

## Young People need People who are Models with whom they can Identify

1951 Pedagogical Course, 138-148

*Young people look for models with whom they can identify in order to clarify the features of their own character and to build up their “royal self”. They measure themselves against the lives lived by models who illustrate the ideal. If these are attractive, radiant people who point out the way, they will be drawn upward; if they orientate themselves to people whom they personally criticize because of their reprehensible lives, they will most probably copy those faults. Young people copy – film stars, sports stars, motor sports stars, teachers, singers, beauty queens, politicians, inventors, speakers, benefactors of mankind.*

*Saints are models with whom we can identify. Think of Maximilian Kolbe or Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Before his conversion, Augustine oriented himself to the moral striving of saintly people. He told himself: They were able to master the difficulties of their lives, and their passions – why should I not be able to do so? As the Spiritual Director of the Minor Seminary Fr Kentenich also used well-written biographies of the saints We can see in Joseph Engling’s biography how powerfully he was impressed by young saints, such as, John Berchmanns, or Gabriel Possenti of the Sorrowful Mother. He recognized their weakness, their striving, their successes and failures. He took them as his example and copied them, and so gradually discovered his own original identity.*

*The following text comes from the Pedagogical Course of 1951. The young person is on the way to becoming himself or herself (to recognize oneself, accept oneself, educate oneself). In order to become independent, the young need help that offers them security and something to hold onto. They find something to hold onto not only in clear knowledge, but also in being affirmed and offered a home in the personality of the educator. Fr Kentenich tried to answer the question: What can and must an educator do if a vital force is to go out from him, which is able to inwardly transform the people he is accompanying?*

[Ideas come alive in living people]

[138] A living example to hold onto. What is meant is the exemplary life of the educator, the incarnation of our teaching in our personal lives. That is why sound Catholic teaching has to work to bring about ideal people. The educator must personally embody and anticipate the ideal of his followers in a comprehensive sense. [139] Great ideas will develop their fully motivating force when we become aware of their value. It is possible for professional psychologists to

empathise with the person they are educating, they may recognize the great contexts and be able to explain them logically. This definitely has a value. However, the most valuable motivation for action, the most powerful appeal of an idea shows when it has proved its effectiveness in the teacher, the educator personally. It is simply a fact that life is only enkindled by life. Ideas are not alive. They only come alive when they have been embodied in someone who upholds these ideas.

The educational process is a procreative act. Each act of procreation presupposes life. Of course, this does not mean that educators have to concentrate on every tiny detail. What matters here is the personality as a whole, the great goal, the great thrust. I have to embody what I teach. I have to exemplify the goal I am presenting to my followers.

To whom should I turn – to our fathers and mothers in the natural family; to our priests; to our teachers? We can sense the impact and significance of a living example, the example of the educator. Indeed, I am almost inclined to ask: Of what use is it if we are able to have religious experiences and find joy in religious experiences, of what use is it if we are able to hold onto a strong and durable community, unless this life-engendering element of a practical example is also present?

This gives rise to three questions:

- What do we mean by a living example?
- What are the reasons for its fruitfulness?
- What means must we employ to achieve this aim?

[140] Firstly, what do we mean by a living example?

If we want to express it in psychological terms, the answer can only be: ***Spontaneous co-ordination with the ideals for which our followers are striving.*** What a simple and unadorned statement! However, it includes a whole world of truths, realities and tasks. Let us explain each word in this statement.

[What matters is striving for an ideal]

I have purposely talked about striving for an ideal. What I require of my followers is not so much that they should possess the ideal, but that they should strive to reach it. That is the demand I also make on myself. If I were to wait until I embody the ideal, until I possess it, until it has become part and parcel of myself, we could wait until we attain the *visio beata* before we start educating.

On the other hand, we may not overlook that even if we make mistakes, even if we make pedagogical mistakes, we may not wish the ground to swallow us and say: We are incapable of educating! If we are striving seriously, it doesn't matter!

Our followers don't ask for more than that either. We could almost say: Thanks be to God that we have made a mistake! Then we are on the same level as our young people. We then have the opportunity to show how to make full use of our mistakes in education in order to grow. In everything that happens our followers should be able to find a living, effective and fruitful ideal in us.

Co-ordination with [their striving for the ideal]

Perhaps you will object: How is this possible? Don't our young people, our followers have an original ideal? Doesn't each one of us probably have a personal ideal? Do I, then, have to try to exemplify them all in myself? It should not be difficult for us to discover the answer. Don't all ideals have something in common? Aren't they all substantially the same?

[141] Let me give you some examples. I am an educator, I am in charge of a boarding school. People complain that the young people are **undisciplined**. How difficult it is today to maintain discipline when our young people reach puberty and everything is in ferment. How difficult it is to maintain discipline and obedience in such young people! What means can we apply in such circumstances? Co-ordination! I must first consider how much indiscipline is rooted in my heart, in my life, and shows in the way I behave. Before I intervene, I must take myself in hand. I must again find my way back to a disciplined, austere and strong attitude, and, if necessary, also act accordingly. Then I can intervene. Unless I do this, it will not bring about a procreative act, I will merely give a lecture. I make demands, but this is not backed up by my life. In such circumstances it will be completely impossible to generate life, or it will be significantly more difficult to do so.

