Tough Love is Not the Answer—
Don Bosco's Views on Punishment

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Introduction

Once when someone commended Don Bosco on the success of his thriving institutions and his own educational achievements, he was supposed to have answered with a disarming smile: "But I don't even have a teacher's certificate that allows me to teach elementary school." Had they pursued the subject of his qualifications further, he would have been the first to agree that he was neither an educational philosopher, nor, much less, an educationist.[1] Had they acknowledged him as a founder of a "system" of education which in modern educational literature implies a highly-structured, well-organized, and efficiently coordinated body of educational methods and procedures, he would have pled 'not guilty'.

For a hundred years the unfortunate transliteration of "*sistema preventivo*" into "preventive system" has sent out misleading and inaccurate signals. It is our position that Don Bosco's so–called "preventive system" is neither 'preventive' nor a 'system'.[2] The educational philosophy which Don Bosco crafted and then

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[1] When a thing is said in humor, it should be searched carefully for a hidden truth. Don Bosco's remark, said half in jest, concealed the story of his onetime running feud with Turin's educational authorities. For several years they had attempted to shut down his newly opened Oratory school because it was not completely staffed with certificated personnel. When Don Bosco's school in Valdocco opened in 1855, it started with the third year of the *ginnasio*, and Brother John Baptist Francesia was its first state-approved teacher. Four years later the Casati Law, which would control Italian education well into the 20th century, was passed. Armed with legislative approval from the Casati Law, school officials now began to harass Don Bosco's Oratory school because it was operating with some uncertificated teachers. The Valdocco *ginnasio* was closed down, but only temporarily, for Don Bosco used a hidden weapon of his own to reopen it. See Michael Ribotta, "The Day They Shut Down the Oratory School", in the *Journal of Salesian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 19–44.

[2] The descriptive phrase, "preventive system", as applied to a formal method of education is not used in the literature of Anglo–American educational history. A close examination of that term quickly shows that Don Bosco's "Salesian Way" was neither

advocated in his brief seminal treatise, "Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù," [3] was based four-square on the conduct and teaching of Francis de Sales. Throughout this essay, then, we shall refer to Don Bosco's educational thinking as "Salesian", as in "Salesian way," "Salesian method," etc. For it is the spirit of Francis that goes to the very core of the educational practices and attitudes that Don Bosco advocated.

Don Bosco's interest in education went far beyond the classroom. It transcended the teacher, the pupil, the textbook. Unlike the more restricted meaning of the term "education" in English, he applied its denotation (as did his European counterparts) to the entire human person.

His vision of the educational process was far more comprehensive, more humane, and more enlightened than 19th century practices. It embraced the entire human person: his temporal well-being, his intellectual development, and his spiritual destiny. Or as he repeatedly wrote, the end product of his *sistema preventivo* was to create "a good Christian and a responsible citizen" *("un buon cristiano ed onesto cittadino").*

A century later, the "Declaration on Christian Education" of Vatican Council II would define Christian education in much the same comprehensive way:

> A true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which ... he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share.
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> Therefore, children and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments so they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving

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'preventive' nor a 'system', and its use deserves closer scrutiny. Mario Casotti, an esteemed Italian historian, writing in his *Il Metodo Educativo di Don Bosco* (14-16), states that the expression "preventive system" as used in educational literature distorts the true meaning of what Don Bosco intended. Even Rousseau, he avers, adopted a 'preventive system' in the ongoing education of his oddball protégé, Emile. In his recent writings Pietro Braido, the foremost authority on Don Bosco's *Sistema Preventivo,* admits that the use of that phrase can, in some instances, be used in an ill-advised manner because it sends out the wrong message. Certainly the expression "Salesian way" or "Salesian system" of education more aptly describes Don Bosco's method of educating the young.

[3] *"Il Sistema Preventivo Nella Educazione Della Gioventù"* was written by Don Bosco in the spring of 1877 while he was in France. The complete text, in a stilted transliterated version, can be found in The Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales (Rome, 1984), 246-253. It is not a happy translation. This brief treatise represents the only formal statement by Don Bosco in his attempt to explain the principles of his "educational philosophy".

> endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy...."[4]

Whenever Don Bosco wrote on educational practices, he invariably contrasted two options open to the educator which were then in current use: the repressive (*ripressivo*) or the preventive (*preventivo*). He was not, however, differentiating between two formally structured "systems" of education which numerous interpreters of his educational writings have suggested. [5] He was simply telling his reader that in dealing with children, in or out of the classroom, the educator had two options to achieve his goal: he could either adopt a get-tough policy (which in his day included, above all else, a generous dose of corporal punishment), or he could treat the child with kindness, compassion, and humaneness—rare commodities among 19th century schoolmasters.

In our essay we shall examine the meaning and application of "punishment" and "discipline" as found in Don Bosco's educational writings. It was a subject to which he returned time and time again—and for good reason. If the hickory switch and the rod have virtually disappeared from the modern-day classroom, they were a constant in the educational formula of 19th century schoolroom management and instruction. Schoolmasters in Don Bosco's days were universally severe in ruling over their brood of little scholars. Corporal punishment was not only expected, but demanded of the teacher. Children were constantly the subjects of a reign of terror presided over by pitiless pedagogues.

It was against this widespread use of hands-on punishment that Don Bosco rebelled. In print and in practice he waged a relentless war against the harsh treatment of children. In his brief and only formal treatise on education, *"Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù,"* it is not surprising that the term "punishment" recurs twenty times. In this cornerstone commentary of his "educational philosophy" one finds numerous appeals from the author for a more humane and compassionate treatment of the child . "After all," he notes, "severe punishment may stop a disorder, but it hardly makes the offender any better."

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[4] *Declaration on Christian Education of Vatican Council II,* 1965 (Paulist Press, New Jersey), p. 128. Commentary by Most Rev. Mark J. Hurley.

[5] An enlightened description of Don Bosco's educational method can be found in the felicitous title used by the Rt. Rev. William Turner, D.D. in his panegyric in New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral on the occasion of Don Bosco's beatification on February 16, 1930: "Expression not Repression—this was Don Bosco's method." He went on to say that for Don Bosco, prayer was a means of expression. Song was a means of expression. The Sacraments were not only sources of grace, but also a means of expression. So were recreations, hikes in the country, games, amateur theatrical. All these Don Bosco embodied in his system of education, sanctifying them, ennobling them, lifting them up by his religious inspiration. For Don Bosco the positive was better than the negative, the constructive more useful than the destructive. In a word: Expression is better than repression. In such context the use of the two words "preventive system" succeed in canceling out each other.

Even today educators are hard-pressed to appreciate Don Bosco's bold, and for his times, unprecedented stand taken against corporal punishment in the classroom. For the modern educator, the frequent harsh and brutal treatment of schoolchildren in the last century often remains an unknown story. A brief journey, then, down the corridors of 19th century educational history can prove enlightening and even edifying. It is against such background that Don Bosco's "Salesian Way," his *Sistema Preventivo*, can be truly gauged and appreciated.

