

A Study of Delegation of Authority in Local Administration

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1. Good Father Kieffer once made the statement that the Society of Mary has the best organization in the Church, and that its legislation also is one of the most complete and enlightened among religious societies, but that its administration is one of the worst. Making allowance for a certain amount of exaggeration in what was obviously a pleasantry, it still remains true that we have neglected, to a very large extent, the remarkable resources for good administration which were left to us by Father Chaminade.
2. One of the best indications of this neglect is the recurrent "crisis of leadership" that plagues Provincial and General Superiors when new Directors or Provincial officers must be named. An effective administration would supply a reserve of men ready for authority, and the fact that we seem to lack such a reserve indicates clearly that our administration is not really as effective as it should be.
3. Again, Directors and other Superiors are continually complaining that they had no more preparation for their present responsibilities than the obedience which notified them of their appointment; and there are frequent requests for some kind of "formation" for executive work. Here, once more, we have an indication that our methods of administration are inadequate, for a good administration would constantly be preparing people to move up on the ladder of responsibility.
4. There is a general and growing dissatisfaction with our present methods of administration, and the General Chapter of 1956 received numerous proposals of reform. These proposals were, for the most part, turned over to the General Administration, although one of them concerning the office of Chef d'Instruction in the local administration became Statute 9 of the Chapter. Another concerning the office of Chef de Zèle in the Provincial Administration was recommended for action in a Circular to the various Provincials. All the others will form an object of extended study and experimentation by the General Administration during the years which will precede the next Chapter where definitive proposals are to be presented.
5. One of the principal points that need attention is the effective delegation of authority in both the Provincial and local administrations, and this problem is particularly acute on the local level. It is the lack of such effective delegation which is most to blame for our failure to train executive personnel, for the best school of administration is always the work of administration itself.
6. It is surprising that this misunderstanding of the delegation of authority should have arisen in the Society of Mary, because the organization of administration in the "Three Offices" is a constitutional provision aimed at preventing just such a development. Father Chaminade thought so much of this device that when he wrote to Pope Pius VII for spiritual favors for his two Societies, it was this aspect of his organizations which he pointed out as their esprit principal. (Letters 110, 111)
7. As a matter of fact, it is a very powerful administrative device, especially when coupled, as it is in the Society of Mary, with a strongly centralized authority. The strong centralization offers the Society the opportunity of facing successfully almost any kind of problem or crisis, while the delegation of authority to the specialized competence of the three Offices gives the Society tremendous resources for growth and development in normal circumstances.

8. It is the desire of the General Administration, responding to numerous requests from all parts of the Society, to make effective delegation according to the lines set down in the Constitutions a normal part of the administration of our houses.

9. It is important to emphasize here that we are talking of a delegation of authority which is strictly according to our Constitutions. Father Chaminade made a complex and coherent synthesis of two principles—intense centralization of authority on the one hand; and distribution of responsibility according to a competence on the other—which many people prefer (perhaps out of a certain mistrust of complexity) to regard as incompatible.

10. Far from being incompatible, these two principles complete each other in a powerful and obvious synthesis. The link between them is delegation which is not in any sense an abandonment of central authority, but a means, a most efficacious one, of exercising it.

11. It is the superior who determines to what extent he will use these means, and hence it remains completely under his jurisdiction. Yet it is not completely subject to his whim: he is obliged by the Constitutions to use it according to the complexity of his task, and when he fails to do so, he is simply a poor superior. We will spend no more time in this circular “defending” a principle that is not in question: “The Director always keeps the first and principal responsibility for the exercise of the three offices”; (Art. 491) and everything which follows (in this circular, i.e.) has this principle quite clearly in mind.

12. In the first studies that have been made of failures of delegation, it has become apparent that the difficulty lies not only in the unwillingness of many Superiors to “share” their authority, but also in the unwillingness of many subordinates to accept responsibility. Other cases have been found where there was a real and honest effort made on both sides to work out an effective delegation, and despite the good will of both parties, it did not work. This last is the most serious situation, for it indicates the absence of those essential ideas and methods which make the delegation of authority possible. Only thus can we explain failure to achieve success despite evident good will and effort on both sides.

13. The General Administration has asked the Office of Instruction to assume responsibility for studying this problem and making recommendations to me about it. One of the results of the study will be a series of circulars from the Second Office on principles and techniques of administration. This first of these circulars will deal especially with the instruments provided by our Constitutions to make delegation work effectively.

