

## The Essence and Form of the Personal Ideal

(J. Kentenich - from the 1936 Retreat Course: "The Heroic Person")

### 1. The essence of the Personal Ideal

#### (a) Seminal definition:

The PI is a personal little truth or a little truth that has become a personal experience. If I know a tremendous amount about God and the soul and religious matters, and am enthusiastic about the big connected realities, but have not yet savoured and digested these truths, they cannot be my PI. So it must be connected with a personal or personally experienced truth. Now that we have planted the seed, let us enlarge on this seed a little with a new definition.

#### (b) An enlarged definition:

The PI is the expression of being inwardly gripped by a truth in an original and personal way determined by God through my original receptiveness for natural and supernatural values.

Let me explain and deepen the individual parts of this definition.

i) An original receptiveness for natural and supernatural values. You will notice that we are in no way concerned with subjectivism. God speaks through words, but he also speaks through deeds. He expresses his individual wishes, his will, through the individual person's original disposition and openness for values. If he has given me this specific receptiveness for certain values, and not for some others, it means that he himself has pre-ordained the values that can and should be developed more strongly in me. So it is God who has determined my PI through my openness for certain values.

ii) Being inwardly gripped by a truth in an original and personal way. We are concerned with something original and personal, because our receptiveness for values is also original and personal. Seen psychologically, then, the PI is a God-willed tenor of the soul which, if upheld faithfully, will mature through a graced, organic development to the freedom of God's children. Or, to put it in other words, the PI is an original way of living inwardly and personally in communion with God. We are concerned with being inwardly gripped by a truth, because the PI revolves around the idea that has taken hold of the soul inwardly, and that grows from within while being nourished and fostered from without.

This brings us to the third point:

iii) Of a truth - in other words, what should be the content of my PI? In some way or other it has to contain heroic humility and love. Let us once again set humility aside. And when we now speak about love, we know that it has to be love for persons and

ideas. Being sheltered in God then means:

A. being personally sheltered. I must personally feel safe in our personal God. We all too easily lose sight of this. For long periods we see the PI far too onesidedly as an idea. The danger exists that at times we feel terribly lonely when we are confronted with certain things, lonely in the sense of being isolated. In the long run we won't escape this state and this danger if we only chase after ideas. We have to find a home in God. Even when we are older, we still run from Pontius to Pilate to find a little variety. The deeper reason is because we are too little at home in God's heart, because we have too little contact with our personal God.

Of course, in some way or other there must also be

B. a sense of safety in ideas. I have to be objectively sheltered in God's affairs, at home in God's living world of truths and values. When I am personally at home in God's heart, I can help others to find a personal home in a similar way. When I am personally at home in God's world of values, I can help others to find a similar shelter, love and home in ideas. Then my PI motivates me as a task, it has moved from being an ideal for the personality to become an ideal for my task. So my PI must in some way contain my love for God, but this does not mean that God absolutely has to be mentioned in its formulation. There have been saints who experienced the reality of the Holy Souls or the Guardian Angels so deeply that these became their spring-board into supernature. The whole supernatural world resonated in the words they chose. So God does not have to be expressly mentioned in my PI, but as an experience God must resonate in it and be implied by it.

## 2. The form of the PI

a) The formulation should be brief. That is to say, I do not have to express every new religious experience in a form or take it into an existing form. New experiences must be associated with the core experience. Then everything I have already experienced, and all that I will in future experience, resonates in those words "at home in God". Therefore the PI can be expressed in a longer formulation, but it can also be a single word, a single person. In the end we all come to the point that, like Vincent Pallotti, it is only: God. Even then the expression PI is justified, because 1. God is experienced personally, and  
2. originally.

b) The formulation must be saturated with value. We take that for granted, but I would like to stress it once again. Nobody can work without a PI if they want to be a strong personality. This is always true, it has always been true and it will always be true. There has been a time when it was not necessary to consciously keep the PI in view, because there was a sound, religious climate. Today, however, where this is lacking, it is necessary to have intellectual clarity and understanding. Today, if we throw our

young people out into life, at a time when the inner core of their personalities has not matured sufficiently, and if they still do not have a conscious grasp of their PI, they will go under in the world around them. Hence, there must be intellectual clarity, my PI must be saturated with value, an expression of my personally experienced values, my central experiences, a seed that has germinated and has slowly begun to grow and mature from within.

c) The formulation should be experienced as an organic totality. I should hold onto the whole organism that resonates each time in me. This doesn't mean it has to be expressed in a form, but I must allow it to resonate.