The Way Things Were

"A boy has a back; when you hit it, he understands."

Today's teacher takes the gentler and kindlier approach for granted. The use of corporal punishment is not only hazardous to the student's health, it can also be hazardous for the one who wields the rod—he and his school can quickly become embroiled in a nasty lawsuit, and in the process soon find himself unemployed. "A boy has a back; when you hit it, he understands" may have been a popular pedagogical maxim in the past. But in the present, that same boy now has an effective way of hitting back.

More than anyone else in this country, it was the American educator, Horace Mann, a contemporary of Don Bosco, who raised his countrymen's consciousness about the way children were being mistreated and physically abused in the nation's classrooms. [6]

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[6] Horace Mann (1796-1859), the evangelist of American public education, was not a professional educator. He was the son of fifth-generation Massachusetts farmers and grew up in extreme poverty and hardships. He struggled in his early years to get an education. His teachers, he wrote, "were very good people; but they were poor teachers." A small bequest enabled him to enroll at Brown University where he made a brilliant record as a student. He subsequently studied law and became a highly successful attorney. Shortly after he entered politics.

Mann was elected to the state legislature in 1827 and served for twelve years as the first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. The most important event in Mann's life was passage by the Massachusetts state legislature of a bill creating a state board of education and of Mann's appointment as its first secretary.

His visit to numerous schools in Europe would change the face of American education as that fledgling nation struggled to implement the democratic ideal of universal education for its citizens

In the field of education Mann had strong ideological and democratic convictions. His policies ran counter to the then acceptable practice of corporal punishment which he condemned in the strongest terms. He was also firmly against instruction of religious sectarianism in the public schools by "sectarian preachers

In 1843 he asked and received permission from the Massachusetts Board of Education to "visit every one of the countries of Europe and to study their educational systems." His aim as secretary of the board, he wrote, was "to find beacons in Europe that would serve as lights to guide American educators in their efforts to solve our own educational problems."

But Mann was soon to uncover more problems than solutions. Out of his six-month-long tour abroad came his Seventh Annual Report, sometimes referred to as "One of the great books that changed America." [7] It contained a full description of the American visitor's observations and judgments on the schools which he saw in operation in England, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Holland, France, and Prussia.

Regrettably, for our purposes, he did not visit the Italian peninsula which in those years was going through the throes of the *Risorgimento*. But the relevance of the secretary's "Report" lies in the way he highlighted the repressive "disciplinary abuses" that Don Bosco so adamantly opposed in his treatise and which he categorized as "repressive" and antithetical to his "Salesian Way" of educating children.

Although Mann's chief interest lay in the examination of "schools, both private and public, and their apparatus and modes of teaching," his "Report" has left us a full record of his impressions of corporal punishment and teacher conduct in the numerous schools which he visited. And for our study these experiences reflected the same repressive disciplinary abuses that Don Bosco found so disturbing.

Mann's investigation of the 133 European schools which he was eventually to examine began in Great Britain and then continued on to the continent. The scenarios of some of the classroom scenes he depicts are often grotesque and appear to lead us through a museum of horrors. Or as he more circumspectly wrote: "It was a continual sojourn through woeful and pitiful conditions."

In London Mann was shocked at the propensity on all sides to brutality. Schoolmasters, he wrote, flogged freely, often enthusiastically. Dr. Keate of

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who parade as teachers." The American public school, he insisted, must serve the entire commonwealth in which numerous religious sects were represented.

An admonition in his final baccalaureate address at Antioch College is a perfect example of his social conscience: "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity." Two months later he was dead.

[7] Horace Mann, Annual Reports of the Secretary of the Board of Education of Massachusetts (Boston, 1891). The "Seventh Annual Report" can be found in the Life and Works of Horace Mann, vol. 5. Robert B. Downs includes Mann's "Reports" among the Twenty-five Books That Changed America. The evangelist for public schools is in good company. Some other writers whose works represent major milestones in the history of American ideas are Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Jane Adams, *Twenty Years at Hull–House*; and Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the American Frontier*.

Eton, for example, flogged about 10 boys a day (but never on Sunday); and one unfortunate chap, Mann noted wryly, almost every day (and he was Keate's nephew).

Only when he arrived in Prussia, where Mann was impressed by the organization and pedagogy of the Prussian school system and the competence of the schoolmasters, did he observe the principal of pleasure, not pain, in motivating learning. This humane treatment of schoolchildren which was so akin to Bosco's "Salesian way", Mann viewed with a sense of relief and pleasure. And it was the total absence of corporal punishment (the "repressive" element) in that nation's classrooms that left the visitor with the most lasting impression:

> ... during my visits in the Prussian schools, I never saw a blow struck in anger, I never heard a harsh rebuke given, I never saw a child in tears, nor arraigned at the teacher's bar for any alleged misconduct. On the contrary, the teacher's manner was better than parental, for it had a parent's tenderness without the foolish dotings or indulgences to which parental affection is prone.
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> During my stopovers in the classrooms, I heard no child ridiculed, sneered at, or scolded for making a mistake ... no child was disconcerted, disabled, or bereft of his senses through fear.... When a difficult question was put to a young pupil which required all his energies, the teacher approached him with a mingled look of concern and encouragement. If the young wrestler answered correctly with difficulty, the teacher felicitated him upon his success. At times I saw him shake the lad's hand in a token of congratulations, and when the difficulty had been really formidable and the effort triumphant, I have seen the teacher catch the child in his arms and embrace him as though he were not able to contain his joy.

It would have done Don Bosco's heart good to have read that account in Mann's "Seventh Report". The paths of the two great educators never did cross during the latter's tour of Europe. More's the pity, for they were indeed kindred spirits when it came to dealing with the child in a kindly and compassionate way. It must not be forgotten that the mentor of the Prussian schoolmasters was none other than Johann Pestalozzi, the exemplar of human kindness. Many of the teachers whom Mann had seen in action in the Prussian classrooms had learned their skills at the feet of the Swiss master in Yverdon.

Horace Mann's apparent successful inspection of European schools did not have a happy ending. Upon his return to Boston he wondered aloud in print "whether a visitor could spend even a week in a Boston school without ever hearing an angry word spoken, or seeing a blow struck, or witnessing the flow of tears." This implied criticism of the city's schoolmasters drew an immediate response. Thirty-one of them banded together and issued a lengthy (and intemperate) pamphlet entitled, "Remarks on the Seventh Annual Report of Horace Mann." It reprimanded him for even questioning the propriety of the use

of corporal punishment which they termed "a necessity to curb the evil tendencies in every pupil." [8]

Mann did not accept with grace the Boston schoolmasters' presumed privilege to "flog at will", as outlined in their pamphlet. He answered with a pamphlet of his own in which corporal punishment, the spark that had ignited the debate, was condemned in the strongest terms. Memorable is his introductory statement: "To thwack a child over the head because he doesn't get his lesson right, is about as wise as rapping a watch with a hammer because it does not keep good time." And to pour salt on the social wound he had laid bare, Mann went on to reveal the results of a survey he had conducted. It found that floggings in a representative Boston school averaged 65 per day for every 400 schoolchildren. Though the acrimonious debate ended with popular support for Mann, reform was slow, tediously slow in coming.