14. It must be understood from the beginning that real delegation of authority is quite impossible without some means of assuring practical unity among all those who share in the direction of an establishment. If these means of arriving at practical unity of action do not exist or are not properly used, it is inevitable that those to whom authority is delegated will sooner or later act in ways contrary to the mind of the Superior, and the latter will feel himself obliged to “correct” the situation. Obviously, if he has not been using the means necessary to achieve unity of action, he will also lack the means of bringing about changes while still respecting the responsibility of his subordinates; and he has no recourse except direct personal intervention.

15. Once he thus reassumes directly a responsibility which he himself had delegated, it is quite certain that delegation is at an end. The subordinate is unwilling to accept further delegation if he thinks it has no real meaning, and even if he is given authority anyhow, he will hesitate to assert it.

16. Thus it is quite clear that some kind of continual contact between the ultimate Superior and the delegated one must be maintained to preserve unity of direction, yet this contact cannot be of such directness that it seems to render the delegation of authority an empty gesture or pretense.

17. The only way in which this can be done in an habitual and persevering way is by the effective use of executive councils. Our Constitutions provide for at least weekly or biweekly meetings of the Domestic Council (Art. 495) and for a weekly general meeting called the Conference on Order (Art. 500). Finally, they call for a personal interview at least once a month (Art. 66) with each member of the community, including, of course, those to whom authority has been delegated. These instruments with others that will be indicated are more than adequate to make an effective delegation of authority possible, but they must be used in a truly executive way if they are to serve their purpose. It is quite possible to have weekly meetings of the House Council which work quite conscientiously, but which are not executive at all. We will consider some of the qualities that would make a House Council a truly executive instrument.

18. Before proceeding to this task, it will be well to correlate this circular with Good Father Simler's "Instruction on the Councils of Particular Houses." That instruction is much more general in intent than the present one. It applies equally well to houses so small that the "Council" coincides with the "Conference on Order"—i.e., the whole community is in both! The present circular, however, refers directly to houses large and complex enough to make real delegation of authority a normal means of governing.

19. The greatest apparent difference is in the large place given to "current affairs" in Father Simler's Instruction and the small time allotted to "day-to-day administration" in this. As a matter of fact, Father Simler does not make a distinction between "Policy making" and "Day-to-Day administration," and a very large part of what he calls "current affairs" is actually in the broader realm of policies and purposes.

20. Where real differences do exist they are intended to reflect real advances in the techniques of administration since Father Simler's time, and real changes in the complexity of our work. No theories of administration can remain unchanged since the development of "scientific management."

21. Now for some of the characteristics of a truly executive Council in the 20th Century.

22. The House Council must be responsible. A House Council which is truly executive in character should contain no "honorary" members who are there only because of their age or their personal acceptability to the Director. Every member should be there because he carries a definite part of the responsibility of the house and he should contribute to the Council those things which are within his responsibility and competence. If the Superior General appoints other members (Art. 494) on the recommendation of the Provincial, their responsibilities should be clearly determined.

23. If the Council contains nonresponsible or "honorary" members, it is very easy for it to degenerate into general and scattered "remarks" without real responsibility. The single exception to this rule is that the official "Admonitor" of the community, who ordinarily should not be identified with the administration, may profitably assist at Council meetings as a special "nonadministrative" representative of the community; contributing the interests and attitudes of the community to the discussions, but without deliberative voice.

24. The division of responsibility represented by a truly executive composition should be complete; that is, every major aspect of the work of the institution should be clearly assigned to one or the other of the responsible members. In general, as few things as possible should be left to the direct responsibility of the President of the Council: everything in the ordinary conduct of the establishment's work should belong directly to some subordinate office before it can require his attention. The great exception to this rule is the one outlined in the Statute 9 of the last General Chapter—the personal welfare of the members who make up his community. This could refer not only to the religious aspect of their life, but also to their “personal problems” of their life, and to their “working conditions”—things which ordinarily do not clearly fall within only one of the three traditional offices. Thus, many questions of personal relations and personal formation could conceivably fall in both the first and second offices, and most “working conditions” which have strong personal repercussions could fall in both the second and third offices. This rather ambiguous situation of questions of personal necessities and well-being of the religious tends to bring about a certain neglect of such questions. Hence it is in place that the Director after having clearly assigned the work of the three Offices to his subordinates would retain personal control of these important but often forgotten matters. He must also necessarily retain a direct interest in the ultimate mission of the institution, which will always be religious and apostolic.

