



8. Reading in Souls

It is natural that when someone is defending his position, he has to write about himself. So, when our founder wrote in his self - defence, he also revealed something important about himself. This makes it possible for us to meet our founder from within, in a very personal way.

In the "Apologia" there is a very compact statement by Fr Kentenich about himself. It can be seen as a common denominator of his educational work and his activity as founder. It is necessary to read the text thoughtfully a number of times in order to draw out its full meaning and content, because it is a very succinct. The following texts has been taken from "Zum Goldenen Priesterjubilaeum", Berg Sion 1985, S. 134f.

Without doubt I have read and studied a great deal, an incredible amount, at any rate more than the most of my contemporaries. ... However, these were not the usual books – that, in fact, happened very rarely. Mostly, almost exclusively, I read in and from souls (the healthy and the sick, highly striving and oppressed souls from every walk of life), as well as in and from the book of what was happening in our times. I also heard an incredible amount. Ultimately everything was God's voice. ... I have assimilated it from the same two books, not, or only extremely rarely, from conferences. It would be easy for me to count the lectures I have attended since 1912.

Everywhere my "books" allowed me to listen into the finest and most delicate, but also the strongest and most passionate, movements of the human heart – of men and women, priests and laity. I thus learnt to distinguish between the human spirit and God's spirit, the human word and God's word. These two books were always inexhaustible, and presented matchlessly rich and valuable content. And since I was visited by leading representatives of modern intellectual currents, who in Germany jostled each other to see me, I was always kept informed about the breath of the times from ultimate sources, and about how it made itself felt in specialized literature, without having to take the usual books into my hands. So I was always prepared for my courses. I only needed to highlight a central idea each time and make it the subject of the course. I always knew where the shoe pinched and what the hearts of my audience were ready to receive. This accounts for the success of these courses.

People praise the Cure of Ars for the number of hours he spent in the confessional. They have even tried to count them. If I were to try to calculate the time in my long life that I have been allowed to devote to souls day and night, and with unaltered interest, an astonishing amount would result. ...

At the height of his life Paul knew only one great passion – God and souls. As we can see from his letters, everything else clearly retreated into the background. This is how his life’s programme has to be understood: “*Omnibus omnia*”,⁴⁸ or, “*Omnia instaurare in Christo*”⁴⁹. I was also given some share in this passion.

...

The psychologist in me, with his extraordinarily strong and widely branching empathy, picked up all the stirrings and wishes in the person before me with utmost care and faithfulness – those that person was aware of, as well as those that remained unconscious, the good and the bad – no matter whether these involved the individual or the community soul. As a result, almost overnight a wonderful opening and openness brought about a closeness of souls that can be considered the best precondition for a reciprocal transfer of life.

The philosopher in me, in the form of the metaphysician, who is inseparably rooted and anchored in the next world, in the Absolute, the Eternal, the Infinite – in the Triune God – through a God - given and profoundly religious disposition, saw to the opposite pole of spiritual distance. The permanent and effective polarity this generated between spiritual closeness and spiritual distance proved at all times to be an exceedingly richly blessed pedagogical principle. Closeness and distance were united in a disciplined, warm, and all - conquering love for God and those nearest to me.

If the philosopher in me assimilated the ideas of the times in all their purity and ultimate embodiment, in order to clarify and digest them, the metaphysician brought order into both – the stirrings and ideas – tracing both back to ultimate principles that had been envisaged from all eternity in the *Verbum Divinum*, and loved in the Holy Spirit. They have therefore to be approached not merely as God’s incarnate thoughts, but also as God’s incarnate wishes, which become ethical and religious imperatives. The pedagogue in me combined them creatively into a unified system with a three - dimensional spirituality, and a comprehensive, modern pedagogical system.

⁴⁸ To be everything to everyone (1 Cor 9,22).

⁴⁹ To renew everything in Christ (Eph 1,10).