

SUPERVISION OF YOUNG MEN
ACCORDING TO PRINCIPLES FOUND IN
THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

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By

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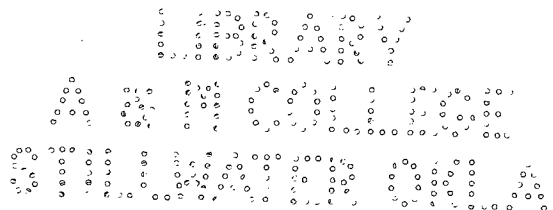
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INTRODUCTION

When St. Benedict wrote his Rule about the year 529 A.D., he very probably had no intention of writing for a group destined to conduct schools for young men. His purpose was rather to formulate a code that was to serve as a guide for those, both young and old, who desired to live as good Christians under the obedience of a superior. This objective he states quite plainly in the prologue as follows:

"We are therefore about to found a school of the Lord's service, in which we hope to introduce nothing harsh or burdensome. But even if to correct vices or to preserve charity, sound reason dictateth anything that turneth out somewhat stringent, do not at once fly in dismay from the way of salvation, the beginning of which cannot but be narrow. But as we advance in the religious life and faith, we shall run the way of God's commandments with expanded hearts and unspeakable sweetness of love; so that never departing from his guidance and persevering in the monastery in his doctrine till death, we may by patience share in the sufferings of Christ, and be found worthy to be coheirs with him of His kingdom."¹

St. Benedict's purpose in writing the Rule, therefore, is very clear. He intended it for those willing to live a simple Christian life according to the teachings of the Gospels. According to Abbot Butler,

... "the monk's object is to sanctify his soul and serve God by leading a life in community in accordance with the Gospel counsels. Works of various kinds will be given him to do; but these are secondary, and no one of them is part of his essential vocation as a monk. What has been said here may be illustrated and enforced from the earlier pages of Cardinal Gasquet's 'Sketch of Monastic History'. The monastic life, he says, 'is nothing more than the Christian life of the Gospel coun-

¹Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue (Atchison, 1923), p. 7

sels conceived in its full simplicity and perfection. It has no determinate object in view beyond this; it has no special systems or methods.' A little further on he says: 'It is merely a systematised form of a life according to the Gospel counsels, existing for its own sake, as a full expression of the Church's true and perfect life.'²

In another place Abbot Butler summarizes the entire idea of Benedictine monasticism quite accurately as follows:

"St. Benedict's idea was to form a community of monks bound to live together until death, under rule, in common life, in the monastery of their profession, as a religious family, leading a life not of marked austerity but devoted to the service of God - 'the holy service they have professed,' he calls it; the service consisting in the community act of the celebration of the divine office, and in the discipline of a life of ordered manual work and religious reading, according to the Rule and under the obedience of the Abbot."³

It is quite certain, therefore, that St. Benedict did not intend his code for men whose work would be educational, for, according to commentators, he most likely did not visualize his disciples in that role. Since that is the case, how can we expect to find in the Rule principles of supervision useful for present-day supervisors in our Benedictine schools? To answer that question, we ought to know what type of common life and what kinds of men made up the early Benedictine community with which the author of the Rule was familiar and over which he ruled as Abbot.

Abbot Butler describes the group well:

² Cuthbert Butler, "Benedictine Monachism," (London, 1919), p. 29

³ Ibid., p. 33

"A simple life it was, made up of a round of simple duties; and the monks were quite simple men; though no doubt some were of the same station in life as St. Benedict himself, the great majority of them were recruited from the Italian peasantry, or from the semi-barbarous Gothic invaders. They were not priests, they were not clerics; there were only two or three priests, perhaps only one, in the community, just sufficient to celebrate Sunday Mass and administer the sacraments. The general conditions of life were probably not rougher or harder than would have been the lot of most of them had they remained in the world. The difference lay in the element of religion brought into every detail of their lives. And so they lived together their common life, serving God by the daily round of duties in choir, in farm and garden, in kitchen and bakehouse and workshop - chanting, praying, reading, meditating - their life-work and life-interests concentrated as far as possible within the precincts of the monastery or its immediate vicinity."⁴