Throughout the early part of the 19th century, the use of corporal punishment (the "repressive" option which Don Bosco often alluded to) continued to make life miserable for schoolchildren everywhere. The schoolboy's lot was not a happy one. A male schoolmaster had to be constantly on the defensive—agile with his fists as with his wits.

In a minor American literary classic, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, the author, Edward Eggleston, introduces us to Ralph Hartsook who has decided to apply for the position of village schoolmaster in Flat Creek, shortly after the Civil War. For Ralph, a gentle man, the notion of beating "book learning" into the brains of the burly and muscular sons of the local farmers, somewhat dashes his ardor to teach school. Nevertheless, the young man walks ten grueling miles through the hot Indiana sun to be interviewed by the school committee. After the interview, the village fathers meet to discuss the merits of the young man's qualifications. He seemed fit enough—except for one thing. Or as Mr. Pete Jones, sheriff and head of the school committee, summed it up:

> "Don't believe he'll do. Don't thrash enough. Boys won't learn unless you thrash 'em says I. Leastways, mine won't. Lay it on good, is what I says to

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[8] Mann's glowing comments on Pestalozzian methods in the Prussian schools and the absence of corporal punishment evoked sharp criticism from an *ad hoc* association of Boston schoolmasters. The controversy did not end with the publication of Mann's rejoinder to his "Seventh Report." In fact, a flurry of pamphlets witnessed a running battle with the Secretary of the Boston's teaching community. This exchange of rejoinders and rejoinders to rejoinders between Mann and the city's more prominent pedagogues brought the issue of corporal punishment out into the open and made the oft-cited "Seventh Annual Report" the best known of the twelve.

a schoolmaster. Lay it on good. Don't do no harm. Lickin' and larnin' goes together. No lickin' no larnin'. Lickin' and larnin' is the good ole way."[9]

(Ralph did get the job—but that's another story.)

It was associating "lickin'" with "larnin"' that Don Bosco strongly objected to. His firm position taken against such common practices compelled him to add a list of guidelines at the end of his treatise on the *Sistema Preventivo* which he entitled "Guidelines to Follow When Administering Punishments." His injunctions left little room for doubt concerning his policy on physical punishment or the harsh treatment of a student. Several are cited below:

1. Avoid punishing a child whenever possible.
2. Punishment is what you make it. If you have gained a pupil's trust, a disapproving look can go much further than a thwack on the head.
3. To strike a boy in any way, to make him kneel in a painful position, or to inflict any kind of corporal punishment is strictly forbidden. Not only is mistreating a child in this manner against the law, it also demeans the role of the educator. [10]

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[9] Edward Eggleston, *The Hoosier School-Master* (New York, 1871), pp. 3-4. Another 19th century literary giant who gave the back of his hand to corporal punishment was Henry David Thoreau, a contemporary of Don Bosco. After his graduation from Harvard, he began his brief teaching career in Concord's Center School. Two weeks later he resigned because of his disagreement with the school authorities about corporal punishment, which he refused to inflict. In true Thoreaun style he feruled several children (with a light hand) to "fulfill his obligation to the committee" and then handed in his resignation. Still not disillusioned with the life of a schoolmaster, he wrote to Orestes A. Brownson, "I seek a situation in a small school, or assistant in a large one.... I would make education a pleasant thing to both the teacher and the scholar. Discipline should not be the end of life. In my school I would seek to be fellows with the pupil, and I would learn from him, as he would from me." Shortly after, Thoreau founded his own school. Though it was short-lived, it proved to be a huge success. American education lost a great educator when the Concord maverick turned to other pursuits.

[10] When Don Bosco banned all forms of corporal punishment in his educational treatise, he knew whereof he spoke. The presence of the heavy-handed, rod-wielding schoolmaster was epidemic in Europe in the 19th century. However, few were more legendary that the pedagogue known as the "Teutonic Terror." This German schoolmaster with a Teutonic exactitude worthy of a better cause, kept a record of what punishments he had used during his 51 years of teaching. As seen below, his records are still preserved:

In several of his educational writings, Don Bosco alludes to the practice of advocates of the "repressive" system of education, of posting school rules and regulations and then threatening dire punishment on the violators. [11] However, he lets discretion be the better part of valor and fails to cite examples of such school rules that must be observed under all circumstances. Considering his time and place, it is left to our fantasy to recreate such situations.

To stimulate our imagination in recreating a 19th century scenario where school rules were conspicuously posted and what their violators could expect, consider the "Penalties for the Government of Pupils in North Carolina Schools and Academies" (circa 1860). Below are some samplers from this enlightening, and what Don Bosco would no doubt have labeled "repressive" practice. Note: All lashes were administered with a hickory switch.

Blows with a cane 911, 527	Blows with a rod 124,010	Blows with ruler 20,989	
Blows with a book 22,783	Blows over the ear10,256	Blows with the hand9,123	
Blows over the mouth 10,235	Raps on the head 115,800		

Note: This same ogre had also punished pupils 777 times by making them kneel on peas, and 613 times on small triangles of wood. Even his verbal scoldings were carefully recorded in a list of some 3,000 abusive words or phrases that he used for minor offenses.. (The eminent 19th century educator, Henry Barnard has the dubious distinction of preserving this schoolmaster's malfeasances. See "Memoirs of Eminent Teachers and Educators in Germany", in the *American Journal of Education*, 1863).

[11] "Il sistema repressivo consiste nel far conoscere la legge ai sudditi, poscia sorvegliare i trasgressori ed infliggere, ove e' d'uopo, il meritato castigo." Quoted from the critical text of Pietro Braido in *Giovanni Bosco, Scritti Pedagogici e Spirituali* (LAS, Roma 1987), 166. In referring to the "repressive" elements in education, Don Bosco was not alluding to any educational system per se that was then in current use in Italy or elsewhere. He was just informing the reader that according to his "educational philosophy", the repressive method of educating children was the antithesis of his Salesian approach which advocated a kindly and reasonable and, especially, a "hands–off" treatment of the child.

Number	Rules of the School	No. of Lashes
1.	Boys and girls playing together	4
2.	Climbing for every foot over three feet up a tree	1
7.	Nicknaming each other	4
15.	For drinking spirituous liquors at school	8
20.	Making swings and swinging on them	7
21.	For wearing long fingernails	2
27.	For coming to school with dirty face and hands	2
31.	For not saying 'yes sir', and 'no sir' or 'yes marm', or 'no marm'	3
32.	For not making a bow when you come in or go out	2
42.	For calling each other liars	4
44.	For playing bandy	10
47.	For hollering or whooping going home after school	3
48.	For throwing things, scuffling, wrestling, shouting, and singing	2

Certainly a far-cry from Don Bosco's "permissiveness" in encouraging his boys to release their pent-up energy with wild abandon during recreation time:

> Above all, let boys be boys. Let them play to their hearts' content and do not stifle them just because they get noisy ... Perhaps St. Philip Neri said it best when he used to tell his lads: "Do anything you like, just as long as you do not offend God." (*Il Sistema Preventivo* (1877), article 3).

