

**Co-ordination on the Level of the Drives  
Conference (9 March 1952) for the Marist Brothers**

**Education –  
Identification with the Secret Ideals of our Youth**

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*The talk was given to the Marist Brothers, but the suggestions Fr Kantenich gives for education can be applied in many fields. They are valid for education in schools, for pastoral work in the parish and family, and by no means least to the way parents educate their children.*

My dear Confrères,

["Take this child and educate him for me!"]

As educators we always have a soft spot for great educators. One of the greatest educators and leaders of all time was Moses. There is an event in his life, in his history, that appeals to us very strongly. We hear those words spoken by Pharaoh's daughter, "Take the child and educate him for me!" (cf. Ex 2,9). Actually, we are unable to forget those words: Take the child and educate him for me! It is the Triune God, the Blessed Mother, who speaks those words to me as an educator, "**Take this child and educate him for me!**"

[Education against the background of our times]

This calls to mind the problematic nature of modern education. We know that the meaning of education consists in initiating the child's self-education. Education, as we know, is essentially different from training and dressage. We have to try with all the means at our disposal to educate the young people to become active and autonomous, so that they will be able to decide for themselves later in life.

Immediately the great opponents of sound education appear before our eyes: the alleys, the streets, the devil; besides this there is the weakness of human nature and the influence of the masses. This places us before the question: How can we overcome these opponents? What can we do as Marist Brothers to overcome all these difficulties, in order to attain the goal God has placed before us as perfectly as possible?

Our holy founder<sup>1</sup> gives us, among other things, a two-fold answer to this question:

First answer: Lead the children to the Blessed Mother;

Second principle: Exemplify the ideal of a Catholic person to your children in every circumstance.

I would like to offer you a few practical thoughts about these two points. In order to have a central thought, I will take the good example of the educator as a starting point. However, allow me to express the concept “good example” in modern terms. I would then have to say: ***Strive to bring your drives into line with the ideal striving of the children you are educating!***

We will have to answer three questions:

1. What do we understand by bringing our drives into line?
2. What is the deepest reason for the significance of bringing our drives into line?
3. What is the best means to arrive at bringing our drives into line?

If you give me the time to answer the three thoughts, you will find that I have given you a completely modern version of your educational system. In practice this means that I will have told you in a modern form what your founder requires of you. To start with I will leave aside all modern and academic arguments, because the time is too short; I can only tell you the essentials briefly and definitely.

[1. Try to exemplify the ideal of the young people yourselves]

First question: So what do we understand by ***bringing our drives into line with the ideal striving of the children you are educating?***

To start with, please note that it is with the ideal striving of the children you are educating that we have to bring ourselves into line. No one expects us, not even the living God, to have achieved the ideal of your pupils. I cannot say: I will only start to educate when I am personally perfectly educated. We could then wait until we are in the *Visio beata* [i.e. in heaven], and then the pupils won't need to be educated any more. So in practice this means that we have to strive to exemplify the ideal of the young people.

Secondly, let us tell ourselves: We are dealing here with bringing ourselves into line with the striving of the young people. Take, for example, the Prefects who have to supervise the others in their study periods and outside this time. It is natural that the young people you are caring for are young; the majority will be in puberty. It is a characteristic of puberty [to rebel]. That is to say, young people at this age are revolutionaries. Now, suppose that I, the Prefect, notice that there are revolutionary tendencies in the young people: at times passive, at times active rebellion. What do

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<sup>1</sup> M. J. B. Champagnat founded the Marist Brothers in 1817 in Lavalla, near Lyon, France.

you have to do now? Please note what I am saying: Bring myself into line with the ideal striving of the young people.

Now I have to ask myself: Don't I have the same revolutionary tendencies as the young people? I must first of all notice and overcome intellectually all the revolutionary currents in myself. Only then can I go and overcome all the revolutionary currents in the young people.

The principle I am talking about here applies to us all as educators, whether we are engaged in pastoral work, whether we are sitting in the confessional, or whether difficulties are being presented to me by someone during a private discussion. Of course, I could give a quick answer, because I am no one's fool; I have experience and I know how one can solve this problem. Let me tell you: If you go about it like this, you will never become a true pastor or educator in the long run. The principle is this: I must first allow all the difficulties I have observed in education, or that are presented to me, to pass through my head and my heart. That is to say in practice, I ask myself: Isn't this traitor, this difficulty, also in my heart? Then I try to overcome the same or similar difficulty in myself before I speak. Once I have overcome it in myself and then give an answer, my whole personality will support that answer – not just my mouth or hand, but my whole personality will have an influence.