A little further on he continues:

"And this was the community, and these the men, destined by God to play so great a part in repairing the ruin, religious, social, material, in which Europe was lying, and in converting, christianizing, and educating the new nations that were to make the new Christian Commonwealth."⁵

It will hardly be doubted that for the orderly conduct of such a community, a great amount of supervision was necessary. One could not expect harmony and good order in such a group of diverse characters without prudent direction of their activities and lives by a wise superior. What is known about St. Benedict and his community leads one to believe that he was such a superior. He had a keen insight into human nature, showed a kind and sympathetic attitude towards all, and possessed a genuine and deep interest in each and every member of his monastery. He governed his community well and

⁴Butler, op. cit., p. 32

⁵Ibid., p. 33

demonstrated that he was more than just an ordinary supervisor of men.

The writer's purpose is to examine the Rule of St. Benedict with a view to finding in it general principles of supervision. These will be discussed briefly in the light of their applicability to the supervision of young men in our Benedictine boarding schools of today. By supervision here will be understood that type of control of conduct that will not only promote orderly and successful functioning of the school, but which will also develop in the individual right ideals of conduct and proper self-control for the future.

As was observed earlier, St. Benedict very probably did not visualize his monks of the future in the role of supervisors in schools conducted by them. How, then, could he lay down in his Rule principles of supervision to guide them in their work? To answer that question, we need only bear in mind that St. Benedict's problem was very much the same as that of a modern supervisor of young men. He had to deal with human nature represented by a variety of characters. The supervisor today faces basically the same problem. He, too, is confronted by human nature with its many and varied individual differences. Since human nature does not change substantially, the principles employed by St. Benedict should be applicable also today. To what extent these principles agree with modern educational thought will be pointed out in the course of this paper.

The writer cherishes the hope that the discussion of

these principles of supervision might be helpful to supervisors of young men, especially those engaged in our Benedictine boarding schools. As Benedictines it should be their ambition to supervise according to the spirit of their holy Founder and Father, St. Benedict.

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CHAPTER I

"How Great a Burden He Hath Taken upon Himself"

(Rule, Chapter 2)

In the second chapter of the Rule, St. Benedict discusses the qualities the Abbot ought to have, and what his attitude towards his office should be. He seems to treat the subject early in order to remind the superior of the grave responsibility he assumes when he becomes head of the monastic family. Repeatedly emphasizing the seriousness of that position, St. Benedict tries to remove all danger of levity regarding the burden the Abbot takes upon himself.

The supervisor of young men will do well to read the instructions St. Benedict gives the Abbot, for he ought to adopt the same attitude towards his work that St. Benedict requires of the monastic superior. If he does not take his work seriously, he probably does not fully appreciate his great responsibility as guide of the young men placed under his supervision. If he lacks ambition and enthusiasm, he very likely has not developed the right attitude towards his work.

"Let the Abbot always bear in mind", writes St. Benedict, "that he must give an account in the dread judgment of God of his own teaching and the obedience of his disciples. And let the Abbot know that whatever lack of profit the master of the house shall find in his sheep, will be laid to the blame of the shepherd. On the other hand he will be held blameless, if he gave all a shepherd's care to his restless and unruly flock, and took all pains to correct their corrupt manners; so that their shepherd, acquitted at the Lord's judgment seat, may say to the Lord with the Prophet: 'I have not hid thy justice within my heart. I have declared thy truth and thy salvation.'

And let him understand what a difficult and arduous task he assumeth in governing souls and accomodating himself to a variety of characters."¹

We notice in the foregoing how serious St. Benedict is about his instructions to the Abbot. He reminds him of the great difficulty of his work, and he calls upon the highest motive possible, namely, the strict account he will have to render to God Himself. Although the supervisor is not directly responsible for the souls of his subjects in the same way as is the Abbot, nevertheless his influence is greater than he may realize. He will have much to do with shaping their characters and influencing the attitudes they will form.