25. A truly responsible Council will not spend all its time in matters of immediate day-to-day administration. In fact, such day-to-day matters should form a very small part (not much more than 10 percent) of the time of the Council meeting. They should normally be taken care of in a routine manner by the various responsible offices outside the Council and they can be brought to the attention of the other responsible officers much better in written memoranda than in verbal “announcements” and “observations” which take up the important time of the meetings.

26. The major part of the meetings should deal with the principal purposes of the institution and the broad policies that realize these purposes; with a running criticism and analysis of the institution's effectiveness in one aspect after another of its operation; and with the administrative formation of the responsible members. This formation is given especially by presenting actual problems of the institution's operation to the responsible member of the Council in whose department they fall. The effort necessary to study and suggest solutions for these problems in the presence of the other responsible officers of the institution is intensely formative, since suggestions of the Director and the other officers come at a time when the responsible member is deeply and publicly concerned with the matters under his jurisdiction.

27. In the small part of the meeting which is devoted to immediate day-to-day administrative affairs, only certain items should be permitted; that is, such items as really interest the whole Council. All others, as mentioned above, are better handled within the responsible offices and communicated by memoranda or by notices on the bulletin board. These items which do interest the whole Council are the following:

(1) The working out of new programs which have not yet been given clear policies of operation. It will be noticed that this really amounts to a sort of empirical working out of policies for such programs.

(2) Matters which the responsible officer himself wishes to present for discussion since he does not see clearly enough according to established policies, he should simply make the decision without bothering the other officers and communicate the result by written memorandum to anyone who needs to know

it. Copies of these memoranda sent in a routine manner to the Director's office will keep him adequately informed of subordinate decisions and permit him to judge their adequacy.

(3) Matters in which the Director or another responsible member of the Council feels that a mistake is being made. Normally, no subordinate member will thus bring up in open meeting his criticisms of another member's conduct of his own office. Rather, he will follow the spirit of the Constitutions which indicate that such matters should be brought to the Director, and that the Director is the one who puts them on the agenda of the meeting and proposes them for discussion. Once the matter has thus been opened by the Director, the member of the Council who feels that a mistake is being made will evidently have his chance to state his views along with the views given by the others.

28. Once more, outside of these three kinds of matter, the day-to-day details of administration of the institution belong in the responsible offices, and not in the Council.

29. It is impossible to have a truly executive Council without a carefully prepared agenda set up by the Director and distributed to the Council members a considerable time in advance of the meeting itself. Only thus will each Council member who is directly responsible have a chance to prepare his stand on the items of the agenda, while the other members can prepare themselves, both to respect the responsibility of the office to which the affair belongs, and still to offer their serious counsel to the responsible member.

30. For a Council to be truly executive, it must be held regularly and at frequent intervals. In a large establishment a weekly Council meeting is constitutional and it should be placed as closely as possible to the beginning of the natural division of the week's work. It might well be held on Sunday afternoon or evening or sometime during the day of Monday.

31. A well-prepared Council which is truly executive should be able to accomplish its work within an hour, and might even take less. If it drags out, this will be because the Director does not hold discussion to the agenda, or because the members have not prepared their contribution. Until the Council is forged into a real "team," such dragging out may be necessary, for to stop inexperienced members from "rambling" might give them the impression that their contribution is not wanted or appreciated.

32. Normally, unanimity is arrived at in the discussion without a formal vote. A vote should be taken only when the Director himself thinks that the matter is of sufficient importance that he has to have a record of the Council's support (e.g., in obligatory matters of the Council according to the Constitutions), or when one or more members of the Council demand a vote after it becomes evident that the discussion is not producing the necessary unanimity. In these latter cases, once the vote is taken the dissenting members consider it an obligation to follow the will of the Council. If the Director himself thinks that the decision is a poor one, he should give his reasons and call for further consideration of the matter at the next meeting, or at a special meeting if the matter is urgent.

33. Although a vote may be a fairly unusual thing in the Council, it has great importance when it does occur, and the Council should be so constituted that a clear-cut decision always results; that is, there should be an even number of Councilors (usually divided evenly between priests and Brothers), with the Director forming an odd number. Thus when the mind of the Council is evenly divided, the Director's vote is decisive and the administration can act with the necessary unity. If the membership is even, the Director's vote counts as two.

