

I. Gravity [Seriousness]

Gravity [seriousness] is a virtue which regulates the exterior of a teacher, conformably to modesty, politeness, and good order.

A teacher possessing this virtue holds his body in a natural position, without either affectation or awkwardness; he does not shake his head or turn it lightly from side to side at every word he utters. His glance is assured and serene, without either affectation or severity. He does not laugh while talking, nor does he make unseemly gestures. He keeps an affable air; he speaks little, uses a moderate tone of voice. In what he says there is nothing bitter, stinging, supercilious, crude, or offensive to anyone.

Since he is convinced that gravity, modesty, and reserve do not exclude kindness or tender affection, he seeks by his lovable qualities to win the friendship of the students, for he knows by acting thus that they will show more interest in coming to his lessons, more docility in accepting them, and more faithfulness in putting them into practice. He does not, however, show himself too free with them, nor does he entertain any familiarity or intimacy with any of them.

Far from seeking only to make them fear him, his main aim is to win his pupils' confidence, the better to know the virtues they may possess, so as to cultivate and develop them; and the more easily to discern their vices and defects, in order to correct these, if not entirely, at least as far as he can. For this purpose he carefully eliminates from his behavior whatever might smack of harshness, overbearingness, bluster - in a word whatever might make him unfeeling, ill-humored, indifferent, or hard to please. He also avoids a menacing tone of voice, a too demanding attitude which prevents the students from showing themselves for what they are, causing them to avoid the sight of their teacher and to hide the evil traits which he might be able to remedy if he knew about them, thus depriving them of the possibility of letting the seeds of their good qualities germinate and grow.

The teacher should, moreover, seek to win their esteem and respect; for students would not listen to what is taught them by a master whom they cannot look up to. Hence, he never forgets his duty of being for them a continual model of all the virtues. He exhibits in all his external appearance the restraint and decorum which result from the maturity of his mind, from his piety and his wisdom. Above all, he takes care to preserve calm through his even temper¹ and good humor. He does not allow himself negligent or immodest attitudes, too much playfulness, all frivolity, all buffoonery, and whatever might suggest trifling. Still, since gravity carried too far would make him ridiculous, and obnoxious, he keeps it within appropriate limits. Thus, this virtue, properly understood, establishes good order in a class, affords a teacher true elevation of sentiments² which preserve him from being wanting in his duty, maintains the students faithful to their obligations, and inspires them with attachment, confidence, and respect with regard to the teacher himself.

1. Evenness of soul is a peaceful and calm attitude which is not troubled by events that happen, whatever they may be. It is acquired by cultivating a balanced view of things, by moderating one's desires and fears, and by preparing oneself for all eventualities.

2. The soul's sentiments are the internal movements and expressions which largely depend on the intellect, that is, the mind, the judgment, the imagination and on the entire way of looking at things proper to the person in whom these sentiments are found.

Besides the defects contrary to gravity which we have mentioned above, there are others which a teacher should carefully avoid: all outbursts of temper, violent acts, fierce and menacing looks, impatience, crudeness, childish behavior, an imperious tone of voice, biting words, or those inspired by a simulated and feigned mildness.

Not only must the teacher avoid these defects, he must also refrain from making faces, joking, striving for humor, giving penances which disturb order, which provoke laughter, which might be unbecoming; acting and speaking in ways inappropriate for a classroom, taking on scornful manners, gruff behavior; making certain sounds or affecting peculiar accents when speaking; indulging in a ridiculously affected manner, like talking in a deep voice, supercilious ways, too magisterial, too absolute, too pedantic airs. He should avoid a too mysterious, stilted outward appearance, conceited, angry and exaggerated behavior, moving his body in too sudden a manner, shrugging his shoulders, overemphasized gestures, banging on the platform, the desks, or tables to arouse or frighten the students.

“Be an example for the faithful by word, by conversation, by charity, and by faith.” (1 Tim. 4:12)

“Declare these things, exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you, that is to say, regard you as his inferior in virtue, and thus make you less than you are.” (Tit. 2:15)