A little later in the same chapter the author of the Rule continues on the same subject as follows:

"Above all things, that the Abbot may not neglect or undervalue the welfare of the souls entrusted to him, let him not have too great a concern about fleeting, earthly, perishable things; but let him always consider that he hath undertaken the government of souls, of which he must give an account."²

And at the end of the chapter he continues:

"And let him know that he who undertaketh the government of souls must prepare himself to give an account for them; and whatever number of brethren he hath under his charge, let him be sure that on judgment day he will, without doubt, have to give an account to the Lord for all these souls, in addition to that of his own."³

It seems that St. Benedict does not mind repeating himself regarding the great responsibility that the office of Abbot carries with it. Several times he reverts to the strict

¹Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 2, (Atchison, 1923) p. 12

²Ibid. p. 17

³Ibid. p. 18

account he must render to God for the kind of care he gave his monks. He refers to the Abbot as a shepherd who must diligently watch over a "restless and unruly flock". The supervisor of young men may well ponder the same admonition. He, too, must diligently watch over his charges, and he, just as the Abbot, must one day give an account of his influence over his youthful subjects. Unfortunately, we sometimes find supervisors who have an attitude of extreme indifference and carelessness towards their work. They apparently fail to appreciate the great dignity of their position and the serious responsibility that goes with it.

In the public school systems the principal usually takes the responsibility for much of the discipline of the school. Referring to the importance of that office, Douglass says the following:

"It seems most probable that the high-school principalship of the near future, along with the school superintendency, will constitute a calling which will be truly professional, requiring not only distinctly superior mental and personal characteristics, but continued technical and professional training, and affording responsibility and prestige on a par with that of medicine, law and architecture."⁴

Speaking about assistant superintendents and supervisors, Cubberley also stresses the great importance of that work as follows:

"The importance of proper selection for such positions can hardly be overestimated, and is seldom appreciated by boards of education. The individual equation is a very

⁴Douglass, Harl R., "Organization and Administration of Secondary Schools", Ginn and Company, p. 548

important element. Men or women who will not cooperate, who lack personality and enthusiasm, who cannot bear responsibility easy and well, or who do not have broad views as to educational purposes and processes, should neither be selected or retained in such positions."⁵

And again:

"We are not likely to overestimate the importance of the school principal. As the superintendent of schools gives tone and character to the whole school system, so the school principal gives tone and character to the school under his control. 'As is the principal, so is the school', is perhaps a truer statement than the similar one referring to the teacher."⁶

In these statements of modern educators, we notice the same point of view regarding the seriousness and importance of the supervisor's position. It is unfortunate that many times in our boarding schools this is not kept in mind, and supervisors are often chosen without sufficient regard for their qualifications and interest in that type of work. Because they are not interested, they fail to put forth the energy required for the proper execution of their office. They lose sight of the serious responsibility they assume when they accept that position. At times we find that on account of youth and novelty of the work, supervisors work diligently and industriously in the beginning. When the novelty wears off, however, they grow extremely indifferent and apathetic. They do not realize that supervision becomes more and more difficult as time goes on, and that year after year the self-

⁵ Cubberley, Ellwood P., "Public School Administration", Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916, p. 186

⁶ Ibid. p. 190

sacrifice required to continue in the right spirit becomes greater and greater. The temptation to shirk one's duty, to take it easy, to seek one's own convenience at the expense of the work that should be done, grows stronger with the years of service. Instead of becoming more and more unselfish, there seems to be an increase of self-seeking and a decrease of earlier generosity and self-sacrifice.

To continue in the right spirit, the supervisor will need to develop and maintain a deep sense of responsibility regarding his work. Frequent meditation on the dignity of his position will help him do this.