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34. The Domestic Council, although it is the principal executive meeting, is by no means the only one. The next important instrument is the Conference on Order which forms a kind of legislative "assembly" to work side by side with the "senate" whose functions are performed by the Domestic Council. The Conference on Order is a weekly affair according to the Constitutions and it might well be held toward the middle of the week marked off by the Domestic Councils, for example on Thursday afternoon or evening. The conference, according to the Constitutions (Art. 502), can have several different modalities of meeting: the whole assembly, or various parallel specialized meetings. These specialized meetings can be differently divided according to different needs as the conference tackles problems of studies, discipline, extracurricular activities, civic formation of the students, spiritual formation, etc. The agenda is ordinarily largely determined by the previous meeting of the Council.

35. The principal point to keep in mind is the same one noted above for the Council; no matter how the community is divided for purposes of the conference, the division should always be a responsible one, and every member of the conference should be representing certain definite interests for which he is responsible.

36. Evidently there will be much more room for discussion and free exchange of ideas in the conference than in the Council, but the Director must see to it that the discussion keeps close to the agenda and that it moves forward fruitfully, without being monopolized by certain more extroverted members, or becoming a "free for all" of casual suggestions and remarks outside one's own responsibilities.

37. As much as possible, the Director should arrange for problems to be set forth in a preliminary exposition by a member of the community responsible for their solution, rather than monopolize the floor himself. The Director would tend to reserve for himself those matters noted above which deal directly with the personal welfare of the community and the overall mission of the Institution.

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38. A third constitutional instrument of executive direction of the community is often completely overlooked. The Chapter of Faults which at the present time, when it is not completely dead, is completely routinized around charity, silence, and regularity, might very well be closely linked with the work of the conference on order, somewhat on the pattern of the particular examen. The members of the community would be expected to limit themselves each week pretty much to those external faults that run counter to the collective decisions of the House Council and the Conference on Order. The Chapter of Faults is all the more adapted to this sort of service because it is specifically limited to external faults. It is to be noted that the first general and provincial chapter regulations conceived these bodies as "Chapter of Faults" in the field of administration.

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39. A final powerful executive instrument which is provided by the Constitutions is the monthly interview by the Director. It also should be consciously guided by the Director along the lines of the executive decisions taken in the Council and the Conference. Moreover, the weekly Spiritual Conference permits the Director to lay an adequate doctrinal basis for collaboration in the councils.

40. If the Director does not make use of these executive instruments to build a real practical unity in his community, he has only one recourse left to secure unity of direction and to correct the abuses which he encounters; and that is to enter directly into the operation of the subordinate offices, and to reverse the decisions of those whom he thinks to be mistaken. This always has disastrous results, for the Director must in these circumstances make rather hasty decisions without full study of the circumstances; and the subordinate who thus finds his authority invaded is always resentful and tempted to abandon further responsibility for his work. If, however, mistakes are corrected through the executive instruments outlined above, the subordinates feel that their authority has been respected and they are led to ever greater and greater responsibility for their work.

41. Division of authority (Responsibility) in a Marianist community ought to follow as closely as possible the division of the Three Offices. One such division which could be typical is as follows:

First Office:

- (a) Chaplain for the community;
- (b) Chaplain or spiritual director for the students

Second Office: Here are the two possibilities:

There might be:

- a) one man as head of all academic affairs, and
- b) another as head of all student services, such as discipline, organizations, sports, welfare, programs, etc.

A second possibility is to include these two aspects of student direction in a single office, and then to have

- a) one officer for superior education and
- b) another for primary and middle education. In larger establishments both primary and middle education might have its own head, but the two together would count for only one vote in the Council to preserve the balance.

The Third Office should ordinary contain

- a) a business or financial officer who handles all questions of finance, bookkeeping, buying and selling, etc. and
- b) an operations office who takes care of janitor service, maintenance, transportation, building utilization, etc.

This would give a Council of six members plus the Director, which is of manageable size and which covers the entire ground of the institution's operation. Normally, the two chaplains and the head of the superior education would be priests and the other three would be Brothers.

42. All the operations of the school, such as parent-teachers associations, fund-raising efforts, scholarship administration, laboratory and library equipment, testing program, etc., etc., should be assigned clearly to the officer most closely connected with them.