I think that this has offered you a systematic answer. The principle is clear.

Afterwards you will have to pause and think of yourselves, so that you can look for individual instances and find an answer for yourselves.

In the example I quoted to you, I actually have a revolutionary in mind. If my answer and also the way I behave, that is, my entire intervention, is to be sound, I must first overcome the revolutionary in myself, or at least try to overcome him. The revolutionary doesn't allow himself to be killed so easily, he remains in me forever.

Let us take another example. My young people have sexual problems or problems with their faith. So I ask myself: Do I have the same difficulties? Even if I don't have them, I can imagine to myself: If I were in that situation, what would I do? To start with I would say absolutely nothing, but instead struggle inwardly to cope with it. What does that mean? I digest inwardly, to start with, what I now want to tell the young people. Once you have educated yourself to practice this inner method, you won't need much time, not even a second: You will hear the problem, digest it inwardly and then answer it.

I have just been introduced to Brother V. He has studied psychology and is working as a psychotherapist. I am not going to give you a lecture on psychoanalysis. The doctors who want to heal psychological illnesses apply the following principle at present: You must first have allowed yourself to be psychoanalysed before you can be a doctor. The very first thing you have to do is to have personally purified the pathological tendencies in your subconscious. Once you have managed this, you can go and help the other sick people. In the past in Germany they taught the intelligentsia: There is no soul. Today the opposite extreme prevails: Today if you are

sick and the doctors can't find a physical reason for it, they tell you: You are psychologically ill. That is why the psychotherapists are so popular in Germany.

My aim at the moment is to hammer in the principle. Can you understand what is meant when we say: We have to bring ourselves into line with the ideal striving of my young people? It means in practical terms: I have to try personally to overcome the difficulties of the person before me.

[A practical example]

Suppose a mother comes to you and says: The young man whom you educated in the past is now in great danger of losing his faith. Or, another mother tells you: My boy could have a brilliant career in the economy, but I am afraid that he could lose his purity or his faith very quickly.

As an educator or pastor I will in all probability be prepared to offer the mother this advice: Pray that the young man makes the right choice. By the way, I don't think that prayer on its own is sufficient. We have to take a further step. You first have to try it out. In what does the trial consist? Probably the mother will herself suffer from religious lukewarmness: She would have liked the boy to have a brilliant career in the economy; but on the other hand she would be sad if he were to lose his faith and eternal happiness as a result. So now I will have to guide the mother to overcome her halfheartedness (her indecision) in her own heart. Unless the mother overcomes her lukewarmness, whatever she says will not have a profound effect on the boy. He can feel what is going on in her heart.

We are concerned with the same thing all the time: Bringing the educator into line with the ideal striving of the young people. We need educated educators today! There are educators who have made self-education part of their programme for life, and who keep to it to their last breath.

[Co-ordination: on the level of ideas, volition and the subconscious-spontaneous]

Now I have added another concept that includes a whole, huge world: bringing ourselves into line **on the level of our drives**. Co-ordination on the level of ideas is insufficient.

It can be that I am a parish missionary [*Volksmissionar*]. Or I could be a retreat master; I have brilliant gifts, and can talk eloquently. That is co-ordination on the level of ideas. Let me tell you that this will only work when I appear for the first and second time. On the third occasion it won't work any more. I will tell you the ultimate metaphysical reason for this afterwards.

Co-ordination on the level of ideas is insufficient for an educator, nor in the long run is a co-ordination on the level of the will, at least, it won't work if I have the people I am educating constantly with me. What has to be added? Co-ordination on the level of the drives. If the will on its own compulsively affirms an idea, and the subconscious constantly objects strongly, I won't have any influence. You may not overlook that education is, first of all, an act of generating new life. This means in practice that life is only generated by life, not by knowledge. The most perfect life

possible here on earth penetrates not only into the mind and will, but must also penetrate into the subconscious life of the drives.

