

PRACTICAL MANUAL
FOR SUPERIORS

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Frigerio, S. J.



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PRACTICAL MANUAL
FOR THE SUPERIORS
OF RELIGIOUS HOUSES

BY
FATHER COSTANZO FRIGERIO, S.J.

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F. LOUGHNAN

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PREFACE TO THE ITALIAN EDITION

This little treatise is the fruit of a wide experience in the art of directing religious persons.

It treats frankly yet discreetly and with unction, of all that is most practical and most difficult in the government of communities of women. Its teachings are supported by the authority of the Saints and Masters of the Spiritual Life. The author has proposed to himself the work of forming a Superior who, by means of her own union with God, by the exemplary pursuit of her own perfection, by her

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zeal for the good of the religious over whom she rules, may gather together a store of practical wisdom from which she may help her subjects with sweetness and strength in the spiritual life, and make them love the holy yoke they bear. The means and obstacles herein enumerated form a luminous picture in which the Superior will find all she has to do and to avoid, in order to make herself worthy of the post she holds and rightly fulfil in the spiritual order, her office of mother. Therefore it would be well that this treatise were widely known. Its use, nevertheless, is to be reserved for Superiors alone, as its title indicates, and the matter of which it treats requires.

INTRODUCTION

Beloved Sisters in Jesus Christ.

Yielding to the requests made to me, I present you this little treatise in the hope that it may be useful to you in the delicate and difficult office you fill. In speaking to a community one constantly harps upon the same string, that of obedience to the Superior, or to any one holding authority from her. Prudence does not allow of advice to be publicly given to the one who governs the whole Community. And yet those who command might need admonition even more than their subjects, either be-

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cause though they have become Superiors they have not become impeccable, or because the task of making others rightly obey is harder than practising obedience oneself. The Superior holds the place of God in the community. She must rule the actions of the Sisters imparting to all a movement in conformity with the Spirit of the Institute. She is like the fly wheel of the machine: if it fails to move or if it is irregular, if it stops, the gravest consequences must necessarily follow. St. Vincent de Paul observes that it is a fact constantly proved by experience that the good state of a community as a general rule depends to a great extent upon the Superior. If among the

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Sisters things do not go right, if there is relaxation or disorder, the blame is generally and justly laid at the door of the guilty parties. But the cause of all these things is most often the Superior herself, who complains of them. She has not known how to govern either herself or others in the right way. Hers is a grave responsibility of which she will have to render a strict account at the judgment seat of God. The Holy Ghost declares: “. . . a most severe judgment shall be for them that bear rule.” (Wisd. vi. 6.)

It is therefore of the highest importance that while the subjects are urged to progress in spiritual fervor, the Superior, especially at the time of

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the Spiritual Exercises and at the monthly retreat, should reflect seriously upon the duties of her office, and set right all that may be amiss. The object of this little book is to be a kind of Vade Mecum to you to remind you of some of the more important practical rules. These rules are for the most part taken from the golden book, "On the conditions of a good Superior," by Fr. Nicholas Lancicius, a man no less remarkable for sanctity than for his wisdom and wide experience.

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus accompany this little work with the outpouring of His grace!

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CHAPTER I

THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

ST. IGNATIUS in his constitutions lays down as the first and most essential duty of a superior that he should be a man of prayer. In fact who does not know that of ourselves we can do nothing good. That we cannot even conceive a good thought available to salvation unless grace is poured out upon us from on high. Now the office of superior is

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above all things difficult and dangerous. What prudence and circumspection are necessary to him that commands, even in his mode of commanding. A false or thoughtless step is often enough to ruin a whole community. The subject is only responsible to God for not having obeyed, whereas the Superior is responsible not only for the order given, but for all the consequences that follow therefrom. She may fail either from excess or defect. She needs must turn to God, the Father of lights, beseeching Him to make known to her what is for His greater glory and for the good of souls. Without prayer she runs the risk of being guided by self-love or chance, or by obstinacy

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in her own ideas, to the detriment of herself and others. A blind man cannot guide others safely along a road full of pitfalls, at every step he will stumble and fall. Every Superior must carefully examine her conduct in this particular and ask herself: In what way have I hitherto governed the house, how have I given my orders? In things of importance have I begun by examining the matter before God recommending myself to Him, praying as the Church teaches me: "that I may see what I ought to do, and may be enabled to do what I see"? (Coll. Sunday within the Octave Epiphany.)

