

The Good Shepherd 'knows' and 'understands' his own

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As human beings we long for love and acceptance. Only when we feel appreciated, accepted, encouraged we can develop our personality, become creative in our work or build up a community as a family. The following text meditates from this perspective on the quality of „knowledge” a leader must have: it is an all-embracing, loving „understanding”.

[/88] "I know mine and mine know me, as I know the Father and the Father knows me."(cf Jn 10,14-15). Here you have it again: [an example for] our Lord's way of thinking. At times people may accuse us Schoenstatt people of being dreamers. If we are dreamers, then Christ is even more a dreamer than we are. Do you sense how immense are the demands that Jesus makes on our fatherliness?

[The unattainable heights of this ideal]

So that you are not too astonished by the heights [of the ideal shown to us], I would like to remind you that on another occasion Jesus showed us the Father in heaven as the ideal of perfection. That is to say, not just Adam and Eve before original sin; not even Our Lady. That would have been an enormous comparison. In this context he points out the highest ideal conceivable: "You must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5,48). Well, that is absolutely unattainable! Nevertheless, he awakens the striving toward this ideal.

[The pedagogy that supports this: pedagogy of ideals]

Obviously, it is clear that what I have said is meant figuratively; if I had meant it literally, we would have to say: not even in the visio beata [in the beatific vision in heaven] will we achieve that. Please take a look at the pedagogy of Christ. How extensively Jesus practiced ideal pedagogy! To what extent did he shed light, time and again, on the ideal! Of course, he knows that we are weak. However, since this was his pedagogical approach, I think we too may, on the one hand, imitate him time and again in our education – in both our self-education and in educating others. On the other hand, we want to make the effort to penetrate more deeply what Jesus is saying here.

[The intrinsic value of the image: the direct explanation]

[/89] "I know mine and mine know me..." First I would like to look at these words on the natural level of ordinary life and explain the intrinsic value of the image: I know mine.

[The solidarity of the shepherd with his flock as a whole and with the individual sheep]

As background, to help us understand, let us observe the shepherd and his relationship to his flock. What is the shepherd like? I shall try to describe this relationship. Let us look at peoples who live close to nature, who are in direct contact with natural processes. They take for granted the fact that the shepherd knows the individual sheep of his flock. He knows their needs because an exceedingly warm love unites the shepherd with his sheep. To a great extent we have lost this feeling because we do not have direct contact with nature.

The shepherd, however, knows not only the individual little sheep, but also the entire flock. The experts who have often investigated these natural processes tell us: the shepherd need not count his sheep individually; he has an eye for the whole, and it is immediately clear to him: a sheep is missing. Thus, amid the entire [flock] he sees the individual [sheep]. We are more accustomed to seeing the individual among the whole.

[God keeps the individual and the whole simultaneously in view]

The Church Fathers tell us: The good God is fond of the whole as if the individual would not exist, and is simultaneously so fond of the individual, as if there were no multitude.¹ This is just a tentative explanation that makes us aware of how God takes care of each individual while simultaneously looking after everyone. Notice how high our ideal is!

What happens in our case? Usually, we begin with one [person] or another; then our love grows and increasingly encompasses the whole.² Even if we admit a development in the way we think, live, love and govern, we must honestly admit that we will never be able to simultaneously take the whole and the individual into consideration as does God. That is the reason for the makeshift expression which can give us a direction for our thinking and striving: I am attached to the whole; however, not in such a way that I do not see the individual, not as if the individual were only a [more or less meaningless] number.

[/90] I am attached to the entire whole, and I put all the strength of my life, all the power of my love at the disposal of both the entire family and also simultaneously of each individual. And I am interested in each small matter, even the smallest, in the life of each one. "I know mine and mine know me..."

¹ The Church Father to whom Fr. Kentenich refers, is probably Gregory the Great: „Divine Providence extends over each soul in the same way it extends over an entire city, over each city in the same way it extends over an entire nation, and over each nation in the same way it extends over the whole human race, but in such a way that he watches over each individual as if he had no other care or concern and over the whole world as if he did not need to care for each one individually.” See: TurBr (1952) in: Hug, Nüchterne Frömmigkeit, 438 und 485.

² Fr. Kentenich devotes special attention to the appropriate relationship between care for the individual and care for the whole in Christian governing. He reflects on this when he weighs the manner in which Divine Providence governs. God knows how to harmonize the two things: his providentia personalis (individualis) and his providentia generalis. See: TurBr (1952) in: Hug, Nüchterne Frömmigkeit, 426 and 463-474.