The supervisor of young men, like the Abbot of a monastery, is truly the representative of Christ. Regarding the Abbot, St. Benedict says:

"The Abbot who is worthy to be over a monastery ought always to be mindful of what he is called, and make his works square with his name of superior. For he is supposed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery."⁷

In like manner, the supervisor is the representative of Christ in the school. What could be more serious than to represent Christ for the young men over whom one is placed? What an exalted position! His works must always "square with his name of superior". He must be a living example of Christ in the school because it is with him that the students come into contact most, and whose actions they are able to observe most closely. All the virtues of Christ should find expression in

⁷Op. cit., Chapter 2, p. 11

his daily life. Kindness, charity, patience, generosity, modesty, meekness, humility, forbearance, love and tenderness - all these the supervisor must make part of himself if he would truly be the representative of Christ in the school. How can one be careless, indifferent, and lacking in zeal when he considers this great responsibility. Yes, that is a big order, but it is precisely what is expected of the supervisor who wishes to supervise according to St. Benedict's ideals and principles.

A second consideration that should serve to develop a deep sense of responsibility is the fact that he should be like a father to the young men under his care, the same as the Abbot in his community. St. Benedict writes:

"Let him show the severity of the master and the loving affection of a father."⁸

To deal with students in a kind and fatherly manner rather than in a domineering sort of way is very difficult. The supervisor will often be inclined to insist on order by using methods that are in no sense fatherly. His plea will be that one must be firm, but St. Benedict urges at least the mingling of "gentleness with severity".⁹

A third consideration for developing this sense of responsibility is the fact that the supervisor, like the Abbot, is also a shepherd of souls. St. Benedict specifically refers

⁸ Ibid., Chapter 2, p. 15

⁹ Ibid., Chapter 2, p. 15

to this in several chapters of the Rule.

"And let the Abbot know that whatever lack of profit the master of the house shall find in the sheep, will be laid to the blame of the shepherd."¹⁰

And again:

"The Abbot must take the utmost pains, and strive with all prudence and zeal, that none of the flock entrusted to him perish."¹¹

And in another chapter he again refers to the Abbot as a shepherd in the following words:

"If I should cause my flocks to be overdriven, they would all die in one day."¹²

In another place he says:

"And let him follow the loving example of the Good Shepherd, who, leaving the ninety-nine sheep on the mountains, went to seek the one that had gone astray, on whose weakness He had such pity, that He was pleased to lay it on his sacred shoulders and thus carry it back to the fold."¹³

This thought, therefore, that he should be a shepherd as Christ was, possessed of the same spirit towards those under his charge, ought to induce the supervisor to adopt an attitude of deep responsibility towards his work.

A fourth and final consideration that ought to help the supervisor to think seriously about his position is the fact that he takes the place of the young men's parents. This substitution for the parents is far more real in a boarding school than in a day school. In fact many times parents send their

¹⁰Ibid., Chapter 2, p. 12

¹¹Ibid., Chapter 2, p. 12

¹²Ibid., Chapter 64, p. 140

¹³Ibid., Chapter 27, p. 70

sons to a boarding school precisely because they expect them to obtain closer supervision that they have received in the day school, both in their studies as well as in general conduct. We find that boarding schools often stress good discipline as one of the outstanding advantages of that type of school. This may be true, but if the supervisors in such schools are not "on the job", if they do not take their work very seriously, if they do not devote themselves whole-heartedly to their office, the young men committed to their care may fail to receive the very advantages the parents were seeking. This may actually constitute a serious injustice.

The supervisor, therefore, ought to develop and maintain a deep sense of responsibility regarding his high calling. He should never become indifferent about this serious task of guiding and supervising the youth entrusted to him, for, as St. Benedict warns the Abbot, "he must give an account in the dread judgment of God". If the supervisor will often ponder the fact that he is the representative of Christ, a father towards those entrusted to him, a true shepherd, and the substitute of parents, he will very probably adopt and maintain the attitude of deep responsibility that this extremely important office imposes upon him.

