



SALESIAN SPIRIT
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PREVENTIVE SYSTEM: PUNISHMENTS



Are there punishments in the preventive system? How do we correct errant pupils and place them on the right path if there are no punishments? The preventive system replaces punishment with friendly and informal supervision and recreation. It is replaced with friendly, frequent and effective admonitions. When asked if punishment was excluded from the preventive system, Don Bosco answered that it was not and that there were punishments that our religion threatened for those who broke God's commandments. Don Bosco suggested that it was sufficient to recall to the students these punishments threatened by religion. And it did have beneficial results. Punishments and corrections should be to make the pupils honest citizens and good Christians when they are no longer in the educational institution. In this perspective, insistence on avoiding corporal punishments and replacing them with kindly corrections is praiseworthy.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The educator should strive to make himself loved by his pupils. The educator should never inflict corporal punishments; also, never a humiliating word or severe reprimand in the presence of others. The educator should not threaten the pupils with punishment. The educator

should not take revenge on the pupils. The educator should replace punishments with gentle reminders. The educator should not reprimand in the presence of others. The educator should not punish slight faults severely.

What are punishments? What punishments were deplored by Don Bosco? Don Bosco understood punishments as anything that is intended as punishment. Hence, the omission of kindness, the educator's unhappy, stern and grieved look, and ignoring the pupil in the classroom for a day were already punishments! Boys considered it already punishment even to be called by Don Bosco when they had done something wrong!

Some punishments that Don Bosco deplored include striking the pupil in any way, name-calling, making the pupil kneel in a painful position, pulling ears, making them stand up at meals for an entire week, punishment work and reflection closet. Some of the punishments that were permitted at



the Oratory for serious faults were: lazy ones were given a smaller portion of food; the disobedient were isolated from companions and isolated to a particular spot in the playground during the recreation period; those who left the premises without permission took meals standing at the door of the dining room; those guilty of scandal or indecent conversation and conduct were expelled.

WHEN & HOW OF CORRECTIONS

Regarding corrections and punishments, it should be noted that they should be administered sparingly. Secondly, corrections should not be prompted by anger but by the good of the pupil and by the love and concern for the pupil. Great prudence and patience are employed to make the pupil realise his fault. Thirdly, the severity of the corrections should correspond to the seriousness of the fault committed. Faults of thoughtlessness should be overlooked. Slight faults are not to be severely punished. Fourthly, the whole class or group should not be punished for the fault of some. The culprit should be singled out, and only they should be corrected or disciplined.

Success depends on the appropriateness of the time of the corrections. A favourable time has to be chosen so that the correction proves helpful. The educator should be in control of himself and his emotions. They should not correct a pupil when they are angry or upset. Let the educator calm down, even if it means some days! When calm, they can correct the pupil. In the same way, the educator should give time and

space for the pupil to calm down. No corrections should be given at the moment of the fault because the pupil will not control himself.

The following procedure is to be followed for the successful outcome of corrections and punishments. (1) The pupils should be aware of the rules, the rewards and the punishments. They should be reminded of the same from time to time. (2) The educator should verify whether and to what extent the pupil is guilty of the fault. (3) Public punishments should be the last resort, not the first! (4) The educator gives the correction privately and never before the companions unless warranted by a scandal. (5) The educator may have recourse to another educator who favours the pupil to speak to him and see things from the proper perspective. (6) The educator makes the pupil realise they are not suggesting anything more than strictly reasonable and necessary. The educator should put it so that the pupils will blame themselves. (7) If the pupil



shows they are sorry, the educator should mitigate or suspend the punishment. (8) The educator should bring to a close his correction with a word of encouragement, such as a promise that they would be friends as before.

IT WORKS!

Here is an episode that shows how Don Bosco corrected boys. One day, Don Bosco spoke rather severely to a boy who had been disobedient. That night, he became sick with a high fever and became delirious. In his delirium, he kept lamenting, 'Don Bosco does not like me anymore!'. On hearing Don Bosco's voice, he calmed down and being assured by Don Bosco that he would always be his friend, he recovered quickly. Another episode shows how the cold-shoulder treatment of Don Bosco corrected boys. Once in summer, a boy was shivering, biting his sheets, and sobbing. When asked what was wrong, he said, 'Don

Bosco looked at me!' 'But what's so strange about that?' 'It's the way he did it.'

An older man recalled with a Salesian his experience of being educated at the Oratory between 1870 and 1876. He identified two things about Don Bosco: he had a good sense of humour and never punished the boys! When the Salesian challenged him for the fun of it, saying that it was impossible, the older man said that Don Bosco had his way of dealing with errant boys. He would call for them. It was already a punishment to be contacted by Don Bosco when they had done something wrong! He would welcome them with his kindly smile, and looking into their eyes, he would say, "It is apparent that you do not love Don Bosco. If you did, you would not have done this or that." "That was enough," the old man said, "we had already been scolded and punished, and we were sorry and were forgiven!"

One of the practices that Don Bosco instituted, which served to foster good behaviour and, hence, reduced the need for corrections and punishments, is giving conduct marks. Conduct marks were given to the boys in the study hall, the classroom, the dormitory, the refectory, etc. Those who got poor conduct marks were called out in the presence of everybody. If the name was not called out, their conduct was satisfactory. Those who got poor conduct marks would be tolerated for some time but not eternally! They were asked not to return for the following year!

Another practice that helped in the good behaviour of the students was the reduction in the fees given to poor boys who had good conduct marks! If they had poor conduct marks, they had to forego that privilege and pay the total fees!

CONCLUSION

Punishment is much easier than patience because it feeds the educator's raw emotions, but does it do any good for the pupil and his future? That is the question that good educators should ask themselves. It will undoubtedly change their course of correcting their pupils. ■