retreat

2.1 The personal ideal is the *idea exemplaris in mente divina praeexistens*²² – the idea God had of me and allowed to become a reality.

“Each one of us has a picture of what he or she should become. As long as we aren’t like it, our peace is not complete!”²³ I don’t want to enlarge on these definitions. You will perhaps tell me again that everything is so abstract. From now on I will become much more practical, because I will deal with the questions about the personal ideal from the point-of-view of their sources of knowledge, method of work and effectiveness.

3. Sources of knowledge about the personal ideal

The question as to the sources of knowledge according to ancient asceticism is synonymous with reforming a choice²⁴ found in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. We want to re-examine our calling in life, and reform it, as though we were choosing it for the first time. This also applies to the resolutions we make to carry out our vocation perfectly in the time to come. We must only add one thing: Our resolutions have to be meaningfully related to our personal ideal. Otherwise they will have no effect; they will be forgotten or not carried out. This could often be a reason why we so seldom carry out consistently what we have recognised during the retreat. So how am I to get to know my personal ideal?

3.1 The two sources of knowledge:

3.1.1 The extraordinary way:

3.1.1.1 The way of revelation, just as God often gave the prophets their life’s task, their life’s ideal. Think, for example, of the calling of Isaiah. We will not have had such a revelation.

3.1.1.2. The way of the extraordinary guidance and dispensations of Providence. This applies to most of us. For example, God led us into a situation without our co-operation, without our guilt. Perhaps slowly, without even noticing it, we have built a world we ourselves never envisaged: God’s guidance and dispensation.

Or, if I have grown very quietly through using my abilities, through questions people have asked, or through the blows of fate. Each time these are God’s guidance and dispensations through which he clearly indicates my task.

For us today our times are an extraordinary source of knowledge about our task. We must only know how to hear and understand God’s voice through them. We must try to hear and understand what God is speaking through our times in order to give us a clearer indication of our tasks once more.

²² Literally: the exemplary idea (of a human being) that already existed in God’s mind.

²³ Angelus Silesius (1624-1677), a German mystic of the Counter-Reformation.

²⁴ German: *Reformwahl*. A reference to the second week of the *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1989: “amending or reforming an election (choice)”, (cf. p.44f.). St Ignatius considers the correct choices for decisions in one’s life, so that they are made for God’s glory and the salvation of one’s soul.

3.1.2 The usual way:

In order to understand the usual sources of knowledge, we have to recall that God speaks to us not merely through his words, but also through his deeds. Through his words he speaks to us, for example, in the Sacred Scriptures, or through inner enlightenment and inspirations. However, over and above this he also speaks through his deeds. The fact that God has given me a very original character means that he has formed me for a very definite task. So, if I examine my inclinations and abilities, and add the inspirations of grace, which usually adapt themselves to our nature, and in addition take my bearings from God's usual dispensations made known to me through my superiors, I have the natural sources with which I can get to know my personal ideal. I must only observe how differentiated my inclinations are, as well as the guidance of grace.

If we take a closer look at this, we will again have to differentiate between two things:

3.1.2.1 The **rational way** progresses by way of reflection on what I know about my inclinations, my passions, my temperament. The strength of my main inclinations allows me to arrive at moderate certainty about what intentions God has for me.

We should never make use of this way with the people, and that includes the youth. However, as the leaders we have to have reflexive clarity if we are to lead others correctly.

3.1.2.2 The **irrational way** is the most suitable one for the education of our people and our youth.

An example: There is a young man [Hans Wormer] who always wants to build churches. His whole inner attitude centres on this idea. It has grown to become the ideal: I want to be a pillar of the Church. So via the irrational way he arrived at his personal ideal.