A principal source of constant disorder in the schoolroom of the 18th and 19th centuries was the employment of untrained and low-grade teachers. Basically the teacher had no idea what to do with the children or how to interest them enough to keep them under control. Don Bosco went a step further. He claimed that without the aid of the Sacraments his teachers would have had no recourse but the rod to manage their pupils. He could have added that sending his first Salesian seminarians to the University of Turin to secure teacher qualification and improve their teaching skills certainly helped them gain a considerable degree of competence.

Educational history records very few examples of educators of national prominence or even of international renown who leveled a flat prohibition against corporal punishment. Even that paragon of human kindness, Johann Pestalozzi, had on occasion to resort to tough love when dealing with unruly children. He admitted that he sometimes felt compelled to cuff a student who was "persistently obstinate and rude." Generally speaking the discipline connected with the great Swiss educator's method was naturally mild. Much like Don Bosco a few decades later, he maintained that the school should be as nearly like a home as possible and that the chief incentives to do right were not fear of

punishment but kindness and love. But there were times when his fractious brood of orphans at Stans tried his soul. He confessed he at times tolerated the use of the rod by his teachers, but he objected when they themselves were out of control: "I do not venture to assert that corporal punishment is inadmissible, but I do object to its application when the teacher or the method is at fault and not the children." [12]

There were occasions when even Pestalozzi himself was pushed to the limit of his endurance, and he let his more rebellious children feel the back of his hand:

> When children were persistently obstinate and rude, severity was necessary and I had to use corporal punishment. When conditions are favorable, it is possible to rely altogether on the pedagogical principle which says that we should win the hearts and minds of a crowd of children by kind words alone. But in a mixture of dissimilar beggar children such as I had to deal with, differing in age and in their deeply-rooted habits, when forced, too, by the needs of the situation to accomplish my aims rapidly, corporal punishment was a necessity. [13]

Several centuries earlier, in 1599, when the Jesuits brought forth their "Plan of Studies" *(Ratio Studiorum)* the architects of the future Jesuit system of education also had to grapple with the problem of corporal punishment. It was solved in typical Jesuit fashion. The Jesuit teacher did not have to handle more than minor problems of discipline, such as arise in any classroom. His function was to

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[12] Robert B. Downs, *Heinrich Pestalozzi, Father of Modern Pedagogy* (Boston, 1975), p. 88. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (174–1827) was a Swiss educational reformer who established a school for poor children on his farm at Neuhof and endeavored to put into practice the educational theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although his school failed, he derived from his experience certain principles for effective education which he later explained in the didactic novel, *Leonard and Gertrude.* His emphasis was upon the concrete approach in education, with objects used to develop powers of observation and reasoning. He strongly influenced methods of instruction throughout Europe and America.

Very much like Don Bosco, his principal concern was caring for destitute children, some of whom were vagrants picked up from the wayside. The children lived with Pestalozzi, who clothed, fed, and taught them. Although the several schools he founded soon foundered because Pestalozzi lacked practical business acumen and administrative skills, his philosophy of creating a climate of emotional security in his institutions deeply impressed those visitors who came from all over the world to observe him in action. In this respect, Don Bosco and Pestalozzi were very much alike.

For the standard biography of this great educator, see Kate Silber, *Pestalozzi, The Man and His Work* (New York, 1960).

[13] Herman Krusi, *Pestalozzi: His Life, Work, and Influence* (Cincinnati, 1875), p. 192.

teach, not to coerce or punish. For real infractions, where even the use of corporal punishment had to be used, a "corrector", who was not a member of the Society, was called upon the scene. Jesuit discipline was undoubtedly strict and even demanding, but it does not appear to have been either cruel or unjust. Certainly the instructions in the *Ratio Studiorum* were wise and tolerant: "Let there be no haste in punishment, nor too much in accusing." [14]

There was no room for tough love in Don Bosco's "educational philosophy" which he outlined in his *Il Sistema Preventivo Nella Educazione Della Gioventù.*[15] Not only were all forms of corporal punishment prohibited, but as will be seen below, all harsh and bad-tempered treatment of children was frowned upon. In his circular of 1883 Don Bosco pleaded with his Salesians to educate in the kindly spirit of Francis de Sales rather than in the repressive style that was characteristic of 19th century schoolmasters. In the opening paragraph of his circular letter he writes:

> Let me begin by urging you to follow our *Sistema Preventivo* in our Salesian apostolate. In adopting the "Salesian Way" we are making it clear that there is no place for coercive measures when dealing with children. Rather, we are committed to educating them by means of kindly persuasion.

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[14] Unlike Don Bosco's *Il Sistema Preventivo Nella Educazione Della Gioventù*, the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum*, was the masterplan for a complete system of education which combined scholasticism and humanism. It was put together with unsparing care after a prolonged scrutiny of the best educational practices then known to Europe. It was a business-like effort and the six veteran teachers who in 1586 wrote the Latin essays making up the first draft recommended that "no boy be admitted to a Jesuit school before he is seven. Children less than that age, it explained, are troublesome and need nannies, not schoolmasters: 'Molestissimi et nutricibus potius indigent quam ludi-magistri.'" (*America*, Oct. 26, 1985), p. 252. The teacher's job, first and last, was to teach Ciceronian Latin, and so Latin was the language of the classroom and the playground as well, the mother tongue being used only by permission.

The glory of Jesuit education need not be repeated here. Many famous men were educated in Jesuit schools. Even Voltaire, who said many harsh things about Jesuits in public life, wrote about their schools: "The best years of my life have been spent in the schools of the Jesuits, and while there I never listened to any teaching but what was good nor seen any conduct but was exemplary." For a classic but somewhat dated study of the *Ratio Studiorum*, see E. A. Fitzpatrick, *St. Ignatius and the Ratio Studiorum* (New York, 1905), chapter 13. For an excellent overview of a 400-year-old system known as Jesuit education see John W. Donohue, S.J., "Notes on Jesuit Education" in *America*, (pp. 252-258), October 26, 1985.

[15] The phrase "Don Bosco's philosophy of education", frequently used in this essay does not encompass any kind of philosophy as a discipline. Rather it attempts to arrive at an understanding of values and reality inherent in his educational thinking by chiefly observational rather than by speculative means. Don Bosco's so-called "educational philosophy", therefore, addresses his specific beliefs, concepts, and attitudes which he practiced and advocated in the education of the young.

For Don Bosco three principles had to be in place for his "educational philosophy" to be effective:

1. The educator had to deal with his students in a reasonable manner.
2. Religious instruction and moral values had to play an essential role in the child's education.
3. The educator was to be always motivated by a kindly and loving concern for his charge's welfare.