But this duty of commanding may be regarded as the least part of the

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Superior's office: if she confined herself to giving orders, and seeing that they were obeyed she would be fulfilling only one-half of her duties. Her chief duty is to direct souls that aim at perfection, to stimulate their goodwill, to smooth away difficulties, to be the comfort, support and guide of the chaste Spouses of Jesus confided to her by their Divine Spouse, that His loving designs in their regard may be accomplished. How can the Superior succeed in so delicate, and so difficult an undertaking all in the supernatural order, unless she herself is full of God and fervent in piety? No one can give what he has not got. She may speak of spiritual things but the words on her lips will be those of a foreign

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language. She may explain duties, but will not succeed in making them acceptable. The words will come from her lips, but the hearts of her hearers will remain untouched. There may be faults to correct, abuses to uproot, hindrances to remove, difficulties to overcome. Jesus Christ has warned us that without Him we can do nothing. (Jo. xv. 5.) You are instruments, therefore you must be united to the Divine Hand that makes use of you. Sometimes you labor to do much, and you succeed in doing but little, and why? Because the blessing of God is lacking. You would do all yourself, you neglect prayer and so the divine help fails you. Add to this the peril of dissipa-

tion, for the Superior has to attend to all sorts of varied works; the peril of agitation, of discouragement if resistance or contradictions are met with in those whose good is sought; and then say if a Superior does not need to be, above all things, a woman of prayer. St. Teresa writing to a Superior says: "The Lord has made me understand that you lack that which is the foundation of your office, namely piety, the spirit of prayer. Now when the foundation is taken away the whole building falls, because want of piety always brings disgust of the things of God, disturbance of soul, weariness of spirit, haughtiness of speech and a dry, severe and unquiet aspect. Hence you take no trouble to win

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souls, you have no carefulness of them, no courteous manners, no charity, no religious spirit, sometimes even hardly any common sense in your judgment of those subject to you!"

Pray then, pray much for yourself and also for your sisters. The Church obliges every Parish Priest to apply the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass every week for his parishioners. She thus teaches that the duty of the pastor is to pray for his flock. Your flock is the chosen portion of the fold of Christ, you are put in charge of the learest of His lambs. Once a week at least, offer Holy Communion for them, beseech the Divine Shepherd to keep them from the snares of the

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devil, to make them grow in virtue, to fill them with grace, to inflame them with His love, to make them holy. Prayer will be worth more than any sort of effort of your own. With prayer you will feel yourself strong with the strength of God: you will be able to say with St. Paul: "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 13.)

From all that has been said you will understand how great should be your fidelity and your earnestness in performing all your spiritual exercises. They are the great means of uniting yourself with God. Be most scrupulous in spending upon them all the time fixed by the rule, never exempt-

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ing yourself from them save for an urgent and unforeseen necessity. Let meditation hold the first place in these spiritual exercises. It has for you a special object, for in meditation Our Lord by His doctrine and example teaches you your duties, gives you His orders accompanying them with His graces. It will be as a fountain of running water in your soul pouring forth of its abundance and riches. Set great store also by the Examination of Conscience. If it is for all a most efficacious means of purifying the soul, for you it is still more indispensable, that by it you may know all your failings in your many duties, failings which may easily harm the entire community, so

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that you may repent of them and apply a fitting remedy to them. Let Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament be your secure refuge. Go often to Him, even were it only for a few minutes at a time. Tell Him all your troubles, unburden your heart with Him, speak to Him of each of your sisters, beg of Him the grace to love them much, especially to love those who may be tiresome to you. Say to Him with filial confidence: Oh, Jesus, beloved Spouse! Thou hast laid upon me the office of Superior, do not abandon me in this perilous charge but give me Thy good spirit, that it may be with me, that it may work with me and teach me what is acceptable in Thy Eyes.

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I acknowledge myself unworthy of the post I occupy, for I have neither the light, nor strength, nor virtue, nor the talents that are needed. But the less I can presume upon myself, the more I lean upon Thee and trust and confide in Thy help. Inspire me, enlighten and guide me! Give me profound humility, which will never allow me to despise any one of Thy Spouses; a zeal at once pure, serious, discreet in maintaining religious observance; but above all, give me tender charity, kindness of manner, sweetness in act and deed to draw all to Thee, and to give to all the spiritual and temporal help and relief they may need.

Do not part from Jesus without

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begging His blessing, and without praying to Our Blessed Lady, the Queen of Virgins, to shelter the whole house under her maternal mantle. What immense good will these visits to Jesus and Mary do to your soul!