If you are dealing with penitents in the confessional who already have a personal spiritual life, you would do best to ask them for their favourite ejaculation. Once I know it, I will easily be able to recognise their main passion, personal ideal and temperament with a certain sureness of touch. If I have recognised it quickly, it does not mean I have to tell them just as quickly! That will only put an obstacle in the way of their development. Of course, it doesn't have to be an ejaculation expressed verbally. It can simply be an inner movement towards God. If there are a number of ejaculations, they can easily be traced back to a common denominator. Once that has been recognised, I have to work towards it being repeated very often and exercising an influence on everyday life. Gradually I must work towards making the ideal not just an ideal of the personality, but also an ideal of their task in life. Otherwise people will degenerate into an unsound individualism.

A further possibility is to ask about a favourite idea, or their main difficulties.

To round this off let me say a few words about what speeds up or prevents us from recognising the ideal.

3.2 Speeding up recognition of the ideal

For example, I feel the urge to join a certain religious community. In that case a large part of my personal ideal echoes in the ideal of the religious community. This can speed up my discovery of my personal ideal. However, you may not overlook that speeding up the discovery often includes great dangers for carrying it out. The danger for members of religious communities is that once they are members, they allow themselves to be carried by the atmosphere of the community, and so fail to reach their ideal. They simply go with the flow. Today, at a time when there is a strong tendency to go along with the masses, we have to place great emphasis on creating personalities.

That is why Lindworsky²⁵ was right when he wrote: Each member of a religious community has to be his own founder of the community!

Or, suppose I have created a strongly liturgical atmosphere in my parish. You may not overlook that when there is only an atmosphere, there is great danger of creating mass-mindedness. There are also religious people who have lost their individuality and become mass-minded. So I have to work time and again to ensure that the great ideas are understood by the individuals, so that true personalities are formed.

3.3 **Slowing down** the recognition of the ideal

An example: Suppose I once had the idea of becoming a beacon of truth. I think that would almost be the ideal of the Dominicans. So I wanted to be a Professor. Suddenly my career was held up by illness; [so I thought:] perhaps I could still become a writer and pursue my ideal in this way. I again became ill. Only one thing still remains to me: I can become a beacon of truth through my being! My ideal has remained unchanged, but there were obstacles to its realisation. It isn't easy to find a way to adapt oneself. However, it is important for me to find this reorientation, because I will then retain the conviction: I have remained true to myself. Failing that I can easily feel superfluous to this world, and inferior.

4. **The effect of the personal ideal**

This combines three points-of-view: The effect of a great and original idea, of a great and original love, and a great and original grace.

4.1 The effect of a great and original idea:

Seen purely from a psychological point-of-view, an original idea has a great effect. Nietzsche once said, "I want to know your great idea..." Study how our opponents have been turned into fanatics by clearly recognised and attractive ideas they can worship. Look into the lives of the saints. They always had great ideas. The early Church was gripped by great ideas. These ideas were alive!

So what is the formative power of a great idea? It forms strong characters, great personalities.

4.1.1 A great and **original idea** forms a **distinctive character**

The widespread pollution of the wells²⁶ of the conscience today is greatly to be deplored. It is possibly far worse than financial and other hardships. Outwardly people behave one way, and inwardly their attitude is totally different. The educator, therefore, faces a serious problem that is connected with the concept "character".

4.1.1.1 The **nature** of character:

Character, as a quality, is the ability and willingness to maintain a conviction and an attitude of soul without wavering; and if necessary, to profess it even at the cost of one's life. We are well advised to base our definitions on ultimate principles, but also to adapt them to the times.

²⁵ Johannes Lindworsky, SJ, studied the psychology of the will in great detail. His work inspired Fr Kentenich greatly. Cf. Lindworsky, Johannes: *Experimental Psychology*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1931.

²⁶ The Nazi ideology of the Arian master race exercised a profound and widespread influence on the people as a whole. People who formed and stood by their own opinions, and the voice of their conscience, were not welcome. This is the background to the statement about the "widespread pollution of the wells".

4.1.1.2 **Lack** of character:

Why are there so few people with strong characters today? What makes it so difficult to hold onto our inner convictions, or to profess them?