These three principles are defined and explained in detail in the 1883 circular (Englished, not translated) which follows. A deliberate attempt, therefore, has been made to arrive at Don Bosco's thinking, that is, what he means to say, and not what the transliterated words and phrases so often cloud and confuse.

Written six years after his educational doctrine was defined in his seminal treatise on the *Sistema Preventivo*, Don Bosco's circular letter *Dei Castighi Da Infliggersi Nelle Case Salesiane* (1883) is a most revealing synthesis of his "educational philosophy".

In recent years Salesian historians have been debating the provenance of this circular letter allegedly written by Don Bosco and entitled, *"Dei Castighi da Infliggersi Nelle Case Salesiane."* [16] The central issue of this scholarly debate asks: Since there is no extant holograph of this circular, was Don Bosco its true author? The *Castighi* document has strong support for its authenticity in Eugenio Ceria:

> Before leaving the Oratory for an extended stay in France, Don Bosco consigned a circular letter to Don Rua with the express order to have it forwarded or hand–delivered to the directors of all Salesian houses. Its author considered the document of great importance since it dealt in detail with the use of punishment as generally outlined in Don Bosco's explication of the *Sistema Preventivo* published in 1877. Dated January 29th, the feast of St. Francis of Sales, the date of the circular had a symbolic significance. That date also marked the occasion of the author's departure for France. This coincidence was intended by Don Bosco to send out the message that the

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[16] Transliterated from the Italian, the title of this *Castighi* document reads: "On the Administration of Punishments in Salesian Houses." This circular letter can be found in volume 16 of the *Memorie Biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco* (Torino, 1935), pp. 439–447. The critical edition of this letter has been edited by Jose Manuel Prellezo S.D.B., and can be found in *Ricerche Storiche* (LAS Rome, 1986) pp. 263-308. Prellezo makes a strong and compelling case for its authenticity. The 1883 circular letter is also listed in the recent publication (vol.1) of *Bibliografia Generale di Don Bosco* (LAS, Roma 1995), p. 45. This authoritative and definitive bibliography of Don Bosco's writings includes the *Castighi* document among the posthumous major writings ("opere maggiori") attributed to him. No qualification referring to its dubious authenticity is given for this work.

theme of the circular dealt in intimate fashion with that kindliness inherent in Francis' "Salesian spirit" which every Salesian educator was expected to cultivate. Don Rua had copies of this document made, but in time its very existence seemed to have fallen into oblivion. [17]

This circular, now almost universally attributed to Don Bosco, appeared in print for the first time fifty years later with the publication of the sixteenth volume of the *Memorie Biografiche* (pp. 439–447) edited by Eugenio Ceria in 1935.

While there is a growing consensus that Don Bosco was personally responsible for this unique and revealing document, there are some noteworthy Salesian writers who are not yet ready to concede his direct authorship. A weighty argument made in their favor is that several of Don Bosco's close contemporaries never alluded to the *Castighi* circular. Others have taken the position that while it does indeed reflect Don Bosco's spirit and intent, he was not its direct author but entrusted its compilation to a trusted Salesian colleague. A final, and less supported posture, is that of several critics who maintain that the *Castighi* document was authored by some anonymous writer who cobbled it together by excerpting its contents from Don Bosco's talks and writings.

There are five extant manuscripts of the *Castighi* document in the Salesian archives in Rome. Although one bears the signature of Don Bosco, the handwriting is not his but that of Don Giovanni Francesia. To compound the confusion, Eugenio Ceria erroneously attributes it to Michele Rua.

The onetime superior general, Father Peter Ricaldone (1870-1951), regarded the *Castighi* circular letter of 1883 as an important and authentic testimony of the Founder and quoted it often in his *Don Bosco Educatore*. Several well-known Italian authors, like Mario Casotti and Giovanni Modugno, in discussing Don Bosco's educational achievements, have cited the *Castighi* document extensively.

Those who question Don Bosco's direct authorship of the 1883 circular take the position that since there is no existing holograph of the *Castighi* document, this precludes the conclusion that Don Bosco actually wrote it. Then they point to the unexplained silence on the part of important Salesian colleagues who were close to him during the period of its alleged composition. Among the more prominent:

1. Don Giulio Barberis (1847-1927) who wrote widely on the use of discipline in Salesian schools, never alludes to the *Castighi* document. Barberis wrote and spoke frequently to young Salesians on the "educational philosophy" practiced by Don Bosco.

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[17] Eugenio Ceria, *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco, a cura di Eugenio Ceria*, vol. 4 (1959), p. 201.

2. Don Francesco Cerruti (1844-1917) was the Salesian Society's first important educational historian. There are no references to the circular letter in his numerous writings on education.

3. Don Pietro Braido does not accept Don Bosco as the direct author of the *Castighi* document. "Though in substance," he writes, "it does agree with his educational thinking in the field of punishment, the circular gives too much importance to a subject which, in the pedagogy of loving-kindness he would normally have made only a passing mention."

Let readers judge for themselves by reading the complete text which follows below. It certainly bears all the hallmarks of Don Bosco's "Salesian Way" as found in his *Il Sistema Preventivo Nella Educazione Della Gioventù* written six years earlier. A consistency of approach is evident in both these two writings: be reasonable when confronting the culprit; treat him with loving kindness and compassion no matter the circumstances; walk the extra mile with him in tolerating his mischievous ways; be kindly in manner when addressing the use of discipline; be motivated by the Holy Spirit when taking action. One seems to hear the echo of the Old Testament prophet of several millennia ago who described God's treatment of the errant Israelites: " ... gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment." (Joel 2:13)

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It is essential to read and interpret Don Bosco "recommendations", "suggestions", "proposals", in administering punishment in the context of the times when he addressed his circular letter to the directors of his various Salesian schools. Every *collegio* (boarding school) had its own unique problems which living conditions exacerbated and expanded. Boarding school students in those days spent twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, within the cramped confines of boarding school walls. The students all ate together in the same dining room, slept in barrack–like dormitories, played in the same common playground. Such communal life created numerous problems that called for frequent admonitions and punishments. Supervision was ubiquitous and mischief-making sometimes became a fine art. Don Bosco always stressed the goal of the "family spirit", but even in the best of families children will get ornery, cantankerous, and look to follow the line of least resistance. The use of punishment advocated by Don Bosco had to deal with infractions and peccadilloes and sometimes serious offenses that resulted from boys living together in an effort to put a halt to them before they festered into more serious situations.

If Punish You Must ...

My Loving Sons,

I have been repeatedly and even persistently asked to provide some guidelines for our directors, school administrators, and teachers regarding the perplexing problems that arise when we have to resort to the administration of punishment in our houses. You are all well aware of the difficult times we live in, and that to act rashly and hastily in such situations can have dire consequences.

I do wish, however, to respond to your requests so that the unfortunate fallout that can follow in the wake of punishing unwisely will be averted. But what is my real concern in this matter is that if and when punishments must be used, the youths who have been entrusted to our care by divine Providence will benefit rather than suffer when they are the objects of disciplinary action.