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43. To preserve lines of specialization in the Conference on Order, perhaps once a month the Conference on Order could unite the whole house in a single "Assembly" which deals with the most general problems and developments of the institution's life: broad questions of pedagogy, general policies of discipline, relations of the whole institution with the public, level of excellence at which the institution aims, etc. The other three meetings of the month could best be assigned to specialized "committees" which meet either at the same time or successively according to necessity. Examples of such groupings are as follows:

- 1) In each level of instruction (primary, middle, superior) the responsible head plus the professors and prefects could discuss problems affecting their section as a whole.
- 2) Another possibility would be to have all the professors meet together in one meeting, and all the prefects in a separate meeting, one to discuss studies, the other questions of discipline and student welfare.
- 3) Another possibility would be that the business and financial administrators could meet with all the heads of budgeted operations, such as the laboratory, library, fund-raising groups, audio-visual custodian, maintenance man, etc.
- 4) Another possibility is to divide all the professors into "departmental" meetings according to their specialties—language teachers, historians, science teachers, philosophy and religion, etc.
- 5) In addition to these groupings of routine functions of the institution there could also be volunteer groupings to discuss certain more specialized problems such as sodality, recruitment, parent-teacher relations, sports, etc.

44. All of these meetings would be careful to keep clear and usefully complete records of their proceedings and decisions; and these should gradually be codified into a unified statement of the school's purposes, policies, and methods, after being accepted formally by the Council.

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45. Once the responsibilities in a community have been distributed, a chart of organization should be drawn up showing the attributions in each office and the inter-relationships between offices. This chart of organization should be subject to constant revision as the discussions of the Council and the Conference bring weaknesses to light.

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46. A much more detailed description of the attributions of each office should be drawn up in at least a series of headings. These headings could be given decimal numbers so that they can be indefinitely amplified and extended. As policies are worked out together and decisions are made, these could be

entered into the index of organization under the proper heading so that the administration would have a cumulative record of all decisions, policies, and procedures.

47. Examples of these different administrative organs and aids will be appended to this study.

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48. It is important in any distribution of authority and closely integrated administration that all the members have a clear conception both of their attributions and of how their own authority and responsibility is circumscribed by the attributions of others. It is only too easy, when people have not been used to the distribution of responsibility, to encounter a kind of "dictatorship from below" when division of responsibility is first attempted. People who have not lived in the intimate interplay of influence of a good administration have the idea that all authority means nothing if it is not absolute. Thus they resist not only abusive interferences in their responsible field of action, but even the normal interplay of counsel by which alone a real social direction can be accomplished. Normally, these naïve and oversimplified theories of authority readily decrease with practical experience of governing collectively, but in those cases where such intransigent ideas of authority persist, there is no remedy except to substitute such people in government with others who have a more open mind. If they are allowed to continue in posts of responsibility, they cause such endless discussions over imagined "interference" that there really is no time left for real administration.

49. It must be recognized from the beginning that it is impossible to outline once for all the attributions of the various offices that must collaborate in administration. These attributions are constantly expanding as the administration gets a better grip on its job, and they are constantly changing with changing processes and circumstances. Hence some provision must be made for a continuing revision and codification of each office's attributions.

50. Moreover, it should be understood that a list of activities proper to a single office has for its object to allocate real responsibility to that office—it never can attempt to delineate an exclusive field of action. There will always be vital contacts and intermingling of action between related offices. What is important is that at all times those who are thus cooperating know where the real responsibility rests. People who are continually preoccupied with exclusivity of action at the expense of cooperation are not fit for office and should be replaced.

51. With these preliminary remarks, we might attempt to indicate how a description of the attributions of an office might look. This description might well follow certain general lines which would be the same for all offices, thus making possible an easy codification of activities and easy comparison between those of related offices. A ten-point list which covers the ground might be something like the following:

0 – Name of the office or function: this would contain such subdivisions as a description of the office, its purpose, the principles of its organization and administration, the plan of its internal organization and the codification of policies which affect its functioning. It might also include further subdivisions concerning the requirements and abilities of the officer and his immediate staff.

1 – The elaboration of policies and the development of the office.

2 – Evaluation of the effectiveness of operation.

3 – Records of the office and of its operation.

4 – Personnel formation and personnel management.

5 – Responsibilities shared with other offices; responsibilities exercised only in committees or councils.

6 – The ordinary and direct responsibilities of the office.

7 – Occasional or provisional responsibilities which may depend on purely personal qualities or on circumstances rather than on the office itself.

8 – Integration and coordination of subordinate units within the office.