4.1.1.2.1 Financial ruin.

So many people today break down because of the financial implications. If their convictions become known, if they remain faithful to them, they are threatened with financial ruin. We have to understand this particularly with regard to state officials. The circumstances of the times are extremely hard on them. However, a far more important and profound reason is

4.1.1.2.2 the scale of values which has been turned upside down.

It is obvious that if I consider my financial standing to be the highest good; if I don't acknowledge the idea of truth and justice as an extremely high good, I will soon be ready to give up my outward convictions for a mess of pottage. We may even ask: Is there any place for an inner, profoundly penetrating conviction? Please examine how things stand with your scale of values. We all have to try to love truth and justice so much that we are prepared to take even financial disadvantages into the bargain on their account. It always does us great harm if these ideas are denied, even if we don't feel it at the moment.

4.1.1.2.3 People today lack silence and solitude.

Without silence and solitude it is simply impossible to form principles, attitudes, convictions, indeed, a sensitive conscience as a whole. Examine for yourselves how greatly the people of today lack silence and solitude in the rush and tumble of everyday life.

Applied to myself: Isn't it necessary for me personally to again look for more solitude and silence? All the great reformers have come out of solitude. If we are alone when we pray, or now during our retreat, we are doing far more for those entrusted to our care than if we plunge from one task into the next. This applies in particular to people with emotional natures, who completely lose the ability to reflect on themselves if they don't concentrate on themselves in solitude.

4.1.1.3 **The laws for building up** character

I only want to mention them quickly, in order to awaken your interest.

4.1.1.3.1 The law of outward appearances

Each character reveals itself in certain outward manifestations.

4.1.1.3.2 The law of knowledge or similarity

I can only understand another character if I have at least some kernel of similarity with it. Suppose, for example, that I am a man with a distinctively dominating character; I will have no understanding for woman's nature. However, if you understand human typology, for example, typical tendencies in women, you will always cultivate a predisposition in yourself for those types you understand. I cannot give myself this predisposition, although I can develop it in myself. Examine what I have said: Where are the people with whom I have to work, but with whom I constantly come into conflict? Of course, it can also happen that I can understand them, but have been educated in such an austere way that I cannot express my understanding. If this is the case, the barriers have to fall one day.

4.1.1.3.3 The law of stratification:

Each character exhibits a certain stratification. Different layers in the personality are expressed to a different degree.

4.1.1.3.4 The law of polarity:

If my disposition tends towards being forceful, the danger is great that I will exaggerate the individual elements that go to make up that disposition. My tendencies, therefore, are strongly inclined to develop in an extreme way. Another example: If I am really kind, it could easily happen that I become a wimp. That is the law of polarity.

4.1.1.3.5 The law of complementation:

Consider for a moment which sort of people you like to be with. They are the people who naturally complement you. We are impressed by what we do not have, or what we don't have to such a degree. However, the law of complementarity is also at work in each individual person. I have a disposition, a main passion, let us say it is sensuality. However, I am also ambitious. Notice how the ability to give oneself in love is regulated by the urge towards ambition; that too has to develop.

Allow me to draw your attention to a danger that goes with working constantly with the same group of people. This law often drives educators to adapt themselves too much to the people they are educating, so that the educators' development suffers. Pay attention to this if you are a Spiritual Director. You live the soul life of those entrusted to your care. This is a great danger unless we try to offset it by, for example, making use of the times of prayer for ourselves, and not just to pray about the difficulties of those entrusted to our care.

Another means is to be active in a parallel group of people. Otherwise it can happen that if I constantly have young people before me, I will personally never emerge from puberty. Vice versa, if God sends me people who develop tremendous verve in the spiritual life, who are on a higher level than I am, I will instinctively be drawn upwards. There is a definite and special Providence in the world around us.

If God loves us, he will send us into surroundings that complement and uplift us.

This brings us to the key thought:

4.1.1.4 A great idea forms character

4.1.1.4.1 The **condition** for this formation: The idea must be saturated with value! I have to assimilate the entire complex of values contained in the idea. This is also the reason why during a retreat we have to struggle far more to assimilate the intrinsic value of the individual ideas than to formulate resolutions. At a time that is so strongly uprooted, and that has infected us so badly, we won't get far if we constantly list one resolution after the other. It won't make us better, it will only make us more ill. Everything has to be concentrated on a value. We have to see to it that trains of thought develop their full intrinsic value through concerning ourselves constantly with them. Such things are so important!