CHAPTER II

GOOD EXAMPLE

AFTER the spirit of prayer comes the other duty of the Superior, of preceding all her sisters by good example. We read of Jesus Christ in the Gospel that "He began to do and to teach." He first set us, by His divine actions, the example to be imitated; and then left us His heavenly teaching. Thus after having washed the feet of His apostles at the Last Supper He said to them: "I have given you an example; that as I have done to you, so you do also." (Jo.

xiii. 15.) She who holds the place of Jesus and represents Him should do the same. In the first place impress deeply in your mind that by becoming the Superior you have in no wise ceased to be a religious; that is you are obliged to tend towards perfection by the various means which the rule prescribes. You are therefore no more dispensed from observance of the rules than any of the others. You might dispense yourself with impunity in the sight of men, but not legitimately in God's sight. It is a wise saying that a Superior before taking a dispensation for herself must have twice as much need of it as any of the other nuns. It would be strange indeed if she who is

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set apart for the maintenance of the rule in all its strictness, should be the one to transgress it. Rather should you, as far as possible, be the first at all the exercises in common; in the chapel, or the refectory or the recreation. Even should you be in the parlor, no one would be surprised or offended by your saying: "I must go, that is the bell calling me to join the community." St. Jane Frances de Chantal advised the Superiors in her order to clean and keep their cells in order themselves as long as their strength permitted. It would not be out of place if sometimes the Superior performed some humble and lowly office, either to give an example of humility, or to appreciate

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better the sacrifices made by those who daily fulfil these arduous duties. You are not a religious for yourself alone; the very fact of being the Superior obliges you to impress the religious spirit on others by your example. Remember that the sisters have lynx eyes to see all you do. Nothing escapes their observation. Your words, your behavior, your way of taking recreation, your manners, aspect and conduct. They pass in examination your clothing, your food, your room, your books, pictures and furniture. The minutest and most trifling things which would pass unnoticed in others are all noted in you. You are like a lighthouse from whose shining they all

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see and learn the duties they have to do, the road they have to follow. Example is worth a hundred times more than words: without it authority embitters souls besides losing its own strength and prestige.

In fact with what face can a Superior exhort her sisters to poverty if they see her over-solicitous that nothing should be wanting to her. How can she inculcate mortification if they see her given up to little pleasures and satisfactions. Can she enjoin silence, exactness, assiduity while she takes advantage of her position to live as she chooses, with pretexts ever ready to excuse her want of observance. Can she exact obedience while she strives to withdraw

herself from subjection to the Superiors above her, or makes them the subject of her criticisms? When she shows herself full of jealousy and self love to the extent of being angry when her subjects have recourse in all freedom to the greater Superiors; and would pry into their motives for so doing, and would even seek to know the contents of the letters addressed by them to the Superiors or by the Superiors to the sisters. St. Ignatius in his Constitutions does not permit the immediate superiors to read the letters addressed by their subjects to the greater Superiors, nor those received by the subjects from the Superiors. The opening and reading of such letters he holds

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cannot be done without committing a grave sin.

What can be thought of the Superior who should refuse, or show reluctance or displeasure in calling the extraordinary Confessor asked for, from among those set apart for the office. How can she be excused of disobedience to the grave laws on this subject, promulgated by the Sacred Congregation acting on the orders of the Supreme Pontiff? Of course if some grave difficulty were to arise on this point, her duty would be to lay the matter before the Ecclesiastical authorities, and abide by their decision. The same may be said of the Superior, who after the explicit and formal prohibitions by the Holy See

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of the practice of the manifestation of conscience to Superiors, should still exact it from her subjects, or should let it be seen that she is angry with those who do not spontaneously make this manifestation to her. With such examples as these the subjects might well be tempted to feel in their hearts, if not actually to say to such a Superior: "Physician, heal thyself."

She warmly recommends her subjects to act always in the spirit of faith, to see Jesus Himself in the person of the Superior. But if she does not show Him forth in herself, if indeed she shows herself as unlike to Him as possible, how will the poor subjects ever be able to behold Him

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in her? Jesus meek and humble of heart, she haughty and irritable. Jesus the Prince of Peace Who came to bring peace on earth, she impetuous, contentious, ruffled at very slightest contradiction. Jesus charitable with all, she full of partiality and favoritism. Jesus drawing all to Himself by His benignity and sweetness, she freezing all hearts like a biting wintry wind by her sharp and discourteous ways. Jesus who went about doing good, she so rigid in refusing even reasonable alleviations, regardless of the bodily weakness or spiritual infirmity that needs them. Jesus prodigal of love to sinners, she unable to compassionate her sisters. St. Paul said to

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the Corinthians: "Be ye imitators of me, as I am of Christ Jesus." Can you say these same words to your sisters? And yet this must be the result of the office you hold, and you will have to render an account of it to God. But take courage, God who has placed you in this office, will not fail to uphold you with graces in proportion. If there be any advantage in being a Superior, it consists solely in this, that you are placed in the happy necessity of being virtuous and holy. Be faithful in observance, and if need be, your community also will before long become observant.