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### Extract from "General Principles of the Apostolic Movement"

by Fr. Joseph Kentenich, 16 - 20 April 1928

First of all the question: What is meant by the PI? To define it psychologically, that is, to define what a person is who has already been formed by the PI, one could say: The personal ideal is the God-willed fundamental tendency, or the God-willed fundamental attitude of the graced soul, which is faithfully upheld, and which matures to the full freedom of God's children through organic, graced development.

1. In explanation let me give you a psychologically orientated historical introduction. Today people like to dwell on the question: What is the difference between the modern soul (1) and the soul of the Middle Ages? The answer that is given is: The modern soul is subjective, the soul in the Middle Ages was objective. Or, you could also say: The modern soul is anthropocentric, the soul in the Middle Ages was theocentric in its orientation. To put it from the pastoral point of view: The fundamental attitude of people today has long ceased to be so. Of course, people today also perform spiritual exercises. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the individual acts and the fundamental attitude of the soul. Even if the individual person does possess a fundamental, religious attitude, this does not always mean that the public climate is still Catholic. The Middle Ages lived in a specifically Catholic atmosphere. People today live in a specifically pagan atmosphere.

These few remarks give the reason for the demand that our whole pastoral work, our work in the pulpit and in the confessional, should be altered. When the fundamental attitude of the soul and the public climate were still thoroughly Catholic, it was possible to raise one thought from the pulpit this week, and another thought next week. Today this form of preaching does not achieve its aim. It presupposes that something is in the soul which in reality has to be re-created. Today it is the task of the pastor to re-create a specifically religious and Catholic atmosphere again. Put in other words, the aim of the pastorate today is the creation of a Catholic mentality.

How is this to be done? A sort of parish ideal, association ideal or house ideal, depending on what I have to care for, has to direct and unify all I do. Of course, such an ideal may not be chosen arbitrarily. It must have grown organically out of what is going on deep down in the people entrusted to my care. However, what applies to the community in this regard, also applies to the individual. This religious and Catholic fundamental attitude has to be created again in every individual person. If the means to achieve this before was the community ideal, so with the individual person it is the personal ideal, the PI, which should be nothing else than the specific religious, Catholic fundamental attitude of the soul.

2. What is meant by the fundamental tendency and fundamental attitude of the soul? The fundamental attitude is a 'habitus', a state of soul, the climate in a soul, in which a person lives. For example, a soul is wholly filled by love for Mary and our Lord. This is then the fundamental attitude of the soul. Actually, the fundamental tendency could mean the same thing. However, it is used to express something else. The fundamental tendency indicates that the soul is drawn into a fundamental attitude. For example, a soul has the fundamental attitude of warm love for Mary. However, if there is fervent love for Mary, the time will come when the need or tendency to love our Lord will awaken. That is to say, a new fundamental tendency grows out of the fundamental attitude of love for Mary, and it can and must be strengthened until it becomes a fundamental attitude.

The definition calls not only the fundamental attitude, but also the fundamental tendency of the soul, the personal ideal. This takes a stand to the question that has been repeatedly raised as to whether an ideal can be achieved, or not. Since the fundamental tendency is called the PI, this implies that the ideal can be reached to some extent. Of course, even this formulation includes something that is forever unattainable. The ideal is only reached in its final perfection when a person is in heaven and possesses the all-fulfilling and blissful vision of God.

When the definition mentions this God-willed fundamental tendency, two things are meant. If this God-willed fundamental tendency is understood as a natural tendency, drive, inclination or impulse, the word "God-willed" should indicate that only the noble qualities of the drives and inclinations are part of the ideal, not the excrescences that are not willed by God but at most allowed by him. The expression "God-willed" should also emphasize the supernatural quality of the impulses. It is God who introduces this or that impulse into my soul as grace.