[An infantile, narcissistic attitude to life has to be overcome]

Do you know what that means for our practical lives? The educator has to educate himself [or herself] to overcome all that is primitive within them. That means in practice: they have to try to overcome their infantile attitude to life, even to the point of the hysterical attacks in their life. Actually that would be matter for a whole course: To consider how many hysterical attacks take place in our own souls. However, I don't want to talk about hysteria at the moment, but simply about our infantile attitude to life.

You have to distinguish between an infantile attitude and a childlike attitude. When do we speak about an infantile attitude? When my inner attitude of soul and my chronological age are in complete imbalance.

[The difference between childlikeness and narcissism]

To put it in practical terms: childlikeness includes two elements: firstly, the urge to be **sheltered**, and secondly, the urge towards **self-surrender**. Now, if I as a mature human being want in an extreme way to be sheltered, and not to give myself, I have an infantile attitude to life.

[Mature fatherliness in contrast to an infantile attitude to life]

Take for example, my attitude as an educator: It should be the **attitude of fatherliness**. However, if at my age I look mainly to develop myself in my educational work, and not to carrying out the task, I am infantile; that is, if I am not primarily looking to develop my abilities (in the service of the educational task entrusted to me), but mainly to satisfy the wishes of my own heart. The mature person who wants to exemplify genuine fatherliness, not just satisfy himself, is interested in the progress of the person before him: carrying out the task! To put it another way: I am immature when my fatherliness, or my pedagogical love, does not grow beyond myself, and is not an expression of sound love for the other person. Or, we could say, the primitive attitude of the educator to life always wants to receive, it isn't productive. The question is always: What do I get? Not: What can I give? The question is always: Do they understand me? Not: Do I understand them? The question is: Can I unburden myself? Not: How can others unburden themselves to me?

Such a primitive attitude to life in an educator leads to him feeling eternally sorry for himself. There is no creative strength in such a soul. Self-pity is the exact opposite to what Paul tells us and exemplified. Paul said, "When I was a child I thought and reasoned like a child, but when I grew up, I gave up childish ways" [1 Cor, 13,11]. There you have the total contradiction (to an infantile attitude to life).

[The selflessly serving attitude of the Blessed Mother]

What was the Blessed Mother's attitude? Notice how the Old Masters paint the Blessed Mother at the moment of the Annunciation: Her whole being expresses self-surrender. She was by no means inclined to pity herself; she wanted nothing for herself. We can feel already in the description how the Blessed Mother would behave afterwards, when what she had been told about the sevenfold sword that would pierce her heart became a reality. We can feel how she would behave when she heard those prophetic words, "This child will be for the rise and fall of the multitudes of Israel" [Lk 2,34]. Her attitude is that of austere willingness to serve. She wanted to serve Life, she wanted to serve the life of the Lord, the life of the world's Redeemer; she wanted nothing more for herself. Our Lord then educated her in a harsh school, so that she even suppressed the most noble and pure feelings because the heavenly Father wanted something else of her. That is why the Scriptures tell us that "she stood under the cross" [cf. Jn 19,35]. That is to say, she stood to God's will, to God's intention, even when God's intention wanted the life of our Lord, that life which was dearer to her than her own life.

May I ask: Can you understand what I am trying to say when I talk about bringing ourselves into line on the level of our drives? The whole world of the subconscious is taken up and harnessed to the coach of education.

I could pause here for quite some time and tell you that I can be primitive, infantile, in my attitude to my own personality, to community life and to my professional life. Let me give you a practical proof by which you can measure in how far you have personally developed. If you can say: I take it for granted that community life includes a tremendous number of difficulties; if you take it all for granted, you have overcome your infantile attitude. However, if you are surprised by it, you are still stuck in an infantile attitude towards life.

There is a beautiful German fairytale. The steed Falanga spoke to a young man: If your mother knew how much drudgery you have to cope with, she would turn in her grave. To what does this give expression? To self-pity. That is not austere masculinity, it isn't an expression of strength. To put it in more learned terms we could say: those are all childish regressions to the time when our mother removed all drudgery from our lives. If we want to become men, we have to go out into life. Also Marist Brothers have to go out into life! They have to be thoroughly shaken by life. If life doesn't shake us up, the Rector has to do it; he has to see to it that we are thoroughly shaken up! That is what is meant by bringing ourselves into line on the level of our drives with the ideal striving of our students.