Therefore, I am listing some guidelines below which if followed, should greatly assist you in the noble but challenging task that faces each of you in the education of the young.

Let me begin by urging you to follow our *Sistema Preventivo* in your Salesian apostolate. In adopting the "Salesian Way" we are making it clear that there is no place for coercive measures when dealing with children. Rather, we are committed to educating them by means of kindly persuasion.

Human nature being what it is, there are times when we have no choice but to take the course of using some kind of disciplinary action. It is this that compels me to outline certain principles which, if used with God's help, will have effective and satisfactory results.

The first overriding principle when applying any form of discipline should be directed to the question: Will the child profit from the punishment? We must never lose sight of the fact that we are surrogate parents to the boys under our care. This is the guideline I have always followed in the past and it is equally relevant today. This then is the position that the members of our Society should take in the care of the boys in our schools. To act like a loving father towards a child who has been entrusted to you, you must have the heart of a father. It follows then that any punishment you have to inflict should be

reasonable and fair. Let me now explain what form a disciplinary action should take, and who should administer punishment when necessary.

1. Punish Only As a Last Resort

In my long experience with children, I have learned one self-evident fact that allows little room for argument: It is much easier to lose one's temper when dealing with a disruptive child than to keep oneself under control. So, losing one's patience and punishing a lad when he misbehaves comes easy. Far more difficult is maintaining your composure while correcting him in a kindly manner and then being supportive regardless of his fault. This is the kind of respect that is reminiscent of St. Paul's reaction towards the fickle behavior of his new converts to Christianity. How often he wept over them and pleaded with them when they did not measure up to his expectations.

I urge our directors then to correct a child in much the same way a loving father would correct his son. But—and I cannot emphasize this too strongly—do so in private. In "*camera caritatis*" as the saying goes. Never scold a boy in the presence of his peers. I realize this is not always possible, especially when a serious offense has been committed, and it may have to be publicly redressed.

When no noticeable improvement is observed after you have reprimanded a culprit, it might be a wise move to speak to a colleague who has a good rapport with the lad. Often a word from one whom he trusts can work wonders. And do not underestimate the power of prayer. Remember how Moses frequently prayed to placate the Lord's wrath against the unruly Israelites.

I have learned from my own experience that when a child is punished in haste, especially when other means have been ignored, little, if anything is actually achieved. St. Gregory once wrote that we cannot force ourselves into the human heart. It is like an impenetrable fortress. The only way one can gain entry into it is through kindness and affection.

Certainly we must do everything possible to prevent bad things from happening, but coercion will not accomplish this. Kindness and tact will. If at first things do not go your way, do not lose heart. Be persevering and loving, and you will see that God will help you master even the most rebellious hearts.

I realize only too well that such an ideal way of acting towards young people is not readily found among young educators and inexperienced teachers. Because of their youth and immaturity, they will at times mistreat children and deal with them harshly, even resorting to corporal punishment—a course of action which is always counterproductive. Because of their inexperience they find themselves unable to cope with disruptive situations and just let things get worse and end up punishing children in an unreasonable manner. Things quickly go from bad to worse, and soon even the normally well-behaved boys react adversely.

Let me share with you my own experiences when I found myself in such predicaments. In my early years I often had to face boys who were contemptuously stubborn and would not listen to any well-intentioned advice. Because of their obstinate attitude towards me, and showing no signs of improving their conduct, it seemed that my only way out was to use severe measures against them. But I did no such thing. I put up with their contempt and arrogance. In the long run it was my untiring kindness towards them that won the day. Often it seems that your tolerance and kindness are getting you nowhere, and that the troubled youngster is just not listening. But don't be fooled. Our problem-child is listening more than you think. His outward demeanor may not show it, but his heart is taking in much more than we imagine. However, do not expect sudden and dramatic change. Time must take its course. Very often the boy himself does not realize the extent of the trouble he has brought upon himself. When all is said and done we realize that he did not act out of malice aforethought, but just acted thoughtlessly like young boys often do.

I have often talked to such troublemakers privately and made every effort to speak to them with kindness and understanding. When I asked them why they were being so unruly, a frequent response was that they believed that their teacher had it in for them and was deliberately picking on them. Sometimes when I examined the cause of a boy's complaints, I learned that he was not completely in the wrong. In fact, I often found that he was indeed the victim of unfair harassment. And I must admit that on occasion it is the educator rather than his student who is the cause of the problem. So how can we expect the boy to be cooperative and responsive?

At times a school administrator is confronted with a situation in which a teacher has become very demanding and insists that his students always be on their best behavior. And when a school rule is broken, he will call for severe and summary punishment. And yet this same teacher violates those very rules he wants enforced. Had this educator followed the sound advice of his own superior, the boy in question might not have broken the school rule in the first place, and his punishment could have been avoided.

Above all, strive to have the child respect you rather than fear you. There are times, I know, when we must take firm and decisive action towards certain youths, but this can and should be done without rancor or spite on our part. This leads me to a second basic principle that is very important when correcting a child or administering the proper kind of punishment. In a word, it's "TIMING".

2. The Right Place and the Right Time

"Let everything take place at its proper time," the Holy Spirit reminds us. Punishing a child is very much the same. Choosing the right moment is very important. If we use so much care in healing an illness or an injury, should we not be equally solicitous in character healing? When a doctor treats a patient, he takes every precaution to prescribe the right medication and to instruct the patient to use it at the proper time. If he does not, the damage that results can be irreparable. The same principle holds when we deal with the character formation of young people. Experience will teach the educator when the need for medicine is called for; and a spirit of loving kindness will instruct him how to administer it. The two must be combined.

The educator must learn to control his emotional outbursts. If he is ill-tempered and irascible, he will do more harm than good when correcting a child in that state because he is motivated more by his bad temper than by his sense of authority. That wise philosopher, Socrates, uttered words to live by when he once told a slave who had infuriated him, "Were I not so angry, I would give you a sound thrashing." He was simply saying that physically abusing a person when we have lost our temper is useless and only makes things worse.

Do not underestimate the innate shrewdness of children. They are keen observers of our outward behavior. They quickly interpret our interior feelings by a change in our facial

expression or in our tone of voice. For them these are signs that reveal whether the educator is acting out of emotion or from a sense of duty. So if we are not in control and acting responsibly when a punishment is called for, its effectiveness on the child will be lost.

When a boy misbehaves, punishment should not be swift. Allow some time to elapse. During this cooling-off period he will have time to reflect on what he has done, his emotional state will have subsided, and he will be in a better position to realize that the punishment he deserves is not unreasonable.

I have always been impressed by the way the Lord dealt with the hot-headed Paul when the latter was "breathing murderous threats" against the first Christians. The Lord did not speedily strike him down with swift vengeance. He bided his time. And that time came during Paul's long trip to Damascus. After he was stricken off his horse, Christ revealed himself to Paul in all his power and glory. Forcefully but gently he made him see the error of his ways. Nevertheless, Paul, having lost his sight, had to spend many long hours reflecting how blind his behavior had been. This analogy carries a valuable lesson on how to deal with rebellious and recalcitrant children.

