

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.*

Prudence *(Continued)*

Cleverness can never substitute adequately for preliminary work and preparation, and most of the time teaches who rely on their own cleverness fall into the use of old materials, repetitions, and digressions. Often some teachers have the illusion that the lesson or material is so simple, so easy, and so elementary that they require no preparation.

*Cleverness can never substitute adequately for preliminary work and preparation*

No teaching, however, requires more preparation than the teaching of young people. There is nothing more difficult than helping young minds begin building a fund of knowledge—minds often with small capacity and very few ideas. It is not easy to help students with inattentive and unskilled minds move toward study and reflection. Teachers must practice becoming like young people, borrowing their language, taking their ideas, and placing all they say into the young people's limited area of knowledge. This kind of teaching requires real skill and devotion. Teachers who do not prepare for it are acting outside of the counsels of prudence.

Consider teachers who are imprudent enough and presumptuous enough to dare running a class without looking ahead to what they are going to say or do. They enter the class without books or materials. They tend to talk at the top of their voice when they should be silent, saying whatever comes into their minds without considering the worth of what is being said or the importance of their opinions. They do not ask for anyone's advice and do not even listen to those with more experience. There exists great disorder in their explanations, making them incoherent and practically unintelligible to the students. They deny one day what they rashly advocated on a previous day, and they often contradict what they have said before. The result of all this is boredom and dislike on the part of students. The students, condemned to listen, yawn or sleep and do not know what to do during the class. They waste their time and begin to take on a dislike of learning and study. This dislike may stay with them for a long time, since that is one of the peculiarities of youth: The impressions and experiences of youth tend to leave an indelible trace during an entire life.. It is important for young people, then, to learn early habits of work and application. A skillful and prudent teacher is able to profit from this peculiarity of youth and give students a good and solid education from the beginning.

Prudence, then, is of the greatest importance. Experience is one sure path for acquiring it, but there is another upon which we must all rely: an openness to the Lord, especially in prayer. Ask the Lord for prudence; pray to the "author of all wisdom" that you will be given the light and necessary graces to direct and lead you in everything with the prudence and wisdom necessary to teach.