"The God-willed fundamental tendency of the graced soul". According to God's concept, the person without grace is not a full human being. God has lifted us up into the supernatural sphere. If grace is lacking, a person lacks the 'forma substantialis' of supernature.

"... that is faithfully upheld ..." The fundamental tendency must be upheld faithfully so that it may become a fundamental attitude. The fundamental attitude must be faithfully upheld so that new fundamental tendencies can develop out of it. However,

to say that it must be "faithfully upheld" does not mean "consciously upheld". There are people who would be harmed if they were to uphold and intensify their fundamental tendency consciously.

Spranger, who has studied in greater detail the ways in which life expresses itself in forms, differentiates between two types of people: the aesthetic and the ethical natures. To use other expressions: the emotional and the reflective natures. People with emotional natures are those whose strongly marked characters urge them powerfully to develop and unfold themselves. Such people simply don't know what to do with resolutions. They may not act so reflexively, otherwise they will become scrupulous and throw everything aside. They may, therefore, not aim at upholding their fundamental attitude consciously. The ideal thing for such people would be to live in an atmosphere to which they only need to expose themselves in order to protect and develop their fundamental attitude. Ethical and reflexive natures have a strongly marked character that urges them with elemental force to express themselves, but they feel the need to grasp the special character of their souls with their minds, to dissect every movement of their souls, as it were, in order to be able to promote what is valuable with conscious purposefulness.

"... to the full freedom of God's children". The freedom of God's children is ultimately love. Every fundamental attitude, therefore, must finally merge into the attitude: My God and my all! Of course, even this common fundamental attitude will always remain subjectively coloured if development is organic. Holiness does not make people identical. On the contrary, it is the most faithful protector of a person's specific character. The personal character of every saint swells with the underlying note of love to become a full and harmonious chord.

3. How does one recognise the fundamental tendency of the soul? It is possible to differentiate between an objective and a subjective method, which are obviously interrelated, so that now this, now that is dominant.

a) The objective method consists in analysing the objective content of the ideal of one's calling, and then seeing what the soul responds to at that time. This must then be held onto as the fundamental tendency or attitude of the soul and developed further. For example, there is a boy who obviously has a vocation to the priesthood. He himself cannot make up his mind whether to become a priest or an officer. The prudent spiritual director will advise him: "Become a competent officer, but an officer in God's kingdom." This combines both tendencies in the boy's soul in a synthesis that the boy can understand and find attractive, and at the same time creates favourable soil for further developments.

b) The second way is the subjective way via the passions (2). Since this way is the more usual one, and since the most personal qualities of the ideal can be inferred from the passions, we shall dwell briefly on the psychology of the passions.

By passion is meant only a strong impulse of the sensual appetites (3). God placed the

passions as forces into human nature. By nature they are not bad, but morally indifferent. Since they are a gift of nature, they may not be exterminated by the person striving for holiness, but rather ennobled.

From the first, a differentiation has been made in the Union (4) between two passions: Sensuality and pride. One can manage quite nicely in practice with this division. By the way, they are confirmed by the most modern trends in psychology in so far as individual psychology and psychoanalysis build on this division. The indifferent quality included in these passions is the power of self-surrender in the sensual passion, and the drive to dominate in pride. To ennoble the passions means to bring this indifferent quality in them into indissoluble union with a good object, and through ennobling intensification of the less developed passion to create a counter-balance to what has developed strongly, that is, the sensual should acquire a sound desire to dominate, and pride a sound capacity for self-surrender.

But how can one recognise one's passions? Here, too, there are two ways. The first way is to study the subconscious soul life. At those moments when the emotional life is not under the control of the will, for example, when one is day-dreaming, praying the Breviary, etc, the subconscious soul life can play as it wills. It is then that the most secret wishes come to light and reveal the inclinations and passions of the soul. The second way is the study of the temperaments. If I know my temperament is mixed, I also know how my passions are mixed.