The idea has to be saturated with value. For this reason the booklet by Hock has on the whole to be rejected.²⁷ I don't achieve anything by trying to remember God in manifold ways; God has to become a complex of values to me! So you must always remember that an idea forms character and leadership to the extent that it represents a central value in my life.

Take, for example, the ideal of the professor I mentioned, "To be at home in, and to help others to be at home in, the heart of God". Now, if that has grown for years I can presuppose that it has become a complex of values. But if I have first to generate it, I will have to measure all the values I encounter during the day against this value. All my meditation, spiritual reading, everything I appreciate, has to flow into the process of giving value to this one great idea. As a result my entire spiritual life will be strongly unified in a definite direction. At the beginning I will have to do it consciously, reflexively. However, when we have become mature personalities one day, it will no longer be necessary. We can take that for granted. My soul will then automatically assimilate only what serves this complex of values.

So please remember that an idea has to become a value if we want to form characters.

4.1.1.4.2 The **practical effect** of forming the character through ideas:

So what effect does this idea have in practice? In actual fact it must gradually form the whole of life. If we only value it inwardly, it will not develop its power. It has to become effective. How does it do so? I can find it exemplified in a person with a strong character.

4.1.1.4.2.1 The idea must **influence** my actions. To start with I will have to see to it that the idea enriches my actions. The idea has to become a motivating force.

4.1.1.4.2.2 The idea must **decide** all questions and cases of doubt, both my resolutions and their application. Suppose you want to draw up some resolutions. If you ask yourselves at the end of every talk: What is practicable? you will arrive at a huge number of resolutions. That won't achieve anything. I have to ask: How does this resolution fit in with my personal ideal?

However, the idea has also to be decisive in carrying out a resolution. Lindworsky described the end result in a young religious striving for sanctity: He had a nervous breakdown! His task was academic studies. The older member, who was appointed his mentor, pushed and ruined him. Would it not have been a greater act of humility to oppose the older member? And what about humility? Ask yourself: What is God-willed humility like? So often we have many wrong concepts. We cart them around with us for half our lives, and during the other half we throw them away, so in the end we have nothing left! Humility and single-mindedness can easily be reconciled. Humility does not consist in allowing myself to be robbed of the core of my personality and ruining my nerves!

4.1.1.4.2.3 **The personal ideal adds heart and soul to indifferent²⁸ actions.**

I would like to point to the community life in a parish, convent or monastery, and boarding school. It is so often said that living in a convent or boarding school is not conducive to creating great characters. The reason is that life in a community easily has a levelling effect. What should we do

²⁷ Konrad Hock was Spiritual Director of the Seminary at Würzburg. He propagated the "exercise of living in God's presence", a very schematic method that made hardly any allowances for the sensitivities of the individual.

²⁸ Indifferent has here to be understood as neither good nor bad.

about it? We have to see to it that the work I have to do during the day is an outflow of my personal ideal. Then the most indifferent actions have a formative effect on my character. At first I will have to do it reflexively, later it will become natural to me. The only thing is that here and there I will have to examine whether everything is growing out the core of my personality, or is a sideline.

4.1.1.4.2.4 The personal ideal **motivates generosity**:

If I have educated myself in this way, I will gradually feel urged to act more generously. This is then a holy urge and force within me. Then “the ideal will have taken possession of me”. That is actually the state the character must acquire as time goes by.

4.1.2 The great idea forms the **personality of exceptional leaders**.

The reason is that the personality of every valuable leader is formed by three elements:

4.1.2.1 Unconditional self-surrender to a great idea.

4.1.2.2 Holistic self-surrender to the individual followers.

4.1.2.3 More than average abilities in the area where the leader is active.

The formative power of the idea is complemented by the formative power of love.