CHAPTER III

VIGILANCE

THE third quality requiring in a Superior that she may satisfy the obligations inherent in her office is vigilance. If this is lacking, regular observance will soon disappear in the Community. Its spirit will be relaxed, and disorders will be introduced for which the Superior will be responsible both before God and man. The shepherd who does not watch over his flock runs the risk of seeing the sheep dispersed and fall into the jaws of the wolf. The pilot who in a

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stormy sea lets go his hold of the rudder, will soon find his ship hurled upon the rocks. The father who does not watch over the conduct of his children is responsible for their wrong doing. The captain who in war takes no thought of the movement of his soldiers is on his way to certain defeat. The story of the siege of Malta holds at least one memorable lesson. The brave Knights defending it had always victoriously repulsed the furious onslaughts of the Turks. It happened that one night the captain of the Castle of Sant 'Elmo overcome by fatigue fell asleep, his soldiers all following his example. The Turks perceiving this state of affairs,

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brought up their scaling ladders, took the citadel by assault and put all its valiant defenders to the sword. St. Peter exhorts us all to watch, for he says: "Our adversary the devil, goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Are religious houses free from his attacks? Far from it indeed. The evil one redoubles his snares against them, for to overcome a virgin consecrated to God, a Spouse of Christ, is to him so great a triumph that he never counts it to be too dearly bought. Whose duty is it but the Superior's, to watch that the door shall be always kept well barred against him? It behooves her to be as the Eye of God, sweet, calm, serene, full of meekness,

but never sleeping, constantly watching over all things and over each one to remove the occasions of sin or of relaxation, to foresee and prevent disorders, to know exactly all that is done in the community. Not seeing, or not taking the trouble to see, is to let all things go to ruin.

Vigilance involves reflection as to the way in which the rules are observed, specially those of silence and promptitude in obeying the various signals: the consideration also of what duties belong to the office assigned to each individual, not that the Superior should be imperious or too exacting, but in order that she may know how to regulate all, as regards both time and place in the most

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opportune way. Vigilance will discover to her any particular friendships or antipathies, which are to be got rid of at once with sweetness no less than with energy: also if there are any in sorrow or affliction that she may skilfully and tactfully learn the cause, open her heart and console the afflicted. If there are any whose health is beginning to suffer, that she may promptly supply the necessary remedies. If each sister is provided with all she needs in the matter of food, clothing and all that belongs to her work and instead of waiting always to be formally asked, providing all they require with maternal solicitude and affectionate forethought.

Vigilance must also be exercised

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over all dealings with people of the world, that they should be as rare and as brief as possible; that the Confessor should not be allowed to interfere in the temporal administration of the house or its internal affairs, which generally leads to great and many disagreeable complications; that no books or pamphlets unfit for religious persons be allowed into the convent, or works or even ecclesiastical persons infected with modernist notions. In the time of Jansenism various religious communities were ruined precisely by this means. The paper wrapping parcels from the outside may sometimes contain things disturbing to chastity of the imagination, and troubling to peace of mind.

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Good books themselves even though written by Saints are not good indiscriminately for all.

Then there is vigilance of the temporal administration, the careful preserving of the household effects, the cleanliness of the whole place, the service of the Church, the overlooking of the servants, in fact all that relates to the good management of the Community. How to succeed in all this? it is a work the very thought of which crushes you. But be not afraid: use the necessary means and you will succeed more easily than you can imagine.

The first means is suggested by St. Ignatius. In his rule for the Superiors of the Company of Jesus, he

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orders them besides the usual meditation, to make an hour of consideration upon their office and the mode of fulfilling it. I do not say that you are obliged to spend a whole hour in this consideration, at least a quarter of an hour would be enough. But never omit this quarter of an hour for any excuse no matter how occupied you may be. The best time for you might be immediately after breakfast. Retire to your own room and there after having devoutly recommended yourself to God, go over the names of each of the sisters, reflect for a space on each one, upon their various offices, then upon the affairs you have that day to attend to. To help your memory, keep a little book in which

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write down simply what has to be done each day. It is incredible of what use this will be for the regularity of all that has to be done, as well as what a saving of time.

The other means is not to overload yourself with obligations which would prevent your attending as you should to your charge of Superior, which is of more importance, and upon which the good order and working of the community depend. Do not let yourself be deceived by the notion of your Sisters' incapacity; rather as St. Ignatius advises: leave a certain liberty of action to each one in her own employment. Your direction added to their own personal experience will contribute to fit them

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for their duties. You have to instruct, to regulate, to make yourself acquainted with all, but not to do all yourself. The head must not do what the hands do: it orders while the hands work. This rule is of the greatest importance, to be specially maintained in regard to the temporal administration, which requires much time and thought. All the more because should one of the sisters make a mistake you can correct or repair the mistake, whereas if you make a mistake yourself you will give occasion for criticisms and grumbling, and your authority will be diminished. The same may be said of intercourse with seculars. St. Francis de Sales asks what part may a Supe-

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rior give to seculars? And he answers: "It must be only the twelfth part, the other eleven parts must remain to be employed in the house." When necessity or charity require the Superior to speak with seculars she must not fail to do so, but beyond this, she must be as brief as possible with them. Her subjects will thus have no cause to complain of never finding the Superior, or for thinking she has not a thought to bestow on her sisters, nor with such pretexts will they be able to excuse their infractions of the rule, or for giving and taking things from outsiders without leave.

