

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.

Gentleness It was the Lord Himself who said “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” There is no other conclusion to be reached than that in the overseeing of the mind and the heart of a young person and in the effective use of authority in a school, a teacher needs to possess gentleness. Gentleness is the filling of the soul with the Spirit so as to moderate the anger that arises when a person feels irritated towards those who have caused some injury. It is the result of a patience that never tires and of self-control that keeps everything under the guardianship of reason and faith.

Given that, one can understand the need of such a virtue in teachers, for to fulfill their mission successfully teachers must make themselves liked by their students. Gentleness is the only way in which they will succeed in the task of bringing out love in their students. You are aware of the statement “love causes love.” As people, we are built so that we cannot resist a person who displays true affection for us. Young people are very impressionable and are especially prone to this. They relate easily and happily with those from whom they hope and expect to receive reciprocal love and confidence. Feelings of love and respect between teachers and students are the result of charity and gentleness, inseparable virtues that cannot exist independently of one another. Saint Francis de Sales himself says that meekness is “the very flower of charity.”

Teachers who are meek and who follow the example of Jesus Christ lose none of their authority and do not stress what is hard and severe in authority. They put themselves in the students’ places. They try to persuade their students that they will find in their teachers tender and devoted friends who understand them. Considering themselves as taking the place of those who have entrusted young people to them, gentle teachers borrow from the father and the mother positive feelings toward young people. Everything in such teachers bears the stamp of this virtue: They avoid judging with harshness and anger, and they do not rely on exaggerated confidence in themselves. They are always guided by a heart full of compassion and kindness and make their decisions without stubbornness or injustice. They do not say things that will hurt the feelings of young people and do not make fun of students, as people who often feel injured by statements or actions of another do. Gentleness overcomes those tendencies to self-love and shuts out the desire for revenge. Gentleness permits teachers to endure all the adversities and unpleasant experiences and occurrences that go hand in hand with schooling and to proceed with complete calmness of spirit.

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Gentleness begets a number of other good qualities: sensibility, good will, and a pleasant manner of acting and speaking. Gentleness permits teachers to remove what is harsh from a command, permits teachers to participate in activities with young people, leads teachers to be able to talk and discuss matters with students, permits teachers to sympathize with students who are often upset over things that are not important, and permits teachers to assist students when they are not feeling well or they are depressed.

(To be continued.)