4.2 The personal ideal possesses the effective force of a great and **original love**:

If we have to educate women, we have to emphasise ideas, because this is not their forte; they need to be complemented in this regard. However, if we are dealing with ourselves [as men], although we will have to reform our ideas, we must above all employ the formative power of convincing and original love: personal love! Take, for example, the ideal: To be at home, and to make others at home, in the supernatural. It is a beautiful idea. But if this idea is to have an effect, I will also have to love the people it refers to, that is, I must love God greatly. Ultimately every ideal has to include personal love for a person in the supernatural world. Otherwise it cannot become effective.

If I may now ask: Why do we make so little progress? Why is it that my personal ideal has a minimal effect? Either it lacked self-surrender to the great idea and task – I have repeatedly to make myself more aware of this task as a scale of values – or I am insufficiently bonded to a certain person in the supernatural world with real warmth and love. I have to call a personal and warm love my own, otherwise love loses its effective and motivating power. All that we have said about cultivating reverence for God is a deepening of our ideal.

4.3 The personal ideal possesses the formative power of a great and original grace:

I have to add this so that we aren't seen only as psychologists. You can choose whichever ascetical system or pedagogical system you like, you will see how small we become when we see the fruits of our education. People have a free will and are burdened with original sin. So you will not be able to educate a strong character without grace. We are limited in every way – our lives, our knowledge are limited. So even if I were to follow up the laws of nature in an ideal way, I will nevertheless achieve nothing without prayer and sacrifice. So if I want to educate, I have to be a man with one great thought, one great love, and one great sacrifice and prayer. All orientation to human psychology will not lead us to our goal without prayer and sacrifice. So there is no method, no system, no matter how brilliant, that is absolutely certain to attain its goal. Great and original grace has to come to its aid. It has to be an original grace, because grace adapts itself to nature.

A final question remains. It is the question about the way the personal ideal works.

5. The way the personal ideal works

I will give three answers: The personal ideal works in a positive, an organic and an energetic way.

5.1 The personal ideal works **positively**:

If I may borrow from the medical field, we can distinguish between a surgical and a medical process of healing.

5.1.1 A surgical process

By it our inclinations and passions are simply excised. However, it is completely wrong to do this. We can feel that this is true, because God has given us our passions to help and support us. So the meaning of education is not to excise, but to ennoble. From time to time we have the impression that some people in the educational world have understood the saying about taking off the old person as though it meant that education consists in constantly shedding things. However, the full statement is this: Take off ... and put on! The main activity in education must lie in putting on.

5.1.2 A medical process

This can take on two forms. I can see to it that the health of the whole body is increased, or that an infected area is made healthy again, or else moderately isolated from the healthy areas. In the first instance we have something positive, in the second, something negative. So also in asceticism we have to distinguish between a positive and negative way of doing things:

5.1.2.1 A negative process of healing

It tries to expose and devalue any sham values in the soul. Take for example, I am attached to a creature, perhaps a woman or a cigar, and I want to overcome this inordinate attachment. There are two possibilities: I can “befog”²⁹ the value to which I am attached, or I can see to it that it is outshone.³⁰ I can tell myself: Vanity of vanities, people are people, dust and ashes. This is how to “befog” the value to which I am attached. The other way is

5.1.2.2 A positive process of healing

to “outshine” it. In the morning, before the sun has risen, I can see any number of stars. Once the sun has risen, they disappear and I can no longer see them. In the same way I can outshine my attachment to created things and beings, if my inclination is inordinate, by trying to love the higher good, God himself, with all the fervour of my soul.

Although our Lord and the saints applied both methods, they highlighted the positive method. Think of the demands of the Apostle Paul in the third part of his Letter to the Romans. Notice how positively he formulated everything.³¹

²⁹ German: *umnebeln*.

³⁰ German: *überstrahlen*.