CHAPTER II

"Let Him Make No Distinction of Person"

(Rule, Chapter 2)

One of the qualities without which a supervisor can hardly expect to be successful is impartiality towards those under his care. This is quite generally admitted by writers in educational fields, while students themselves have often pointed to it as one of the virtues they desire to see in their teachers and supervisors.

For the one just beginning supervisory work, this is a serious problem. He knows from his own experience as a student that supervisors sometimes do not possess the degree of impartiality expected of them. He may distinctly recall instances of favoritism which he keenly resented and probably remembers that there was much dissatisfaction in the school on account of it. Because of his awareness of the possible bad consequences of partiality, therefore, he is usually determined to make good in that respect. But in spite of his good resolutions he may find that he has not remained free from criticism for the very mistake he wanted so much to avoid. This may confuse and possibly discourage him. He may not know just what to make of the situation. Does the Rule of St. Benedict offer anything that will help him solve this problem?

In the second chapter of the Rule we find the following:

"Let him make no distinction of person in the non-

astery. Let him not love one more than another, unless it be one whom he findeth more exemplary in good works and obedience. Let not the free-born be preferred to the freedman, unless there be some other reasonable cause. But if from a just reason the Abbot deemeth it proper to make such a distinction, he may do so in regard to the rank of anyone whomsoever; otherwise let everyone keep his own place; for 'whether bond or free', we are all one in Christ, and we all bear an equal burden of servitude under one Lord, 'for there is no respect of persons with God'. We are distinguished with him in this respect alone, if we are found to excel others in good works and in humility. Therefore let him have equal charity for all, and impose a uniform discipline for all according to merit."¹

Several things should be pointed out regarding these suggestions of the holy Rule. First of all, St. Benedict is fully aware of the fact that in order to rule well, the superior must be impartial. He must not make any distinction of person on account of station in life, origin, relationship, wealth or other purely personal considerations. These grounds for showing preference cause much difficulty. It is to be regretted that supervisors sometimes show special favor in behalf of those whose parents are wealthy or hold high positions in life. Such catering to the higher strata is entirely out of harmony with the principles of St. Benedict and should be avoided scrupulously. The writer recalls instances of such respecting of persons and knows how keenly students resented it. On the other hand, he also remembers the words of praise for supervisors who associated with all students alike, no matter what their origin and worldly position. One of the surest ways to become ineffective and disliked is to show un-

¹Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 2, p. 14

due favoritism for those who stand high in the eyes of the world.

While condemning partiality for purely personal reasons in no uncertain terms, St. Benedict makes it plain that he is quite aware of the matter of individual differences. We know from science that both in plant and animal life there are great differences in every specimen. No two are exactly alike. Even in the case of identical twins who have much in common, there are surprisingly great differences in their make-up. St. Benedict realized this and made allowance for it. He makes this very clear in the following:

"Let him understand what a difficult and arduous task he assumeth in governing souls and accommodating himself to a variety of characters. Let him so adjust himself to everyone - to one by gentleness of speech, to another by reproofs, and to still another by entreaties, to each one according to his bent and understanding."²

There is no doubt, then, that St. Benedict realized that there would be a difference of characters which would call for difference of treatment. The supervisor must indeed apply the same rules to all, but he need not necessarily use the same method of exacting obedience. St. Benedict makes that clear. He must deal with each in the manner he thinks best suited to each particular person. This is sound advice. It is not the manner of enforcing the same rules that causes difficulty. The trouble begins when the supervisor does not

²Ibid., Chapter 8, p. 16

insist on obedience for all and allows certain ones to escape. This is dangerous, and if certain ones regularly evade the rule without correction, serious difficulty will ensue. Correcting one by gentleness of speech and another by entreaties, and still another by reproofs is in harmony with St. Benedict's suggestions, and the wise supervisor will know when to employ each. But he must avoid showing partiality and leniency for purely personal reasons that in no way justify special consideration.