9 – Supervision of the internal administration of well-defined subordinate offices. Each of these subordinate offices would then be divided according to the same ten points.

51. Evidently with this kind of division it would suffice to begin with the Director's office to work everything out, for all the other offices would be enumerated under point 9 of the Director's office, and themselves would be further subdivided according to the same plan.

52. For purposes of convenience, however, it is better to determine a certain number of highest executive positions ("policy making officers") which are given independent treatment. These major executive positions should completely cover the whole life of the institution, but should be kept to a small number, usually seven or less, which permits a real and effective executive council. One such division was suggested above on pages 11 and 12. This division could now be numbered as follows:

0 – The Institution itself.

1 – The Director.

2 – Chaplain of the community

3 – Chaplain or spiritual director of the students.

4 – Academic director. (To the public: "Principal of the school")

5 – Director of student services and discipline.

6 – Financial or business officer.

7 – Chief of maintenance and operations.

The first three of these officers could well be priests and the second three Brothers. Moreover, there are two possibilities for further delegation of power in very large institutions:

8 – The Academic office can be doubled when the institution comprises more than one clearly defined section, as, for example,

(1) elementary and

(2) secondary education, and

9 – A special office for public relations and fund raising.

53. Each of these offices would then be developed according to the ten points previously outlined. This would immediately give from 80 to 100 titles which would indicate rather clearly the work that would have to be done to distribute adequately the entire operation of the institution. Under each of the 10 titles referring to the division of each office or function, subordinate points might be developed which would further guide the analysis of the office and the assignment of responsibility. If all of these titles are worked together into a single list which could be numbered decimally so as to permit indefinite expansion, each institution could readily draw up over the course of the years a complete blueprint of its operations so that all changes of personnel could readily fit into the operation already established.

54. This ability to substitute frequently without disrupting the operation of the institution is very important and it is to be expected that there would be a continual movement in the assignment of officers to the various posts, not only because of normal changes in the community, but also because people who have shown executive ability will continually be moving up the ladder to higher responsibilities and those who show themselves unfit for executive responsibility will give place to others who will be given a chance to prove themselves.

55. Evidently, a distribution of power based on such a rational scheme would offer distinct advantages to younger people who would generally move upward through it to posts of local or even major Superiors, since all along the line they would be learning how to analyze and distribute power in a rational and orderly fashion.

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56. It is important in a really cooperative administration where authority is widely delegated that the theory of religious obedience should be realistic and clear. There exists in some Provinces a kind of “mystique” of obedience which has very curious results. The first principle of this rather poetic view of obedience is that the Superiors are always right and that their decisions are always perfect. Strangely enough, however, the people who maintain this always make an exception for whatever Superiors actually exist, and they are very bitter in their disappointment at the fact that the actual Superiors do not measure up to their theory. Where this attitude is widespread, there easily arises a spirit of passive criticism which makes no effort whatever to correct the difficulties which are the subjects of the complaints. It is fairly easy to see how this curious and completely passive criticism could arise if one believes that absolutely everything must be done by Superiors and that the present Superiors do not possess this normal omnipotence and infallibility.

57. Of course, the mistake is in the major premise— that Superiors are always completely capable and intelligent. As a matter of fact, they are just as human as anybody else and are subject to exactly the same human limitations. The so-called doctrine of blind obedience does not maintain that the orders of Superiors are always objectively the best—what it does maintain is that it is objectively better to follow them even when they seem to include, as they often do, rather obvious shortcomings. The spirit of faith does not need a supernatural infallibility and competence in Superiors. It is sufficient for it that God has

chosen to confide authority to the exercise of human instruments. The realistic view of faith is that if God has confided authority to men, then it is his evident will that from time to time some rather stupid orders should be obeyed, since there are very few human beings who escape stupidity for long periods of time, and they are not changed much by being placed in posts of authority.

58. What we must look for, then, in our Superiors is not omnipotence and infallibility, but rather prudence; and this prudence though it is evidently guided by divine prudence, is still essentially human and subject to human shortcomings.

59. The great truth about the value of obedience even in difficult circumstances is this: a well-disciplined and competent army can frequently win battles even though the general direction leaves something to be desired, but the greatest military genius of all times, even at its most brilliant moment, could win no battles without a competent and disciplined army. The great force of a social body is in its membership, not in its direction. It is true that when a competent and disciplined membership is also blessed with great leadership, extraordinary achievements can result, but these are rare and spectacular events in the long course of history, and truly great leaders are far apart.