4. How does the fundamental tendency become the fundamental attitude? There are two means that help to strengthen the fundamental tendency and make it a fundamental attitude. The first is concentration. The fundamental tendency is consciously held onto, repeatedly renewed, although not mechanically, but by repeatedly being placed before the soul with its full value. Only those thoughts influence the soul which the soul recognises and accepts as really valuable. The second means consists in trying to form one's whole life according to this fundamental tendency. The steps by which this formation of life is carried out by the PI are called the formal stages of the PI in the asceticism of the Union. In the beginning, that is, as the first stage, the PI is reviewed very often. One considers in very objective terms how the PI can be incorporated into the individual actions of everyday life. A soul who does this seriously, and who has recognised the connections between the PI and life, will soon feel the need to examine every action afterwards, that is they will feel urged to examine their actions for their moral worth by means of the PI. That is the second stage. In the third stage the PI works like a form of good intention. The person brings all his or her actions, which have until now lain scattered on the periphery of their life, into connection with their PI in such a way that they are the outflow of the PI as though from a spring. The fourth stage also helps us to reach the one aim, that everything should be an outflow of that one great idea, that one great thought, which grace has just placed into the foundations of the soul. The soul in this stage feels urged to let his or her PI decide the matter whenever they are in doubt about an action. Once the soul has got to this, it automatically rises to the fifth stage, in which the God-willed fundamental tendency has become so strong in the soul that it also motivates

actions that the soul would otherwise not have performed. Once the soul has reached this stage, the fundamental tendency has become the fundamental attitude.

5. What are the elements which the fundamental attitude should ultimately contain? Whatever is contained germinally in every God-willed fundamental tendency. According to the threefold relationship of every creature to the Creator, to their neighbour and themselves, there are three things: Love for God, love for one's neighbour and an ordered love of self.

6. What possibilities exist for the development of the individual elements of the fundamental tendency?

a) Love for God is capable of developing in extent and in intensity. It is capable of developing in extent - dogmatics gives us the reason for this when it tells us that God is three Persons. If there are three Persons in God, the soul, which should absorb the whole of dogmatics, must as time goes by become so mature that it enters into a personal relationship with all three Persons of the Godhead. The extent of the love of God finds expression in the stages of 'caritas': the ethical purification of concepts of value, devotion to Mary, devotion to our Lord, devotion to God the Father, devotion to the Holy Spirit. By the way, these stages do not necessarily have to start at the bottom. God's Spirit breathes where he will. The spiritual director is only the handyman of the Holy Spirit. He has only to listen to find out where the Holy Spirit is urging the soul in order to lead it there.

Love for God is capable of growing in intensity. The moralists and ascetics of old said that there are two stages in the love of God: amor concupiscentiae and amor benevolentiae. This division is of particular importance to people today. On the whole people today are more inclined towards self-seeking love of God - amor concupiscentiae. We love God for our own sake, because God is a vital value to us, and because we will become happier on account of our love for God. Of course, such a person must gradually be led to love God for God's sake. But one has to leave time for this. Naturally one could ask whether there is such a thing as disinterested personal love on this earth, and whether anyone on earth can love God purely for his sake. Here on earth there will never be a completely pure, personal and wholly disinterested love of God. The thought that I can also get something out of it will always be there, even if it is very quiet. However, the old principle: Non propter hoc sed nec sine hoc, also applies here. I give my whole nature wholly to God and leave everything else to him. As the soul continues to advance, the 'amor benevolentiae' will grow increasingly in strength, until the two penetrate each other. Every person striving for holiness must take a turn from the anthropocentric to the theocentric. Only when this turn has been taken does the person begin to become inwardly calm, and because of this inner calm, and because of being filled with God, they will begin to achieve great things.

b) Although self-love cannot grow in extent, it is possible to distinguish five stages of the growth of ordered self-love in intensity, which the asceticism of the Union calls the stages of 'passio'. As a result of original sin human nature has become sick to the roots of its being. Our inclinations and drives must first of all be controlled to such an

extent that no serious sins occur. Therefore the first stage is liberation from habitual mortal sin. The second stage is liberation from habitual venial sin. The third stage is purification of the drives by liberating them from the inclination towards what is dangerous and superfluous, and by overcoming purely impulsive desires. The fourth stage is self-surrender to the divine will. The divine will in itself becomes the dominant principle in the soul. The fifth stage is the habitual preference for suffering. Man, and in particular priests, must reach out also to this last stage. Whoever does not strive to love the cross and suffering will only be a mediocre priest today, because the whole of life is so heavily burdened with the cross and suffering.