It is my ardent wish that my spiritual sons follow the Lord's example. Be patient and loving and try to discern, with God's help, the proper time and place to correct a child.

3. Let Every Punishment Carry a Clear Message

The clear message I am stressing is that the punishment you are administering is not the result of an emotional outburst. It is a calm and reasoned decision. I realize that this course of action is a real challenge for any educator. To be cool-headed and self-controlled in such circumstances can be a trying experience for anyone who has to deal with rebellious or uncontrollable children. Remaining calm, therefore, is not an option, it is a necessity. If a child is to be convinced that we are genuinely concerned about his welfare, this will hardly show through in our bursts of anger. It is in the spirit of our tradition to deal with children in a fatherly and understanding way. If we intend to measure up to this tradition, then fits of uncontrolled anger are out of place. The boys under our care are our sacred trust. Just as Jesus came to serve and not to be served, we have to serve each child in that same spirit. How can we do this in a

domineering manner? That is why our service to the young, despite their uncouth ways and frequent irritating thoughtlessness, must be Christ-like. When you stop to think of it, that is just the way Jesus dealt with his apostles who at times acted like irresponsible children. He put up with their ignorance, their infidelity, their crude ways. He treated sinners in the same intimate and compassionate manner. This kind of behavior astonished some people and even shocked others. But Jesus' way of acting conveyed the message of God's forgiveness. And he told us to learn from him to be "gentle and humble of heart."

If we can come to the realization that the boys among whom we work are to be treated as though they were our own sons then anger has no place in your hearts. Neither have cutting remarks, dirty looks, mean-spiritness. A good and true father masks his irritation when correcting his child. He blends compassion with his firmness. I know only too well that there will be moments when we will feel like exploding after a boy has behaved in an outrageous manner. If our pent-up anger is released in a flood of violent words, nothing is accomplished, and the culprit, even though he knows he deserves to be punished, will himself feel anger and resentment in turn.

It may not be easy in the heat of the moment, to keep ourselves under control, but a silent prayer is often our best immediate response.

I urge you to go slow in punishing someone the moment he has broken a rule, or has even been guilty of a serious offense. Do not let your emotions take over and sway you in such moments. After all, Jesus forgave an entire town when its inhabitants refused to receive him within its walls. Two of his disciples even were loud in their anger because of this insulting treatment of their master. They wanted that town to be struck down immediately by lightning as a punishment for such an affront.

There is great wisdom in those words of the Holy Spirit: "Be angry but sin not." I would like to add something further. If, as teachers and educators, all the hard work and stress and strain we have to put up with seem to be getting us nowhere in our work with young people, then perhaps we should take a good look at ourselves. It may very well be that the source of our problems arises from the unfortunate and mistaken ways we discipline our charges.

The heart of the matter is simply this: stay in control. The way God taught this lesson to Elijah, the prophet, is very much to the point here. As educators we have much to learn from this story which you can read at length in your Bible. The gist of it is this: Elijah, in a spirit of righteousness, had taken up the cause of the Lord. He inveighed energetically against the scandals that were happening among the Israelites. But apparently God preferred a gentler, kindlier approach in dealing with his wayward children when he told the prophet: "The Lord is not in the whirlwind." Saint Theresa said much the same thing in those simple yet memorable words of hers: "Let nothing upset you."

St. Francis de Sales, the model of our "Salesian Way", gives us some very salutary advice in this matter. Francis, the epitome of self-control, had resolved early in life never to speak when his heart was disturbed. He used to say: "I do not want to lose in a quarter of an hour all those precious drops of kindness which I have managed to store up, drop by drop, during my lifetime, and which I guard closely in the corner of my heart. The poor bee labors for months to create a small amount of honey which a person gulps down in a mouthful. Besides, why should I lose my patience and my composure in discussing something with someone who I know has no intention of really listening to what I have to say?"

On one occasion Francis was criticized for having dealt too kindly with a youth who had seriously offended his mother. He explained: "That lad was not prepared to benefit from any stiff reprimand he had coming to him. I could see that he was very distraught when I first spoke to him. Any strong language I might have used would have done more harm than good. He was in such an agitated state of mind that nothing I could have done or said would have helped the poor lad. It would have been a case of myself going down while trying to save a drowning man. Our kindly and gentle patron pretty well illustrates what I am trying to say.

At times to make sure that a culprit gets the message he needs, it often helps to make a public statement in his presence as to what awaits those who break the rules and regulations that have been drawn up to regulate the good conduct of all. The great value of winning the trust and friendship of a child is to withdraw that trust and friendship from him until he comes to his senses and realizes he needs our assistance. I myself have

often used this approach, and with God's help it has proved very successful.

Only in the most desperate cases should we make a young offender swallow his pride with a public apology.

Sometimes the help of a third party can be quite effective in administering a reprimand or a disciplinary punishment. If you think it will help, by all means call upon his assistance. Select someone whom you know the culprit likes and esteems. Such a tactic will often open up a line of communication, and you will be able to approach that boy again without embarrassing him. Even Jesus was not adverse to using a go-between or some kind of mediator. He did on occasion send some of his disciples ahead to a town or community to prepare their inhabitants for his message.

Don't demand the impossible from a boy when you have to correct him. Meet him half way if necessary. Your sole aim should be to make the culprit realize where he went wrong. So do not expect an immediate conversion. Be reasonable. Once he admits his mistake, meet him more than half way by lessening the punishment he has coming to him.

One final point. When you have to deal out punishment to someone who has an almost intractable character, let him know you are more than willing to let bygones be bygones. Try to make him understand that he will rise in the estimation of his peers and his teachers when they see for themselves that he is making an honest effort to improve his conduct.

The Culprit Must Be Assured that the Educator does not Carry a Grudge

Every punishment leaves a trail of anxiety and even stress in its wake. Therefore, an encouraging word to the youth who has been punished will make the transition more humane. In the difficult art of education, forgetting and forgiving a child's fault can put the educator to the test. Again we look to Jesus as our model teacher. Nowhere is it written that he kept reminding Mary Magdalene of her sinful past. We marvel at the delicacy he used in helping Peter admit his weakness until he begged for forgiveness. When some of the apostles owned up to their disloyalty, all was quickly forgiven and forgotten.

Every boy who has been subjected to some kind of disciplinary punishment must be made to feel that the educator

puts his trust in him to change his ways, and that he will not hold any grudge against him for his past misconduct. If you expect this same boy to change his behavior, then only kindness and affection will get that result. A kind word, a pat on the back, an encouraging word will work wonders. Certainly this kind of attitude will be far more productive than a mean-spirited dressing-down which only ends up unnerving the youngster rather than encouraging him to improve his conduct.

In my long experience of working with children, only the compassionate treatment of a child can bring about real change in the development of his character. A severe tongue-lashing, will not. And if I may be personal for a moment, there are some people reading this right now whom I once won over in just this manner and who are now members of our Salesian Congregation today.