³¹ The reference here is to Chapters 12-15, in particular St Paul’s teaching on the various gifts in the one Body of Christ in Ch. 12

Our Lord also applied the negative method, but in general you will notice how he and the Apostle are interpreters of the positive method. They want to allow the sun to rise so that people are drawn upwards by the light of this sun.

Personally we want to keep in mind that in general we have to emphasise the positive method very strongly, especially for the people of today, and in view of the uprootedness of the soul today, so that people are unable to look upwards in a positive way. This applies in particular

5.1.2.2.1 when we are dealing with struggles and temptations that are accompanied by physical changes.³²

Last year, when we talked about love, we saw clearly that with the limitations of human consciousness, if we concentrate on one value, it usually brings about a certain indifference to opposing values. You need to think this through sometime in order to be able to apply the positive method with a certain sureness of touch. If, for example, I concentrate all my love on God, isn't it natural that, on account of the limitations of human consciousness, it will generate in me a certain indifference to all that is created unless it is connected in some way with God? We have to apply this law.

For example, I am passionately attached to a woman in my pastoral field. I notice that drives are awakened that draw me downwards. If I now try to give all my love to God, may I not expect that as time goes by a certain reserve towards this woman will be generated in me? If physical changes accompany a temptation, it is particularly important to apply the positive method. All these temptations have to be driven out of my soul as quickly as possible as time goes by. That is to say, the soul has to turn its attention as quickly as possible from these things, because otherwise, while we are concentrating on struggling against them physically, the body will make itself more strongly felt. Every time we concentrate for a longer period on these things, we create a tendency for similar temptations to gain the upper hand later. If, instead I try to concentrate my whole being on a great goal, although I may suffer, I have adopted a positive mindset. In this case it is the only correct method.

5.1.2.2.2 If we are already older, we should in any case prefer the positive method. This is because we no longer react so strongly to the negative method. We have to enkindle a great light, then negative things will soon be overcome and left behind us. If we place ourselves in the radiance of this great light, a great deal still remains that can be drawn out of us.

5.1.2.2.3 If we have become weak and tired, if we no longer have any inner zest that can motivate the soul, we can still draw the most from ourselves through a radiant ideal. Hence, more pedagogy of ideals! A more positive attitude! More positive action and battle! We are advised to apply this process in an almost exaggerated way at a time when everything is torn apart.

You need not fear a lack of humility or superficiality. If this happens, it means that you are overlooking the organic context. When faced with my ideal I am far more inclined to feel small, than if I constantly look downwards. A pedagogy of ideals always drives us upwards; we act, not because we must, but because we may! We may not come into the danger zone of our opponents. They

³² Fr Kentenich is thinking of temptations like anger, fear, sexual temptations, that not only involve the soul, but also affect the body directly.

rob people of all breadth of vision, all zestfulness, by applying the categorical imperative, a militaristic approach, *ad nauseam*. No one can bear being forced to do things for any length of time.

Human nature is naturally dependent on love. Love is the essential fundamental drive in human nature, not fear! So, whoever knows how to awaken love, has taken hold of people by the corner from which he can embrace the whole of human nature. If people are exhausted by constantly hearing “you must”, they lose their zest and the most beautiful and refined part of their nature. Look at the people who are constantly flogged. Of course, it is also necessary to say “you must” at times. A very profound love always includes fear as well. However, we may not overlook the most essential element during our retreat. On God’s ship there are no galley slaves, only free oarsmen, as we are told by Francis de Sales. I may cause hurt, but I may not educate slavish people.

In his elective meditation, St Ignatius puts this most beautifully. We look at one aspect of the devil. He tries to take hold of his followers by making use of thunder and lightning, that is, by force. On the other hand, our Lord says, “If you want to be perfect ...”, that is, he issues a positive invitation.

This illustrates what I am trying to say. It is obvious that if I always have the ideal in view, everything will urge me to take my bearings from it. The ideal is decisive in accepting love as the norm for the ideal. I will then be able to suppose that my soul is constantly making progress.

5.2 The effect of the personal ideal is **organic**.

The word “organic” sounds good today. We have to overcome the mechanistic tendencies of our times. The organic totality has to be in the foreground. When can we speak of organic growth? There are three elements: growth from one organic entity into another organic entity.