Another example. I can see the **immaturity and inconstancy** of my young people in puberty, in their teenage years. Things inside them are in chaos. Within the educator a storm is brewing. Soon the storm breaks loose with thunder and lightning, but once the storm has passed, all is calm again. That is also a way of creating calm, but it isn't an expression of co-ordinating ourselves with the young people.

[The work of education begins with the educator]

I should rather ask myself: How much immaturity is there in my heart, in my mind, in my imagination, in my daydreams? What do I have to do? I must take myself vigorously in hand, subject myself to my will, and thoroughly renounce all that is immature in my nature. [142] Then I will be able to generate new life as an educator. Then whatever I say will be immersed in life: I know from personal experience how difficult it is to discipline myself. If I have to face rebellious young people, I first have to try to control the rebellion in my own drives: consciously, clearly, humbly and vigorously. Only then can I control them in others.

There is hardly anything more beautiful than to be an educator. If we are real educators, we will be far more formed by our educational work than we actually form others. Education is a reciprocal act of procreation. That is the secret of education, the process of education. If I stand there as the “Master”, and my followers are the “underlings”, I may teach them, but I will not educate them. Unless I am open to accept the values of my followers, they will not be open to accept my values. You can multiply the examples. All of us should take note of the following principle, whether we are fathers and mothers in the natural family, or spiritual fathers and mothers: ***All the needs and naughtiness of our followers must first pass through our hearts before a reaction passes our lips.*** They must first be digested in our hearts and penetrate to the ultimate roots of our being. We will then mature constantly according to the laws of growth into strong and graced personalities.

[The method of counselling. Illustrated by examples]

Another example. A young person tells me about his crises. These could be either moral or religious in nature. Perhaps this person cannot come to terms with practical faith in Divine Providence. From my studies I naturally know all the answers. We need only open a theology book. However, the young person also knows all the answers just as well as I do, perhaps even better. Offering some sort of learned answer does not mean passing on life. The young person can also study books. [143] As the educator, I must first fight through the battle of the young person in my own heart. It is possible that we may have to do this very consciously for a time. We may even have to examine our conscience in this regard. It could take some time before such a method has become second nature to us. Have I really fought through all the anxiety and naughtiness of my followers in my own heart? At the height of our life and striving as educators this form of education must have become second nature to us. To listen and struggle, to take in and digest inwardly, are one and the same thing. Only then can we offer an answer.

Another example. A young person has difficulties with holy purity. If, as the educator, you can say that you do not have any difficulties in this regard, you will need to consider where your anxieties and concerns are to be found. Where are your difficulties? Where is the weakness in your character? The young person has shown you his brokenness, where is yours? While you mull over all this, your will is active forming and moulding you vigorously.

If you are a father or mother and form and mould yourselves in this way, you will be highly graced educators. You will be able to say: We are on the way to bringing ourselves into line with our followers' striving for the ideal. Then our words will be taken seriously at a time when we can truthfully say that we are caught up in a crisis of the word. The spoken word is not taken seriously today. Whom do we believe today? Please answer that question for yourselves. If, as father and educator, I am and do the opposite to what I require of my young

people, they will laugh at me behind my back. My personality will not have a procreative influence, and the same will apply to what I say.

[144] The secret of education is the educated educator. That person will work miracles in education who is serious in trying to live what he knows and teaches, and what he demands of others.

[Spontaneous co-ordination]

Let us consider another, important statement: spontaneous co-ordination. It is not enough if we co-ordinate ourselves with our young people merely intellectually, on the level of ideas; it has to be spontaneous. Ideas and words are like soap bubbles – they burst when they have been in contact with air for any length of time. In the long run it is also insufficient if we co-ordinate ourselves with the young people only with our wills. The whole person is not sufficiently involved.

Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster<sup>1</sup> once related an incident: A mother asked an educator what she could do about her difficulties with her son. He answered: “First ask yourself what your attitude to these difficulties is. Your son is torn between being a strong character and becoming rich. If you personally hold onto your attitude that it is essential to become rich, no matter what it costs, or at least look for concessions in this regard, you can talk as much as you like, he will eventually turn his back on everything.”

We are often helpless when faced with our young people today. The answer must be: Physician heal yourself! It is not enough, at least in the long run, if we co-ordinate our striving with the striving of our followers merely on the level of ideas and the will. Our subconscious has also to be involved and filled with it.<sup>2</sup>

In the language of Scholastic theology – I am now addressing our priests – I would have to say that we must even the *motus prio primi* (the first spontaneous movements of our hearts) so much in hand that they fly upwards to the ideal.

[Immature attitude to life]

Of course, I am typifying. [145] We know that we will not be able to reach such a high goal. However, we have to catch a glimpse of it. The unconscious has to be purified! We must be filled to overflowing by the ideal. These Catholic ideas have to penetrate to the deepest roots of our being, even if we have to walk the Way of the Cross, indeed, even if we have to die for them. Put in more negative terms, all that is primitive in our heart, our being, our life, has to be overcome, starting

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<sup>1</sup> German philosopher and educator (1869-1966).