Applied to the sheep: the sheep knows its shepherd and knows when to react [to his call], just as Jesus says: The sheep senses when the shepherd calls. Any number of people can call; the sheep does not react: the others are simply not the shepherd. How uncomplicated it is: Jesus simply uses images taken from daily life; indeed, he takes them from the images with which his listeners are familiar.

[The biblical “knowing”]

First I would like to repeat the words of Jesus: “I know mine and mine know me...” Actually, now I would have to come to the logical conclusion: just as the earthly shepherd knows his flock. But this comparison is not enough for Jesus. Now he soars to the heights: “as the Father knows me and I know the Father.” Can you imagine anything greater? Are you aware of what this means? In what way does he [as the only-begotten Son of God] know the Father? And in what way does the Father know him? Dogmatics tell us: [the Father’s knowing] is so strong and deep that the product of this knowing is a new Person. How deeply interwoven they are! How well the Father knows the Son! And again, this interwovenness is so deep that it constitutes two Persons. And we must simultaneously point to the Person of the Holy Spirit. That is how deep the loving knowledge of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is. And for Jesus this is the ideal. Just as he knows the Father, just as the Father knows him, so too does he want to know each individual. This is how we see Christ: so deeply, interiorly rooted, similar to how he and the Holy Spirit are attached to the Father. “I know mine and mine know me as I know the Father.” In what way does he know the Father? How deep is his knowledge of the Father’s wishes, of the Father’s originality!

[/91] Here again: this image is as high as the heavens; under normal circumstances anyone would consider it excessive, but applied to Christ the image is quite right. This is how he knows me; he knows me with all my abilities, with all my possibilities, with all my weaknesses. However, his is a loving knowing; this is why I simply named as first quality: the love of a shepherd, that is, a shepherd’s love founded on knowing, on understanding. In our eyes, all this reaches as high as the sky!

[Applied to us: knowing as “understanding”]

If you apply what we have said to our small community, and mainly to the Leader of leaders, the Father of fathers³, you cannot help but ask yourself: Does he know each individual? Does he really know them? Now you may mention each individual by name. [Applied to me as confrere:] Do I know the individual confrere and each one’s originality? Do I know them with benevolence, with love? Is my knowing a benevolent knowing, recognition and acknowledgment? “I know mine as the Father knows me.” I have to [try to] be the reflection of the Father. Have I acquired this deep knowing? Nowadays psychology refers to this as understanding. Understanding is

³Fr. Kentenich refers to Günther Boll (at the time not yet ordained priest) whom he had foreseen as the superior and leading figure of the „New Community”, which was meant to prepare the official foundation of the Schoenstatt Fathers.

simply a loving knowing, a benevolent knowing, a real knowing, a clear knowing, a sure knowing, a penetrating knowing.

[A critical look into our times]

My dear Confreres, you may not overlook the fact that, in our day, masculinity is on its way to forego fatherliness altogether. Nowadays masculinity is on its way to devote its strength entirely to technology, unfolding its creative strength in technology alone. However, [this type of creativity] does not bring about the transformation of one's being; it does not comprise the life of a person. As a father I let my children study. Why do I have them learn and study? Later, in one way or another, they should be able to earn a living. To reach life in its depths, however, [has become] almost impossible.

[We are typifying, exaggerating]

[/92] And again, you should sense that I typify. In reality things are not like that everywhere. Not by any means! Thanks be to God that it is not so. If it were, I would say we are approaching the end of the world. If it were, the entire order of being would be altogether upside-down.

[The task given to us is enormous]

What I would really like to tell myself and also you once more is this: how great are the demands included in the concept *father* and *fatherliness*. It does not imply enjoyment or domination; instead it is an unending serving. How much must I pray and study in order to get to know my followers! [From what has been said,] we come to the following conclusion: if I know someone, then I may also help him toward the development [and realization] of his character. That is precisely it: fatherliness includes helping to perfect a person's nature.

[A look at the families who belong to the Movement in Milwaukee]

And where do we still find fathers today? Just consider the fathers who belong to our family branch here. Where do we find a father who sees correctly what I just mentioned? And we are not taking into account whether the father himself practices what he knows [i.e. whether he has the strength to put the ideal into practice]. How fathers struggle and slave [just to safeguard the standard of living and send their children to school]! But what about their inner transformation, a transformation of their life? In addition, it may be present occasionally. And yet the primary thing these days in the education of children is that they acquire knowledge so that the child can take his or her place in modern society.