## **[2. Why is it so important to bring ourselves into line on the level of our drives?]**

Second question: What is the deeper reason for this? I have already given you a psychological reason: ***Education is an act of begetting.*** This act of begetting is subject to the law: Life can only be begotten by life: and human life only by human life. What do I need for this? The particular examination, the spiritual daily order; discipline and obedience, in order to purify my subconscious. All this is educational work in the deepest sense of the word.

Allow me to give you a second reason. If you look more closely into your own life, you will find: *To whom do I gladly submit out of inner conviction?* The answer can only be: *To a person who is personally at home in the supernatural world.* This has always applied, and is especially apposite today. People today submit only to the devil or to people who are gripped by love for God. I could easily dwell on this thought. You must consider personally how important such reflections are.

Modern psychology<sup>2</sup> even tells us that every leadership presupposes priestly fatherliness. What do we understand by “priestly”? In non-Catholic psychological terminology: Being at home in a metaphysical world. The educator must somehow be unshakably at home, stand firm, so that everyone else can orientate themselves to him. That is to say, he has to have a metaphysical attitude. We say for this that he must be firmly and unshakably grounded on fixed principles that are never shaken. To give it a Catholic colouring this would mean that these principles have to be immersed in the supernatural reality. So, once again: bringing ourselves into line on the level of our drives; but on the level of our drives!

Now consider for a moment: Why are we not allowed to use corporal punishment? You could give any number of superficial reasons. You could say: It can easily be abused, it could even be a sexual aberration. However, this is not the deepest reason. We know from experience that if it is easy for us to use corporal punishment, the danger is great that we will immediately pick up the stick for the least thing. Do you know what gets lost? The strength of a character that is fully integrated. Can you understand in how far the ban on the use of corporal punishment is ultimately based on the psychological reason and purpose of preserving the strength of a true character? A strong character has an influence that cannot be replaced, [least of all by corporal punishment].

### **[3. Ways and means to the goal]**

Third question: What do we have to do to reach these heights? If I now use the accepted language of asceticism, I have to say: I have described to you the highest ideal of holiness. Consider what it means when we expose ourselves so completely on the level of our drives to God, to the heights of sanctity.

Let me give you two answers:

Firstly, constant deepening of our ideal striving for holiness in the spirit of our Lord’s words, “I sanctify myself for them” [cf. Jn 17,19].

Secondly, a very deep, fervent and tender love for the Blessed Mother. Do you know why? Love is a force that unites. And if I see the Blessed Mother, I know that her being determines her activity; she belonged to God not only on the level of ideas, not only on the level of her will, but also on the level of her drives. If that law is true: her being determined her actions, it means: The more I give myself to her, the more she

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<sup>2</sup> Fr Kentenich is quoting Prof. Ernst Goldbeck, who spoke about “priestly fatherliness” as the fundamental attitude of an educator at a Conference for Educators of Young People in Berlin (1930). Cf. 1951 Pedagogical Conference, Forming the New Person, Schoenstatt Editions USA 2003.

will see to it that my subconscious belongs to God. So I may close this talk with the words with which I closed the retreat last year, "*Ecce mater tua*" [Jn 19,27a]. This may not be something external, formalistic, but the expression of a very fervent and tender relationship to the Blessed Mother. And if it is said of St John, "He took the Mother to his own home" [cf. Jn 19,27b], it also applies to me. I take her into my heart, I take her into my mind, I take her by the hand, I take her with me to school, I take her with me to my room, to bed, I take her along everywhere, wherever I am.

Now let me return to the start. What did I say to start with? What is the advice your founder gave us as educators? Lead the children to the Blessed Mother and exemplify to them the ideal of a Catholic person! I have only clothed both simple formulas in a very large, modern garment. It is what our Holy Father [Pius XII] repeatedly advises and expects of us: Return to your founder! We learnt to do this once again in our jubilee year. It has to continue in the years to come, even to the end of time. Then the great saying of Vincent Pallotti will prove true in us, "The Blessed Mother is the great missionary", the great educator, "she will work wonders."