The great means with which to foster an ordered love of self is the particular survey (PS) (5). An ordered love of self is taken up into the personal ideal as an ennobled passion. However, this does not mean that it is the fundamental attitude of the soul, it has first to be made the fundamental attitude by the particular survey. Of course, the particular survey is not looked upon here as a means of exterminating what is only faulty, but as a method of battle that goes through the whole day in order to ennoble the main passion, and as a means to draw in all that moves the soul - love for Mary, love for our Lord, etc. Its renewal, therefore, is always the renewal of the entire soul life with all its goals and values.

For example, if someone has the resolution to be cheerful all the time, he should see to it that this resolution is connected with that Person in supernature to whom his soul in its present stage of development has a personal relationship. Therefore, his particular survey should be, for example: Out of love for our Lord I will be really cheerful now. If the particular survey is always connected up in this way, the soul can grow organically. Then, the more love for Mary grows, and the more the soul grows into supernature, self-love will also be ennobled until finally the particular survey is nothing else than the function or the renewal of the entire attitude of one's soul.

c) Love for souls, again, is capable of growing extensively and intensively. It is capable of growing in extent. A person is only able to have a community awareness that encompasses great communities if he has learnt to embrace small communities. One must first be able to love the souls of a small circle before love becomes general.

The love of souls is also capable of growth in intensity. Here, too, one has to differentiate between various stages:

Stage 1: Amor concupiscentiae. A person is apostolically active because he knows and feels that through giving himself to souls he becomes inwardly richer, deeper, more purified.

Stage 2: Amor benevolentiae. The motive of personal growth increasingly recedes into the background and the dominant motive becomes: If only you are happy!

Stage 3: A person rises to the heights of such selflessness that he will gladly give up certain souls if God wants it. Love for God has become so strong in his soul that the



love for souls is completely subordinated to it. If God wants a person to love him through working for souls, he works for them. If God wants a person to love him through suffering, he suffers.

### Footnotes

1. When Father Kentenich uses the word soul it is synonymous with person.
2. Father Kentenich gives his own meaning to this term. He explains it in "Unter dem Schutze Mariens" (1939): "Every movement of the sensual appetite - love, hatred, desire, is thus a passion. ... This should be noted, because modern pedagogics understands passion either as a constant inclination to or aversion from a 'bonum' (good) or 'malum' (evil) in opposition to the judgement of reason, or else violent, strong sensual desire. ... By it we understand every movement of the sensual appetite, every one - not only the stronger, every movement - not only the constant direction towards something good or bad, every movement towards each and every object - whether good or bad" (p.115). "The passions move independently of our wills, hence their name passions, 'passio'. A person is primarily passive" (p.116).
3. I have chosen a Thomistic term to translate this concept, since it corresponds to what Father Kentenich means: "St Thomas ... described two kinds of appetition (emotion): a simple tendency towards or away from what is sensed as good or evil (this affective power is called the concupiscible appetite), and a more complicated sensory inclination to meet bodily threats, obstacles and dangers by attacking or avoiding them or by putting up with them (this affective power is called irascible appetite). Eleven distinct kinds of sensory passions (emotions) are distributed to these two sensory appetites: love, desire, delight, hate, aversion and sorrow to the concupiscible; fear, daring, hope, despair and anger to the irascible" (Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol 8, p.108, ed. P. Edwards, Macmillan 1967).
4. Today Father Kentenich would say Schoenstatt or the Schoenstatt Movement.
5. Or special resolution. I have taken over the term used in a translation of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, since Father Kentenich took it from St. Ignatius.