Try to understand that every boy has his bad days. Teachers are no exception; they have them too. In view of this should we not sincerely try to help these lads get through their difficult moments? Sometimes why not try telling a boy who has gotten himself into trouble that we believe he did not act out of malice. He knows he is guilty, and we know he is guilty. But in taking his side in this manner he will think twice before making the same mistake again.

Perhaps some of these suggestions may sound like a string of platitudes to you and hardly worth a second thought. But believe me, if you put some stock in this advice I am giving you, your noble task of educating children will prove a fruitful one. Moreover, many a boy who was at one time regarded as a hopeless case had his life turned around because some teacher put some of these proposals into practice.

What Kinds of Punishments Should be Used and Who Should Use Them?

Am I ruling out the use of punishments altogether? I am well aware that in the Scriptures the Lord compared himself to a "watchful rod" in order to keep us from sin and to instill in us a fear of its consequences.

There is no reason why an educator cannot follow the same line of reasoning in administering punishment. We have our own version of the "rod", so let us use it wisely and humanely. If we

follow this policy, a disciplined child will in the long run become a better child.

I have learned from my visits to the city jails in my early years that harsh punishment may penalize the crime, but it does not rehabilitate the criminal. You cannot force a plant to grow straight by violently bending it. A young boy is much like a young plant which must be tended carefully and wisely nurtured to produce a straight and natural growth.

I would like to add here a few guidelines to serve you when disciplinary measures must be taken in our schools:

1. When a boy misbehaves or is disorderly, let him know that you are keenly disappointed in him. Make him realize that he has let you down. If such a lad esteems and respects his teacher, he will almost never make the same mistake twice out of respect for him.

2. Any reprimand that must be given must be given in private and in a fatherly manner.

3. Do not reprimand a boy time and time again. Repetitious corrections in time become meaningless.

4. Make it clear to the culprit that in breaking the rules of the school he has not only disappointed you, but has let his parents down as well.

5. Trace out the consequences of his bad behavior to him. Then contrast that with the joy and good feelings that await someone who follows the rules.

This approach when used, and without resorting to any kind of corporal punishment, will, I assure you, produce a gratifying and generous response.

Anyone who has worked for considerable time with children should not be surprised when a boy breaks the same rules over again. Such is the nature of youth. But react with firmness and let your admonition be businesslike. That should wake him up. And the culprit will have to admit, if only to himself, that his conduct falls far short of what is expected of him.

But don't rush to judgment. When a youth sees that the punishment he has coming to him is being held off, and when he learns that you still believe in him and do not wish him to get into deeper water than he is already in, he will come around.

Any boy is very sensitive to becoming the object of public humiliation. When he sees that you have spared him from such a fate and hears that you are willing to forgive and forget—unless he is really a hardened case—you will see that his conduct will improve.

I must concede that there are times when the direction I have just outlined cannot be taken. I refer to instances of disruptive conduct that demand firm and prompt disciplinary action. Very well then, let sterner but salutary measures be taken if you think they will prove beneficial.

For example, if a boy misbehaves badly during mealtime, let him make amends by having him eat standing up, or if necessary, isolate him and have him eat his meal alone. But I insist that if such drastic steps are taken, the troublemaker must be served the same quantity and quality of food as his companions. Furthermore, don't force him to eat outdoors in the hot sun or exposed to wintry weather.

Very often a punishment is what you make it. Not calling on him in class despite his eager raised hand, for example, delivers the message you want him to get. But there is one form of punishment that I do not favor. I refer to that practice of having a mischievous pupil do mere busy-work, like having him copy out endless pages from some meaningless text. I hear this is happening all too frequently. Reputable educators are divided on this sort of punishment. Some claim it has some value; others say it's a waste of time. I shall leave it up to you to decide which course to take. But a word of caution: Sometimes an irate teacher gives a lad an impossible amount of pages to copy out. This ends up irritating the boy and gives him cause for complaint that his teacher is "persecuting" him. As I see it, such useless and nonsensical busy–work is uneducational, and does not benefit the student in any way. A much more productive form of punishment, which I understand an increasing number of our Salesian teachers are using, is that of having a boy memorize stanzas of poetry or excerpts from classic literature. At least punishment of this kind has some kind of lasting benefit for the boy in the long run. However, I am still not convinced that such forms of punishment, though they appear more benign and not so irritating, are always successful.

I feel I must say a word here about the practice of sending a troublemaker to detention after school. Personally I do not approve such tactics. I find such action degrading. In the long

run, sending a boy to detention only ends up angering him. And the devil often takes advantage of making a bad situation worse.

I have received reports that some of our schools consider such a practice to be "absolutely necessary". Then so be it. However, I insist that you see to it that someone casually drops in and talks to the boy during those "dark moments" of his isolation. Use that visit to make the lad realize that such a punishment is being used only because his teachers are at their wits' end and do not wish to use sterner measures. So have a heart. Build up the boy's morale when you are alone with him. If he shows that he really wants to mend his ways, then bring the detention period to an end, and let the boy get on with his life.

So far, everything I have written above pertains to the breaking of school rules and regulations, which often are of a trivial nature. Now, however, I want to discuss more serious offenses that may occur. I refer to breaches in morality and even to the breaking of the law. Violations of this kind must be reported immediately to the director of the school who will take prudent steps to interrogate the wrongdoer, especially if we are dealing here with a cause for scandal.

If the guilty party continues to give bad example and shows no signs of amending his behavior, let him be summarily dismissed. Patience has its limits. But action taken in the case of a student's expulsion should be effected in a manner that will protect his good name as much as possible. Therefore, involve the boy's parents in such a way that the youth's transfer to another school does not cause tongues to wag or does not create a lot of malicious gossip. The parents of the disciplined boy will be grateful for such discretion on your part. Parting will be amicable, and there will be no hard feelings.

Finally, other than just routine everyday admonitions, it is the director's duty to regulate what types of punishments are to be administered and the circumstances in which they are to be used. He should have the last word in this matter. In his role as director and father figure of the school, it should be much easier for him to communicate with recalcitrant students when disciplinary action is to be taken. However, his is not the task to administer punishment itself; let him delegate that to some appropriate person. What punishment is to be meted out and under what conditions, is reserved only to the director. No one else should assume this serious responsibility. Let me repeat

what I have just stated: it is the director's prerogative, and his alone, to make all and final decisions in this matter. And let no one try to find some kind of loophole to take things into his own hands.

I urge you with all my heart to heed these recommendations. God will bless you for it. And let me repeat what I have said many times: Education is a matter of the heart. How do we acquire this "educated heart" in our dealings with our boys? Prayer is one of the most effective ways. Pray to Him, our Master–teacher, to help you acquire that difficult art of reaching the human heart.

Keep me in your prayers. I remain ever yours in the most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Your affectionate father and friend,

Father John Bosco, Feast of St. Francis of Sales, 1883