The room of the Superior should be always accessible to all her subjects, that she may there and at all

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hours lovingly welcome them, and without showing any sign of hurry, listen to their doubts, smooth their difficulties, console them in their afflictions, sympathize with them in their weaknesses, encourage them in the practice of virtue, in a word fulfil the office of mother towards them. St. Francis de Sales proposes to superiors the example of the mother hen which never scolds nor is angry with her chickens, when they run in troops to crouch under her wings, but on the contrary spreads them out as widely as she can to shelter them all, and then lovingly and patiently keeps them all covered and in safety.

CHAPTER IV

PRUDENCE

LET prudence stand as a wise counsellor beside vigilance. St. Augustine says that Prudence is to be preferred in a Superior even to sanctity, for he says a saint is only a saint for his own sake, whereas a prudent Superior is for the welfare and advantage of others. Prudence will teach in the first place to distinguish vigilance which is a virtue, from anxiety which is a weakness. Be attentive and vigilant, but do not imitate those timid, inquisitorial, sus-

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picious Superiors who take umbrage at everything, who even set people to overlook and spy, and report all the proceedings of the sisters, as if they were so many convicts in a prison. Such doings bring discord into communities, and easily become the cause of divisions, aversions and animosities. The virtue of prudence distinguishes, in the rule, the spirit which vivifies from the letter which kills. It can pass over what cannot be corrected, it does not lay too much stress on trifles, it moderates indiscreet zeal and indicates how things should be done, perhaps not in the way that in the abstract might be the best, but in the way that is possible, because sometimes while striving uselessly for

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the best, one misses what is good. It is an excellent thing for you to aim high in the pursuit of perfection for yourself, but it may not always be wise to aim imprudently high in the direction of others. The saints were ever strict with themselves and indulgent with others. From their teaching and example you may learn the following rules of prudence:

Study the character, inclinations and abilities in the distribution of offices, so that you may know how much labor can be easily borne, how much would overtax the strength both physical and moral. So arrange things that no sister is oppressed with fatigue, but has plenty of time to attend in peace to her spiritual exercises, to

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take the needful rest and recreation, that she may preserve health and strength to the glory of God. Show esteem for the sisters, find excuses for their failings, praise the good they do. Do not expect that to be accomplished in one day which would take months or even years to do. St. Francis de Sales used to say with a smile, that he was all powerful, because on the one hand he only willed that which the Lord willed, and on the other he never required from men more than their weakness would allow them to do. Be on your guard against tale bearers, listen to them coldly and before believing them, sift the matter yourself, examining without prejudice what you have been

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told. It often happens that not more than half of the half is to be believed. Never act with precipitation and at a venture when you are agitated, nor allow yourself when angry to give any order, nor begin a discussion with angry looks and words: all these things excite contempt, lessen authority and greatly alienate affection from the Superior. St. Francis de Sales used to say: "We have made an inviolable compact, my tongue and I, pledging each other our word upon it, that as long as my heart is disturbed, my tongue is not to utter a word, and when my heart feels no longer any movement of anger then my tongue can say all it chooses." Always keep secret everything that has

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been confided to you, either of the faults of the Sisters, or their family affairs, or of the letters they send or receive, or in fact everything that might cause pain were it to be known. Trust not too much in your own judgment, but willingly ask the opinion of others especially of the counselors, or the most perfect, and adopt their advice when possible. This will prevent grumbling and will ensure more willing acceptance of your orders. In things of greater importance, consult your immediate superiors so as to strengthen yourself by their authority. Do not easily make changes, or introduce new customs out of your own head. When you have taken a determination carry it

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out firmly, without letting yourself be drawn aside from it or be influenced by any human respect. Be not cast down by contradictions or adversities, knowing that these are the ordinary marks of the works of God; neither lose courage or patience if you do not succeed in pleasing every one. According to the maxim of St. Ignatius, work as though all depended on you, and trust in God as though all depended on Him.