[Let's not lose sight of the goal]

[/93] If we see [the goal of education] correctly, we look at fatherliness as an exceedingly fruitful task. This is why it is so important that we do not primarily try to gain influence. The greatest influence we can have on the world is this: that we become fathers; in other words, that we really become children in order to become fathers; indeed, fathers who give creative form to life. To that end: do not get stuck on brain-knowledge; instead always see the actual question: How do I give form to life?

[Petition to Mary as our educator]

Think of what we often repeat: what does our Blessed Mother want to give us? Spiritual [inner] transformation. The entire person [not only his head] must be transformed. Do you think that we can be transformed – exceptions confirm the rule – through mere knowledge⁴, or by merely learning a few methodical-technical tricks and applying them? No, [that is by no means sufficient]! A person has creative power only to the extent to which he or she develops inner authority – this is always true. Perhaps you could again make a more exact mental note of these two expressions: inner and exterior authority. Of course, there is always tension between inner and exterior authority. This is a matter of basic attitudes [in education].

[Understanding and forgiving]

In order to go into more depth, I would like to dwell for a while on the thought of understanding. Let me repeat what we have already heard in the past: to perceive means more than to know; it is a loving perception, equivalent to understanding the entire person. Doesn't each of us have the inner need to be understood? How often I sense: he doesn't understand me at all! He may understand my words, but he does not understand my person. He doesn't understand why, at times, I react to such an extreme; he doesn't understand why, while someone else remains perfectly calm, my entire soul revolts in some situations.

[/94] You are familiar with the French proverb: to know someone implies to forgive him. What does it mean? If I really know someone, then I understand him [and his reactions]. To understand someone means to forgive him everything. Of course, that does not mean that I just let everything run its course. Every person – I include myself – wants above all to be understood and only then to be educated. And if I encounter someone and sense his benevolence, sense that he cares [for me] even though I go around with God-knows-how-many poor habits, [right from the start] there is a totally different basic relationship.

[Paternitas calls for creative power]

Paternitas is by no means a play. Do you not notice how much fatherliness demands of us? I know for certain that the cry for fatherhood can be heard everywhere these days. But I have my doubts whether it is correctly understood. Isn't it actually just general emotional bla-bla-bla? If you look into present-day writings, religious writings, including Sunday bulletins, the relationship between father and children is depicted so beautifully in them: beautiful pictures! That is all right. However, behind this you should always see what is essential [in educating children]: [that the father and his children] have a creative mutual understanding. If that is not the case, everything that happens is nothing more than play; it is deceiving; it is not effective in forming children, because there is no fatherliness behind it.

Recall what we said earlier: to educate means to be creatively active, that is, to beget. How few fathers beget the [spiritual] life of their children! Yes, they beget them physically, but [in our context] this is not the question; that is a biological process. How few fathers beget their children on the spiritual level, that is, how few form their children's soul, how few touch the souls of their children and form them in a creative way.

⁴ German: Kennen und Erkennen.

[To press forward from the attitude to the deed]

My dear Confreres, if you really want to become a community of fathers, fathers of our entire [Schoenstatt] Family, fathers of the people; and if you want to form new fathers, if you want to build a Father Kingdom – a Father Kingdom first and foremost in relationship to our Father in heaven, but also in the entire culture – [then you must prove it by your deeds].

[Joseph Engling as an example]

[/95] If you think of Joseph Engling and compare yourself [to him], then I have to really make serious efforts to develop down-to-earth action. It is not enough to say: I live in keeping with [the correct] attitudes. What did he do? He wrote down the most essential questions, those which opened his being interiorly and clearly defined the ideal of his very being [i.e. which belonged to the core of his personal ideal]; he repeatedly reminded himself of these at certain opportunities. A definite manly discipline and strength must penetrate our person!

If in daily life I always wait for attitudes to develop, [then I'll have to wait a long time]. While on earth, who can always consciously bear the same attitude in mind? We also have to keep in mind that we have original sin, and that there are times when our attitudes slip through our fingers. But if I want to be concrete, then [for my own examination of conscience or day of recollection] I must formulate a set of questions which secure my fatherliness. That is important not only now [in the silence of tertianship]. It is twice as important in the future: How will I be later? Otherwise, there is danger that all ideals become idols: today we are enthusiastic, the day after tomorrow we encounter difficulties, [and then we throw off everything]. And, for the father, difficulties belong to daily life]; difficulties awaken creative strength in us.