It is well to observe also that St. Benedict, in his usual prudence and deep understanding of human nature, does not demand that impartiality be absolute. He seems to realize that when governing a variety of characters, there will be occasions when exceptions have to be made. After all, rules are made to serve the best interests of the individual as well as the group; consequently they should be flexible enough to permit exceptions whenever there is a just and reasonable cause. St. Benedict indicates clearly that such exceptions may be made for a "reasonable cause". It will be very helpful to the supervisor always to keep this in mind. In his zeal to be entirely impartial toward all, he sometimes forgets this very important fact, insisting always that the rules must be kept and that there will be no exceptions. Sound as that position may appear, it will invariably create difficulty for the supervisor. Students themselves realize that at times exceptions are rea-

sonable and will rarely resent those distinctions that are made on account of a truly just cause. In fact, they may even criticize the supervisor for not allowing an exception when there is good reason for it. Let us consider a simple illustration. The rule is that students rise at six o'clock. A student asks the supervisor to remain in bed because he feels ill. Certainly an exception is in order; there is a good reason for allowing it. Now if the supervisor fears that he will be criticized for permitting it, and insists on enforcing the rule for rising at that hour, he will undoubtedly become involved in a difficulty. He fails to make a distinction when a just cause exists.

St. Benedict's counsel that there must be no distinction for purely personal consideration, therefore, should be followed by the supervisor in his work with students. But he should not overlook the fact that the holy Rule provides also for exceptions whenever reasonable causes exist. He must learn always to take these into account and not unreasonably insist on absolute compliance with rules lest he increase the difficulty of his task. When to make such exceptions will depend on the circumstances of each particular case. There can be no ironclad rule about it. What course to take in each case will depend on the judgment of the supervisor. He must learn to consider each problem deliberately, calmly, and without prejudice to the person in question. If he will try not to remember the person involved, but will

think objectively only of the case at hand, he will generally make a fair decision.

There is one reason for showing preference that St. Benedict specifically mentions in the Rule, namely, the possession of greater virtue in the individual.

"Let him not love one more than another, unless it be one whom he findeth more exemplary in good works and obedience."³

St. Benedict seems to indicate here that the Abbot is justified in showing greater love towards those who are more virtuous. This is not surprising, for sanctification is the whole purpose of the monastic institute, and should not the Father of the community rejoice when he sees his children advancing in holiness? This love the author of the Rule certainly expects to be supernatural; consequently it must not be based on earthly motives such as noble extraction, relationship, station in life and the like. But even though St. Benedict allows the Abbot to love one more than another on account of virtue, the supervisor must be extremely careful not to make this too noticeable, neither to the one who is preferred, nor to the other students. Certainly there will be danger of offending the others if it becomes too plain that a superior has a special love for one or the other. This is true in spite of the fact that the students themselves fully realize that the one in question is deserving of such preference.

³Ibid., Chapter 2, p. 14

There are various ways in which the supervisor can let such a student know that his good conduct and virtue is appreciated, but it must be done very prudently and discreetly.

Nor should a supervisor unduly praise a student even in private. It is extremely difficult to praise the young without the danger of doing them definite harm. There is always too much occasion for pride and vanity. If any praise is given, it should be very moderate and very brief. Supervisors who engage in undue flattery and "back-slapping" do not realize how much harm they may actually be doing. Human nature cannot stand much praise without the danger of becoming proud and vain. Father Faber, a great English writer who had a keen insight into human nature, explains this danger as follows:

"Few men can do without praise, and there are few circumstances under which a man can be praised without injuring him.... Most men must have praise. Their fountains run dry without it. Everyone in authority knows this well enough. He has to learn to praise without seeming to praise. Now, kindness has all the virtues of praise without its vices. It is equally medicinal without having the poisonous qualities. When we are praised, we are praised at some expense, and at our own expense. Kindness puts us to no expense, while it enriches those who are kind to us. Praise always implies some degree of condescension, and condescension is a thing intrinsically ungraceful; whereas kindness is the most graceful attitude one man can assume towards another. So here is another work it does. It supplies the work of praise. It is, in fact, the only sort which is always and everywhere true, the only kind which those who are afraid of growing conceited may welcome safely."⁴