Another duty of the Superior which requires the greatest prudence is that of correction. The Venerable Lancicius lays down the following rules: Never condemn any one unheard. Do not reprove too often nor for trifles; never when in a state of agi-

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tation or anger. Choose the most favorable moment for correction, giving the one who has committed a fault time to enter into herself and to regain her composure. Never give penances at supper, which might prevent quiet sleep, or disturb the joy of the preparation for Communion. If the sister to be punished is not well, wait till her health is quite restored before inflicting the penance. When correcting, take into consideration the age, character and office of the person to be corrected. Carefully avoid every bitter or imperious word: this also applies when you have to deal with the tempted or the scrupulous. After the correction has been made, show clearly you have no ill

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feeling towards the person admonished: when you take leave of her do so with the utmost cordiality. Let it be seen that you feel regret that, as a conscientious duty, you are obliged to inflict a penance. Use the greatest kindness to the one who acknowledges her fault. Never show that you remember a fault when it has been followed by amendment. Never speak to others about the correction you have thought right to make. Put yourself in the place of the culprit and say to yourself: If I had her disposition and were in her actual circumstances, how reasonably should I not wish to be treated? This is nothing but the practical application of Our Lord's admonition: "All

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things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you; do you also to them." (Mat. vii. 12.)

CHAPTER V

CHARITY

CHARITY is the principal point of good government: therefore the virtue of all others which a good Superior should aim at practising. Without charity the rest vacillates, loses all efficacy, reaches no good results. You are convinced, no doubt, of the general reasons of the excellence, necessity and advantages of this queen of virtues, now consider attentively the special reasons you have as a Superior, for its practice.

The first is the very name of

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Mother given to you. You have succeeded to the office of the earthly mother whom your daughters have left for the sake of Christ, believing they would find a second mother in you. There is only this difference between the love of a mother according to the flesh which is a natural love, and the love of a mother according to the spirit which is inspired by divine grace. This spiritual love therefore ought to be not only greater but more perfect than the natural love, inasmuch as grace is more perfect than nature. It is therefore your essential duty: your conscience must not be satisfied with having less tenderness and solicitude for your sisters, what-

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ever their personal qualities, than their earthly mother would have. Secondly, the quality of your daughters. They were not born slaves; of their own free will and choice they have put you in the place of their own mother. They are the beloved daughters of God, Who is a God of infinite goodness and mercy. They are the most precious portion of the flock of Christ, He has made them His Spouses. If you had charge of the daughter of some great monarch destined one day to mount the throne; with what solicitude and respect, with what consideration would you not treat her! Revive your faith and know that your Sisters are even more worthy of consideration than any

King's daughter. Thirdly, the post you occupy. If Christ has given charity as a sure mark of His disciples, with what perfection should she practise charity who by her office represents Christ and holds His place? If you fail in charity can you expect to hear from His lips any words but these: "Amen I say to you, I know you not"? I know you not for my representative, for you have not even the character of my disciples. Your lamp is unprovided with the oil of charity, you can only be numbered among the foolish virgins. Fourthly, Jesus declares in the Gospel that His yoke is sweet and that His burden is light. It is for you Superiors to make it so. Woe to

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you if by failing in charity you make that yoke hard and unsupportable which, according to His Divine promise should be easy and light to bear. You would wound Jesus in the apple of His Eye grieving Him in what He holds most dear. Fifthly, the judgment with which you will be judged and which will turn specially on the charity you have extended to others, as you learn from the Gospel. Our Lord in describing His judgment of us speaks only about the acts of mercy done towards our neighbor. Who is more nearly neighbor to you than your sisters? It is written by the Finger of God that the judgment of those who show no mercy will also be without mercy, a thought which ought to

make us tremble! Sixth, the merits you will gain in the perfect practice of charity, for that requires no less than a complete mastery of self, and a constant victory over your passions. It is quite easy to be carried away by impetuosity, to listen to self love always impatient of the smallest contradictions: these are arts easily learned without a master. The school of Jesus Christ is quite the opposite; "Learn of Me," He says, "because I am meek and humble of heart." Meekness and humility are the flowers from which ripen the fruit of Divine Charity. Seventhly, it is the surest way to make yourself obeyed with alacrity and pleasure. Nothing resists a meek and humble

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soul, whereas nothing good is to be gained by an imperious and angry spirit. It is true you may be obeyed, but it will be grudgingly. A thousand difficulties will be found in all your orders, a thousand excuses to avoid carrying them out. No matter what efforts each one makes to overcome herself, she will feel weariness and sadness and will long for the time when the Superior is to be changed. What is done unwillingly is not worth anything. He who works from fear does all lazily and carelessly, and fails not to shake off the yoke on the first opportunity. Those on the contrary who rule by love, sweetness and kindness are loved and desired by all;