[The seed and *Ver Sacrum*]

Earlier we gave some thought to what it means to be grain. The core thought is always the same: the seed must die. Incidentally, when I speak of the seed, I am using the biblical expression for what we in Schoenstatt history refer to as “*Ver Sacrum*”⁵ 3. The *Ver Sacrum* community is seed for a new world, but the seed itself must die. At the time, how the Holy Springtime generation was educated according to the legend! And today? How will the good God educate me so that I am increasingly granted the gift of genuine childlikeness before him! Then in every way I will develop strong fatherliness; or should I say motherliness? Choose the expression you [prefer]. For me the motherly aspect is always implied in [the word] fatherliness. A man must live by placing severe demands on himself. If he does not do so, he is guilty of negligence.

[/96] Of course, if I [am not interiorly free but rather] filled with psychic compulsion, then in

⁵ The *Holy Springtime*, [Ver sacrum], a Roman legend relates the following: whenever there was great need – pestilence, war, natural catastrophes – the people consecrated a *Holy Springtime* to their deity: the best of their youth was to dare a new beginning; they were to leave their fatherland and, amid great danger and sacrifices, conquer a new land for the deity. Following a play prepared by Fr. Hermes, SAC, the youth became enthusiastic and, after 1936, this led to the formation of the Ver Sacrum Generation of World War II. It was this generation of young men who donated the sanctuary light for the Original Shrine and took this as their symbol when they consecrated themselves on New Year's Eve 1940/41.

practice I must apply differently what has been said. In that case, my “lightheartedness” is equivalent to becoming the powerful personality. But for now we will presuppose that all of us are free from psychic compulsion.

[With regard to our Father’s manner of speaking]

You notice that I am looking for several other expressions in order to describe the same life-process. It seems to be a mere playing with expressions, but it is actually nothing more than an attempt to shed light on the same process from very different points of view so that in one way or another each of you discovers himself.

What must my understanding be like? You will probably comprehend the following expressions immediately, and I will not need to explain them further. My understanding is

- ◆ First, a creative understanding;
- ◆ Second, a respectful understanding;
- ◆ Third, an uplifting understanding.⁶

[Creative understanding]

When is my knowing [a person] equivalent to creative understanding? When I creatively grasp the person before me at the tip of his personality. Only if my understanding is filled with love, will I have a creative, transforming influence. The power of love is always a creative power. Even from the philosophical point of view, love consists essentially in the transferal of life⁷. Then there is the other definition which we have used so often: love is a power that unites and makes similar. A power that unites: that precisely is the transferal of life.

[/97] You see, if we want to be a brotherly community of fathers, my togetherness with my brothers, our sincere togetherness must always be a type of transferal of life. If I close up toward my brother, if I don’t let any of my brother’s spirit in, and don’t release any of my spirit, our relationship is disturbed.

Each of us may ask himself: How do I relate to the others? Do I have creative understanding, is ours a creative being together, a creative being in one another? The relationship among us has creative power to the extent to which our being together is not a mere being next to each other, but rather a genuine being fond of one another. This is what Jesus means when he says: "I know mine and mine know me, as I know the Father and the Father knows me."

[Respectful understanding]

Secondly, my understanding must be respectful. Why respectful? There is a connection between this and our image of God. What is the Triune God’s reverence like? How respectful the three

⁶ See the exposition *The Art of Listening*, in: JPT (1931), published as *Ethos und Ideal in der Erziehung*, Vallendar-Schönstatt 1972, 286-300.

⁷ German: Lebensübertragung

divine persons are toward one another! They are so respectful that they even constitute – now this is an improvised expression – three [independent] personalities. How respectful! In other words, they do not reject or repel one another; instead they acknowledge each other.⁸ Love, in its essence, moves not only toward but also away from [the beloved]. If you really love one another, you may never overlook this. Love thrusts us toward one another, heart to heart. And yet, the other side of love is reverence. Fundamentally, it is a trembling before another person's greatness. Of course, if you are so filled with the weaknesses of the person before you, that you see absolutely no greatness in him, that you do not find the treasure in the field, then, generally speaking, you will not be able to love at all.

[/98] You would at least have to have compassionate love. But even compassionate love always presupposes [that I perceive] some value in the other person. If I am not able to discover any value in him, my love cannot be enkindled. This is why it is so important that we really acknowledge other types of people! Yes, reverence is awe. To love – what does it mean? It means being glowingly fascinated and seized by awe. In reference to God it is a feeling of awe before God's greatness and of being glowingly fascinated (attracted) by his love.