<sup>2</sup> Fr Kentenich illustrated what he meant with “spontaneous co-ordination” when he quoted the reaction of Ghandi’s father when Ghandi admitted that he had stolen from him. See J. Kentenich: The Family – At the Service of Life, p.72f.

with our infantile attitude to life and including all forms of hysteria. What is common to both is extreme self-centredness. Human beings constantly centre on themselves. There is only a difference in degree. There are not a few men and women today who are hysterical, whether they are dressed as priests or religious, or not.

[What is an infantile attitude to life?]

When we talk of an infantile attitude to life we mean *a crass disharmony between our age and our attitude of mind and soul to life*. A little child may behave in an immature fashion. We don't call this an infantile attitude. However, an older man who behaves childishly is infantile.

There is another definition of an infantile attitude – *a lack of harmony between love for self and others*. In this case a person centres constantly on self at an age when he or she should be detached from self, and when love for others should characterize their lives, not morbid self-love.

We also find an infantile attitude when someone is at an age when childlikeness should be mature, but it has turned into childishness. If in mature years someone should develop motherliness or fatherliness, and motherliness turns into smother love, and fatherliness into grandfatherliness or lust for power, we have a primitive a primitive attitude to life.

[146] An infantile attitude is also present when we want to take, when we should give, or when we constantly and in an underhand way nurture a secret longing for a mother's caresses. When we were young she protected us from all the knocks of life. Unless we had the steely courage to accept the hardships of life, and allow them to hammer, form and mould us into strong and vigorous personalities, we will develop a self-pitying attitude and constantly centre on ourselves. As a result we will not be able to master life. This is an infantile attitude. I have an infantile attitude when I repeatedly ask: What will I get? instead of asking: What can I give others? Do they understand me? Not: Do I understand others? Do they love me? Not: Do I love others?

[Overcoming an infantile attitude to life: St Paul and Our Lady]

We find the opposite to an infantile attitude in St Paul: "When I was a child I used to talk like a child, think like a child, reason like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways aside." (I Cor 13,11).

We can discover a classic ideal of overcoming an infantile attitude in the life of the Blessed Mother. After she had spoken her 'Yes' at the Annunciation, after she had publicly acknowledged and proclaimed that she was the handmaid of the Lord, she never went back on her word. Everything centred on the Lord. She served the Lord and his work selflessly. All centring on self was excluded. She

not only went with him to the marriage feast, she also stood under his cross on Golgotha. Even if the way led through all sorts of suffering, even if the sevenfold sword pierced her heart, she accompanied him. She stood to him. A strong character who was loyal, who was faithful in following him until death.

[147] She allowed our Lord to take her by the hand, she allowed him to form and educate her, and even gave up any noble wishes that awakened in her. She knew no rest until the Lord had re-directed even the most noble wishes if that was what the Father willed. We think of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple<sup>3</sup>. Noble motherly emotions were awakened, and she complained: "Child, why have you done this to us?" Our Lord treated her harshly. She had to be educated to heroic selflessness. Think of how long it took before the profound polarity between most noble motherliness and a vigorous attitude of service had been achieved. In the temple we see her beside herself with a mother's grief. Under the cross every form of primitive motherliness had been overcome.

There are followers who are prepared to go along right up to the cross. There are also followers who turn away when they meet the cross. There are followers who love to theorize, who enjoy being praised, but when they have to go into the dark night, they withdraw like cowards<sup>4</sup>. That is a primitive attitude! Is it not necessary for every family, whether natural or supernatural, to go through serious times of crises? It will then show whether father and mother have overcome their primitive [=selfish] attitude to each other and the children. Each religious family that has been given a great mission must be prepared, therefore, for dark hours, hours on Golgotha. Who will remain faithful? Will it have to be said as of the disciple in the Garden of Olives: "But they were asleep<sup>5</sup> ..."? If life plays with us, it will show whether our strong and vigorous willingness to be formed has attained its goal.

[148] I think that you now know what is meant when we talk about *spontaneous co-ordination with our follower's striving for the ideal*. There is no place for an infantile attitude there.

Present-day psychotherapists point out that if they want to people who are psychologically ill, their own words are often insufficient. If the sick person reveals his or her subconscious complications, the psychotherapist must first try to overcome similar complications and weaknesses in their own souls. If someone whose soul is freed from self takes in the need of another person, they exercise a mysterious influence on that person. However, if they still centre on themselves, if they are now inwardly free, the other person can talk about their needs a thousand times, the therapist will not be able to influence them in any way. Doctors say the same thing today. If we want to help people who are psychologically ill, we have to overcome in ourselves similar battles to the ones

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<sup>3</sup> Cf Lk 2,41 ff.

<sup>4</sup> The background to this statement is the crisis through which the Schoenstatt Family was going at the time with the Visitation and approaching exile of the founder.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Mt 26,40 ff; Mk 14,34 ff.; Lk 22,46.

the patient has. Today everything enters very deeply into the subconscious. It has to be purified, clarified, ennobled. We have to free ourselves from self.