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every one carefully avoids giving them the least displeasure. In one of his sermons St. Bernard says that it is impossible to rule well unless sweetness is the principle and rule of government. He uses a most expressive mode of conveying this truth to the minds of his hearers, when he says: "As it is impossible to please God without faith, so it is impossible to please men without sweetness." And he quotes his own experience. As a young abbot his burning and fervent zeal inclined him overmuch to the side of rigor, so that he was feared by all and avoided by the greater number. As soon as he became aware of this he humbly begged pardon, changed his severe ways and

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making use of fatherly kindness, so straightly bound to himself the hearts of his monks that he governed seven hundred with the greatest ease and success. Besides common sense alone would prove the same. Ask who you will which he prefers, sweetness or rigor, he will unhesitatingly reply that all will follow after sweetness and turn their backs upon severity. The greatest difficulty which arises in this regulating of yourself by loving kindness is when there are obstinate, frivolous, fiery or hysterical people in the house, who seem to take advantage of your goodness to become more insolent and troublesome. Well, reflect that the Lord has confided them to you to make them bet-

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ter. Remember the loving kindness of Jesus towards the Samaritan woman. Consider too if a lamb falls down and breaks a leg, the shepherd does not beat the poor beast and proceed to break its other legs. On the contrary, he comforts and lifts it up, pouring balm into the wound. He binds it up skilfully and does all he can to soothe the pain of the wound. Do you imagine you are doing a pleasing service to God when you treat with harshness His little lamb, which by reason of His trust in you, He has given into your charge to guide and keep? The erring can be brought back to repentance by a kind rule: they will never enter into themselves if the Superior is harsh or bit-

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ter. A good Superior should be animated with the spirit of Christ. He appeared to love sinners even more than the good, saying He had not come for those in health but for the sick, and that the angel of God would rejoice in heaven over one sinner doing penance. "For my part," declares St. Francis de Sales, "I prefer to compassionate the infirmities of others than to offend against charity and patience by over much zeal." And writing to a Superior he says: "Be very tender towards the imperfect, for even a sinful soul can reach perfect sanctity if it is kindly helped. Now it is your business to help the imperfect. The Superior is not so much for the strong as for the weak."

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Even should you not succeed in curing the faulty soul, what a consolation it will be for you if you can truly say: I have done what the Lord commanded, what He Himself did to the Samaritan woman. I have behaved throughout as a good and loving mother.

The Venerable Lancelius puts before you two mirrors in which you can see in practice the two different modes of governing. First mirror, the harsh and rigorous mode: Carefulness in making your authority felt, rather than in making it sweet and moderate. Dryness and sharpness in words, using despotic terms such as: I command you, I will have it so, make no answer, it is enough that

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such is my will. Answering sharply without taking time to consider, cutting short the speaker before half has been said, refusing to hear any reasons. Acting in a dry and decided way, with a serious air or with overstrained politeness indicating a lack of sincerity. Acting with partiality, refusing to some what you grant to others, granting requests with a bad grace thus rendering even benefits painful and oppressive. Making a mystery of everything, keeping secret things which it would be pleasant to know and which could well be told, taking no part in those cheerful and innocent conversations which rejoice the mind and maintain charity. Unbending in the matter of reasonable

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requests, treating as mere fancy or foolish touchiness the ills confided to you. Even should the thing be only fancy, is that not often in itself an illness? Taking no thought or notice when told that a sister is tired or sad. To be unwilling to call in the Doctor, or to give the medicines he orders. To count every mouthful that is eaten, complaining of having to spend too much. All these things are contrary to confidence in God and to charity. They are more than sufficient to alienate the affections of your subjects and to give them cause to consider you miserly. To let a whole day go by without once or even several times going to visit the sick. The Superior ought to be persuaded

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that no visit is as valuable to the sick as hers. Nor is it enough to say that the infirmarian does the needful in caring for the sick and that you have so much other business on hand. This is the first and weightiest of your duties. A mother would not act so with her sick child. One of the most frequent temptations which embitters the religious life is precisely dislike of the Superior. A government such as this would only add fuel to the flame. An uncivil act is often enough to inflict a wound so deep on the heart that it can be healed by nothing short of a miracle.