To some extent we must acquire a good deal of this respectfulness. Later on, when you are priests, if you want to live and act in a fatherly way, you must always see to it that reverence is the root of your being. This does not mean that I cannot tell a joke. To the contrary. If I am able to acknowledge and accept people with a psychology different from my way of being, then this being joyful when we are together, teasing one another – as long as it is kept in bounds – is also an expression of reverence. I accept him as a personality. Respectful love, respectful understanding. [...]

[Uplifting understanding]

[/99] And lastly: uplifting understanding. You should keep this in mind at all times: I always believe in the good in a person, even if he is a criminal. Yes, even in a criminal there is still some good. It is true that original sin has made us sick through and through, but it has not marred us altogether, to the point that we should conceive of ourselves as Protestant theory teaches. We are not mangy dogs. This is Protestant thinking: God accepts us and then covers up all my weaknesses. No, there is tremendously much good in us, both in the natural order and even more so in the supernatural order. I believe in the good in my brother even if his ways of behaving and reacting often hurt me; I believe in his mission. You must foster this attitude toward every person, now in our community life and later as well in your ministry – even if it were the dirtiest person, even if it were your mortal enemy!

That is uplifting understanding. It is not oppressive. I ask myself each time: what uplifts? What awakens? What does not drag downward? I do not stand there with a whip; I do not judge everything from a critical and moralizing perspective; rather, I uplift the person.

⁸ German: die hinlaufende and die zurücklaufende Linie der Liebe: Erglühen und Erschauern.

[/100] Today this is so important because we often observe how filled with inferiority complexes the young generation is. When working with the present-day person, education toward humility must doubtlessly be applied differently than in the past. Nowadays [in my ministry] I must presuppose, that the person no longer possesses sound self-esteem. If I have no self-esteem, I can never become humble; at the most I can become mentally ill. Time and again we must remind ourselves of this, even if we are attacked because of it, or are treated with hostility and are called heretics. These are no heresies! They are only the Church's old, traditional teaching applied to present-day, fragile human beings!

[An enormous and up-to-date task – our helplessness]

If you look at this ideal in this general outline, a gigantic task lies ahead. Indeed, so elementally great that I would not know of a greater one. And it is so elementally up-to-date! In every way, as regards the present-day person, it hits the nail on the head. Then we understand, how much we must depend on Our Lady. We want to be instruments in the hands of the Blessed Mother, in order to transform the present-day world, to help transform the person of today down to the core of his being.

You see, we are all helpless in the face of such a great task. My exterior appearance may make me seem like a genius, but who of us feels that he is equal to such a task? Who? If I do not realize that I am an instrument, if I do not know that another divine power is using me, [then we will very soon grow weary and be disappointed].

[The instrument's trust in the reality of the covenant of love]

Think of the expression: "the dumbest farmers harvest the biggest potatoes."⁹ The saying is universally valid, even in our context. If I cannot live up to the ideal, soon I will consider myself a dreamer. Then, as so often happens in life, in the beginning one has the highest expectations of a man. Failure and disappointments follow. He loses courage and gives up. I say this in simple words, but these are seriously weighty experiences. These are ideals for which we have to struggle.

[/101] Therefore, I repeat: renewal of the covenant of love. We want the covenant of love between us, Our Lady and the Triune God to become a really genuine, deep covenant of love among one another. Whether it is a fatherly-childlike or a childlike-fatherly relationship, it must be a covenant of love; indeed, a genuine covenant of love.

[Reference to *Heavenwards*]

Let the first verse of the *Hymn of the Home*¹⁰ take hold of you once again! Please do it! In our *Heavenwards* you will find, in abbreviated form, many things upon which I briefly touched. One

⁹ This is a typical farming expression often used by Fr. Kentenich. He repeatedly drew our attention to the significance of faith and trust: those who work most and count on their own strength for everything they do, will not necessarily harvest the most. Growth, harvest and success depend on God.

¹⁰ *Heavenwards*, p.158.

understands these concise expressions found in *Heavenwards* only after having absorbed the entire world from which they stem.

Now we want to continue on our way and be grateful to our Blessed Mother that she grants us the opportunity to really reach out for the ideal as instruments in her hand. We want to be grateful for all the gifts she has bestowed on us till now, and even more grateful for all we still expect from her.