

## II. Silence

**Silence** is a virtue which leads the teacher to avoid talking when he must not speak and to speak when he should not be silent.

This virtue, therefore, includes two functions. It teaches the art of being silent, and that of speaking opportunely. Thus, it causes one to avoid two opposite defects which it condemns: taciturnity and loquacity.

The first effect of silence produces order and calm in the classroom, insures the progress and advancement of the students, gives the teacher some rest and preserves his health - three things which a teacher cannot afford to neglect without exposing himself to serious consequences.

Indeed, if he speaks too much the students will do the same. They will ask and answer questions out of turn; they will meddle in what is none of their business; they will excuse themselves and try to excuse others; the class will resound with a steady hum.

Moreover, experience shows that the teachers who talk a lot are hardly listened to, and that little account is taken of what they say. But if they speak rarely and to the point, the students pay attention to what they are told, like it, remember it, and profit by it.

Experience also shows that teachers who like to talk too much live in perpetual agitation, and weaken their lungs severely. Teaching, in itself, is very taxing; to devote oneself to it properly, no doubt a good teacher will willingly sacrifice himself; but he must do so prudently. Hence he avoids all imprudence and in particular eschews any manner of teaching which, without being truly useful, proves injurious to his health.

The class signals we use afford us the great advantage of keeping silence while teaching.<sup>1</sup> These signals have been established so as to warn and correct the students, and to indicate to them what they have to do; thus the teacher needs to speak only when he cannot make the children understand, by signs, what he wants of them. Thus, these signs, while reminding the teacher to refrain from speaking, at the same time indicate to him to speak when the signals do not suffice. This is where the teacher begins to apply the second function of silence.

But this he must do only on three occasions: in reading, to call attention to mistakes that no student can correct, and to give needed explanations, warnings, orders, and prohibitions; then during catechism, to explain the text and help the students to answer properly; and finally, during the morning and evening prayers to exhort the students and to make some reflections for them. On these occasions he should say only what is strictly necessary. If he spoke more than this, he would offend against the first aspect of the virtue of silence.

Besides, the main aim of the teacher is to bring up the student in the Christian virtues. In general, he should enlighten their minds and move their hearts by means of these truths which he should teach them. In instructing them he must prepare himself, as we have already mentioned in our first letter,<sup>2</sup> and as we shall explain more fully when treating of the virtue of Prudence. To make his language more appealing he must seek to convince himself of that with which he wishes to inspire his disciples. "If you wish to persuade," says St. Bernard (Sermon

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3. See De La Salle's *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, Part Two, Means of Establishing and Maintaining Order in the Schools, section 2, Signs Which Are Used in the Christian Schools.

4. Page 27ff, in the note.

59, #3 on the Song of Songs), “it is rather by affectionate sentiments than by studied declamations that you will succeed in this.” Indeed, any number of examples prove that while a skillful and eloquent teacher exhausts himself in vain by efforts which are all the more wearing as true zeal enters less into them, another, perhaps much inferior in talent, but fully convinced of what he teaches, will bring about the most salutary results.

A good teacher will in general consider as faults against silence which should be avoided:

- 1) speaking without necessity or remaining silent when he should speak;
- 2) expressing himself badly when he does speak, because he had not foreseen the topic, the need for speaking, the proper times and circumstances for it, or the good or the evil which might result from it; or again expressing himself without force or precision, without exactness, hesitantly, groping for the right words, as if not knowing what he is saying, or by being too prolix and unmethodical;
- 3) remaining too long in conversation with certain students or their parents, with other outsiders, or with his fellow teachers, even though he has some reason to talk to these persons;
- 4) being preoccupied with the news of the day, listening to what the students wish to relate to him about these events;
- 5) finally, talking too much or too quickly or too slowly, confusedly, too loud, or so low that students cannot hear, or cannot easily grasp what is being said to them.

*“Men will give an account on the day of judgment for every idle word they have spoken.” (Matt. 12:38).*

*“Speak those things that become sound doctrine.” (Titus 2:1).*

*“When you speak,” says St. Bernard, “do not let your words come rushing out; utter only true and weighty words; speak only of God or for God.” (CUM LOQUERIS, SINT VERBA DUA, RARA, VERA, PONDEROSA ET DE DEO.)*