60. We could go a little more deeply into the understanding of the mutual relations of authority and obedience, and we will see immediately why the above considerations are true.

61. By its very nature, authority is for the general good. Its field of action is a broad one and its competence lies in the ability to grasp and to manage general factors. On the other hand, obedience works in a much more limited and specialized field, and within this field can aspire to a technical competence which authority can never possess without abandoning its own proper mission. Thus, authority and obedience are always in partnership and there is real initiative and responsibility on both sides. It is to be expected that no general order can ever apply perfectly to all the different circumstances which it tries to cover—in this sense all human orders are more or less stupid. But this is no defect because the specialized competence of those who obey is able, from its much more exact understanding of particular circumstances, to apply the general order in a constructive way that makes it fruitful. People who profess to obey blindly and mechanically the orders that come from above are really not obedient, for obedience is always responsible. In fact, one of the cleverest ways of sabotaging authority is precisely to obey it in a blind and mechanical way without making any responsible application of the general order to the particular circumstances which lie within one's own field of competence. Thus in a very real sense, no command ever applies directly to circumstances. It reaches these circumstances in an intelligent manner only through the responsible collaboration of those who obey.

62. Many people fear that if they distribute responsibility and work regularly through their executive councils, they will lose direct control of the works of which they are in charge. Actually, quite the opposite is true. They soon discover that they are in control of the community in a much more profound and fruitful way than could ever have been possible while they were trying to carry the whole burden singlehandedly.

63. The fact is that their direct control is transferred from countless petty details of passing importance to the really great issues of administrative control: the purposes and policies of the institution, the broad lines of its development, a real grasp on the efficacy of its operation and the excellence of its product, determination of its place in the community which it serves, and last but not least, a decisive influence on the formation of all the members of the community, especially those who are more

capable. All these things which are of supreme importance are very easily lost sight of or left to chance or routine if the Director attempts to spread his attention immediately over the whole operation of his institution; yet it is precisely these important things which make up the very meaning of "direction" in its profoundest sense.

64. We might well consider for a moment the role of the Director as a former of men. The very complaints which we hear on all sides about lack of preparation for the exercise of authority are proof that our present methods of administration are not truly formative.

65. It should be immediately evident that an administration such as has been described in these pages would have a very great formative role on all the members of the Council, and through this formation of the principal officers of the community, a further formative role on all those who work under these chief officers. Moreover, the Director will have abundant time for arranging a really serious program of personal direction to complement the influence of the actual exercise of authority. This direction, closely linked to the function which each member exercises in the community and aimed at increasing his understanding and responsibility for his mission, will be much more effective than the more general and casual interviews which are at present the rule when the Director can find time for them.

66. The Director's greatest service to his collaborators in the community is to bring them to a consciousness of their own latent powers. The French philosopher, Lavelle, has well said that "The greatest good that we can do to others is not to communicate to them our own riches, but to lead them to discover their own." It is the business of the Director to awaken and to direct the energies of his collaborators in the common task.

67. To awaken a true collaboration in others is a much more difficult task than simply to give them orders; it always takes longer to lead one's collaborators to discover responsible solutions and work them out together than it does to impose an easy solution from on top. But it is much more fruitful to carry our responsibilities with our collaborators than to carry these same responsibilities for them, and the Director must always resist the temptation that he will get things done quicker and better if he does them himself.

68. It is true enough that a "strong" and authoritarian leader can produce external results that are sometimes surprising. What is not seen so readily is that he leaves in his wake a number of subordinates who have given up all idea of exercising a responsibility has been denied them.

69. Cardinal Suenens in his remarkable book *L'Eglise en état de mission* has a paragraph which expresses all this very well. "Of course, control is indispensable. Yet to control does not mean to restrain but rather to stimulate, to channel, to encourage. To control does not mean to substitute oneself for others; on the contrary, it is the art of not doing things oneself but of getting others to do them; of not eclipsing or extinguishing, but rather vivifying and enlarging the action of others. In order to have success in a common work, it is necessary that each one feel engaged, responsible, fully active, and giving a willing cooperation to the common task."

70. Such an administration as has been outlined above will accomplish these ends at the same time that it brings to the direction of the work itself the accumulated wisdom and skill of the whole community rather than the resources of a single man. A Director who can look back on such achievements will certainly feel that he has been more in control of his work than one who has frantically tried to carry the whole burden of an institution himself with his own limited resources.

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