5.2.1 The personal ideal works **slowly**.

Organic growth is slow growth! How do we often do things when educating ourselves and others? There is a frenzy of activity, an urging and forcing, just as Münchhausen³³ wanted to make the grass grow more quickly by pulling and tugging at it. Don’t we often do the same thing? However, by doing so we make it impossible for anything to be integrated. How little integrated religious life we find among Catholics today. One reason for this is that we don’t proceed slowly. If as an educator I notice that my followers are flocking towards me, I always question it. However, if there is something there that grows slowly, the relationship will last. Sound life is always life that grows slowly and organically. Examine it to find out whether the personal ideal doesn’t allow for slow and organic growth. Of course, it is possible to achieve quick, outward success, but something that is slowly integrated is quite different. The more slowly something grows, the more it will be integrated and have grown from within.

5.2.2 The personal ideal grows **from within**.

It is able to create real dispositions and attitudes. The personal ideal is the adequate expression of my attitudes, but it has also to create and deepen them. In contrast to the tendency to erode everything today, it is particularly important for the ideal to create attitudes from within. However, these attitudes must then be revealed outwardly through actions and individual exercises. There is no sound life that does not create an atmosphere, just as the tree creates its bark.

³³ *Baron Hieronymus von Münchhausen* (1720-1797), the author of tall tales, is a symbol in German literature for a braggart. He wrote about heroic deeds that defy belief.

5.2.3 The personal ideal works **from one organic totality into another organic totality.**

Take, for example, a painting of a tree. It is painted little by little. However, where there is life, you already have the completed tree in miniature from the beginning. That is often the mistake of our asceticism. It proceeds logically, but not psychologically. How did people often do it? It is stated in a book that there are so-and-so many stages of humility. So I take a longitudinal section of the soul according to the stages, but fail to take a cross-section through its present circumstances in life.

The one doesn't grow equally with the other. So it can easily happen that I have already reached one stage, and then become really proud. That is why it can also happen that in the periods exclusively devoted to education, we may appear to be saintly. However, as soon as we are out of it, everything disappears. The growth has not been integrated. A greenhouse cultivation! We have to take these things very seriously, because God expects us educators to produce work that will last.

So please examine whether it isn't true that the personal ideal really secures this sound growth. From experience I can say that when I have someone before me who has developed slowly, and who also has the courage to swim against the stream, I am convinced that that person will mature far more profoundly than others who constantly shout "Hurrah!" My ability to influence a small group through suggestion has to recede into the background. Otherwise it is a violation. Education means serving life. I can't create life. I can only serve life. And I will be able to do so far more surely if I educate through a pedagogy of ideals.

5.3 The personal ideal works **energetically.**

The personal ideal works constantly and energetically, but also slowly. The deeper reason is because, through the personal ideal I have taken hold of a person by the corner that constitutes that person's most essential fundamental drive, his or her drive to love. Since we work far too much with the motive of fear, we educate so many cripples. That is also why we ourselves have been crippled, and cannot grow beyond a certain limitation of our being.

I don't know what you want to say about all this. Perhaps you are thinking that it is all too sporadic. You are probably right if you haven't gone into it in the meantime. However, you can take along with you a practical thought: How can I describe my ideal? How can I describe the central idea of my life? May I ask you as pastors: How can I describe the leading idea of my pastoral work? If you look at the newspapers, you will get to know the leading idea of the current Party Day in Nuremberg. Uprooted times have to be repeatedly fed by new leading ideas. So hold onto the central idea for next year. But then work throughout the year without wavering in this direction. The great laws of the ideal also apply to my parish ideal, my community ideal, the ideal of my Order. If only we could increasingly agree on this, and take our bearings from it for the way we preach and do everything else! Once the central idea begins to have an effect, the corresponding attitudes will be created. That is so important when compared with the erosive tendencies of our present times. Of course, our people don't have to be conscious of all this, but we have to be!