

PART ONE

Teachers and their Relationship with Students

In order to succeed in the very difficult task of effectively educating young people, a teacher truly must possess certain qualities.

Zeal Zeal is the great desire to make God known, loved, and served, and thus to bring knowledge of salvation to others. Activity flows from this virtue. Teachers who possess it fulfill the duties of their profession with enthusiasm, love, courage, and perseverance. When they see young people who lack knowledge and Christian values, they experience what Saint Paul felt when he wrote to those he had evangelized: “My children for whom I labor again and again until Christ is within you.” That statement, in fact, is the goal of all Christian education. To reach it, teachers must neglect nothing.

Teachers who have this virtue will be happy only when their students progress in the knowledge of virtue. All day and each day they will work at this great and difficult task of Christian education. When they pray, when they study, when they receive the sacraments, it will be especially for “their young people.” This will be done without distinction or regard for any student as special, because such teachers know that all students are equally important to God and that their duty is to work with each with the same devotion, watchfulness, and perseverance.

If at times you show preference to any young person, it should be the poor, those who have no one else to show them preference, those who have the least knowledge, those who lack skills and talent, and those who are not Catholic or Christian. If you show them greater care and concern, it must be because their needs are greater and because it is only just to give more to those who have received less. You must be “all things to all people,” like Saint Paul—little with the little, great with the great, seeing in all only the image of God imprinted within them like a sacred seal that you must preserve at all cost.

If at times you show preference to any young person, it should be the poor, those who have no one else to show them preference, those who have the least knowledge, those who lack skills and talent, and those who are not Catholic or Christian.

Teachers animated by such a spirit do not simply follow what is generally accepted in a profession but have a thousand little ways to encourage progress in even the weakest and least-talented students and challenge all students to their highest performance.

Such teachers know when to maintain silence when required, to keep students at work when required, and to maintain proper order without using punishments—neither threats nor reprimands. Such teachers use any occasion to provide models for young people and to communicate about God, Jesus Christ, and the students’ souls. Since the zeal of these teachers is guided by love, they do everything with strength and with gentleness: with strength because they are courageous and unshakable in the midst of any difficulties they face; with gentleness because they are tender and compassionate like Jesus Christ, the model for all teachers, who loved to be bothered by young people.

Without this virtue of zeal among the teachers in a school, everything changes. Everything falls apart. There is ignorance, disorder, bad conduct, and the true corruption of young people—these are what families experience through the faintheartedness and indifference of teachers without zeal. They are put in the midst of young people and cause the ruin of a great number of them. Thus, the virtue of zeal is necessary for a Christian teacher.