The second mirror shows the other side of the picture and contains all the marks of a government according

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to God. In all the orders given and dispositions taken let your authority be as little felt as possible. Behave in such a way to all by sharing in the consolations and afflictions of your sisters, that each may feel she is singly and sincerely loved and esteemed. Keep your countenance always calm, open and smiling that you may approach all hearts as an angel of peace. Be therefore the first to greet your sisters with gentle courtesy. If one of the sisters works at a distance, make some excuse to visit her often, ask after her health, if she needs anything, how she likes her work. Show esteem and kindness towards her, no matter how disagreeable may be her character. Encourage all, sustaining

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them and relieving them, and never asking from them more than they can do. Listen willingly to excuses, and yield easily to just reasons. Spare your sisters all the troubles you can, and sweeten those which cannot be avoided. Even when these troubles are imaginary or exaggerated, relieve them as much as possible and grant even more than is strictly needed. According to St. Francis de Sales, it is better to be deceived in doing good, than to sadden and mortify any one for fear of being deceived. Even should the person abuse your kindness, it is quite possible she might do a thousand times worse if she were harshly treated. Grant all that does not wound your

conscience or disturb religious discipline. When granting any request do so willingly and graciously. If, as sometimes happens, you are obliged to refuse a request, do so in such a way that the sister may see how sorry you are that you cannot grant what she asks, and while encouraging her to be patient, express your willingness to comply with her wishes on some other occasion. Have a mother's heart for your sisters, by being tender and expansive. Be always kind in compassionating them, generous in giving them little favors and surprises, and in procuring for them suitable rest and relaxation. Win their confidence by kindly and affable ways, be gentle and patient in wel-

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coming and listening to all, in spite of the weariness some might cause. In fact make yourself all things to all men in the Lord, without any differences or favoritism. Be specially and tenderly charitable towards the sick and take an affectionate care of the lay sisters, who are also tenderly beloved spouses of Jesus. See that they have plenty of time for their spiritual exercises, and are instructed in Christian doctrine and the obligations of their vows. See to it that their work is never overburdensome to them. Always assist at the recreations, so that they may be spent religiously and in such a way as to be a true relaxation, as well as an exercise of fraternal charity. St. Teresa hear-

ing that a certain Superior caused the recreations to be spent in great seriousness, thus admonished her: "Are we women not foolish enough by nature, but we must become foolish also by grace?" During recreation she herself would always laugh heartily and take part in innocent amusements, even when she felt least inclined to and was most oppressed with anxious cares. Never put economy in the first place, nor be hard in money dealing with shop-keepers and workmen. The expenses for the church and charity to the poor must be first and amply provided for, and the food of the community must always be of good quality, wholesome and abundant. To sum up all in one word:

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Keep the most tender, loving, sweet and generous Heart of Jesus ever before your eyes as a model to be faithfully and lovingly copied.

CHAPTER VI

FIRMNESS

IT by no means follows from all that has been said, that your indulgent toleration is to be blind and pusillanimous. When it is a question involving the glory of God and the good order of the house then indeed you must arm yourself with holy daring, advising, correcting, punishing and by all the means in your power opposing yourself resolutely to all scandal or disorder. If from human respect or timidity you let things slide, universal disorder will follow.

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Will you not be responsible for this universal disorder which you might and ought to have prevented? Our loving Saviour tells us in the Gospel; "I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd giveth His life for His sheep, but the hireling flieth when he seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep." Upon these words St. Augustine says that "he that flieth and abandoneth the sheep in danger is not the only hireling; he also is a hireling, who from human motives, from a coward fear of exposing himself to the annoyances and persecutions of the wicked is silent when his conscience and the good of souls would oblige him to speak. Thou with thy silence," says the holy

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Doctor, "didst fly, cowardice of soul was thy flight. In body thou wert present, but in soul thou didst fly." And St. Ephrem declares: "The negligence of pastors is the joy of the wolves."

If by reason of your slackness the rule is violated with impunity, the practice of poverty is lessened, silence is constantly broken, the parlor becomes a general meeting place, cliques and parties are formed; who is to give an account of all this to God if not you who are set apart for the very purpose of maintaining regular observance and promoting fervor? Your Sisters have defects, which is not so very surprising. If they are

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not perfect, they are nevertheless bound to tend towards perfection, and it is your business to help them to eradicate all that prevents their aiming at perfection. The soft, nerveless Superior runs the risk of spoiling everything. The good spirit once lost in a community, what efforts will not be required before it can be brought back to fervor. You will soon find yourself in a hornet's nest, for it is foolish to imagine you can make yourself loved by a good nature which allows and endures everything. Rather you will be despised, and all esteem for you will be lost.

Be courteous and pleasant to all, but at the same time know how to be

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respected and obeyed. Combine sweetness with firmness. St. Teresa had made her convents into a training ground for the most heroic virtues, and all ran with a marvellous generosity in the way of perfection, needing a curb to restrain them rather than a spur to urge them on. Yet she obtained all by means of love. True sweetness does not consist in glossing over defects but rather in striving untiringly to correct them. What mistaken zeal would attempt to do by threats and harshness, true charity does with ease by sweetness and kindness. Such is the way, then, to make your rule efficaciously sweet and sweetly efficacious. Many and grave are your duties, O Superiors!

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But think that the crown also will be great which by the faithful doing of them you will acquire in heaven.

THE END

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