Faber, Frederick, William, "Spiritual Conferences"
(Baltimore: John Murphy & Company, 1892), p. 28-29

The supervisor, then, ought to be careful not to make it a practice to praise unreasonably on account of the danger of doing serious and lasting harm to the young. This does not mean, as Father Faber well indicates, that he should not be kind and charitable. Indeed he should. In fact, he should encourage where encouragement is needed, but he must be cautious about carelessly and indiscriminately showering students with "bouquets". But he should be kind, charitable, considerate. And it is just this thought of kindness that the writer will offer as a very likely solution for the whole problem of partiality. If a supervisor will be kind to all, if he will be considerate, if he will try to be equally charitable towards everyone, he will probably not fail seriously in the matter of partiality. His efforts are directed towards the welfare of all. He will not have time to spend too much attention on a few. And even if he should occasionally fail, showing some preference, his constant effort to be kind to all will save him the criticism he might otherwise be subjected to. It is favoritism towards one or several, accompanied by a cold neglect and indifference, or even unkind treatment of others, that causes the supervisor great difficulty and destroys his efficiency. Consequently, the supervisor should make every effort to be kind and charitable towards each and every student. If he does that earnestly, the problem of partiality will probably not give him much trouble.

CHAPTER III

"Let Him Be Cautious and Considerate"

(Rule, Chapter 64)

One of the most important phases of supervision is the correction of faults and the punishment of infractions of the regulations of the school. It is a problem that confronts every supervisor and produces a variety of methods. Nearly everyone has a cherished theory of his own, at times in harmony with the spirit of the holy Rule, while at other times definitely opposed to the ideals suggested by St. Benedict.

It is not the purpose of the writer to indulge in a long discussion of the subject here, but merely to interpret the mind of St. Benedict, at least in a general way. He hopes that it may help the young supervisor who has not a well-defined method of correction and punishment of offenses. As a Benedictine it should be his aim to govern according to the example of St. Benedict.

In the second chapter of the Rule, St. Benedict has the following to say about correction:

"For in his teaching the Abbot should always observe that principle of the Apostle in which he saith: 'Reprove, entreat, rebuke', that is, mingling gentleness with severity, as occasion may call for, let him show the severity of the master and the loving affection of a father. He must sternly rebuke the undisciplined and restless; but he must exhort the obedient, meek, and patient to advance in virtue. But we charge him to rebuke and punish the negligent and haughty. Let him not shut his eyes to the sins of evil-doers; but on their first appearance let him do his utmost to cut them out from the root at once. . . . The well-disposed and those of good understanding, let him chastise the wicked and the hard of heart, and the proud

and disobedient at the very first offense with stripes and other bodily punishments, knowing that it is written: 'The fool is not corrected with words'¹

One may easily get the impression from the foregoing text of the Rule that it is extremely rigorous. Yet, if one considers the customs of the times, it is really not so severe as one might first suppose. According to Abbot Dilatte,

"Nowhere before had a legislator formulated a code of such perfect sobriety, so prudent, discreet, and gentle in its holy rigor."²

He verifies this statement by referring to earlier rules with the following:

"The old monks, less scrupulous than the Pharisees, sometimes gave as many as a hundred stripes to great offenders. 'Let them be extended and receive a hundred lashes', says the Rule of St. Fructuosus. The Penitential of St. Columbanus speaks of a hundred and even two hundred stripes; but the same code of punishment has this provision: 'Let no more than twenty-five stripes be given at a time'. The Rule of the Master is more formidable still: 'Let them be beaten with rods to death', that is to say, observes Calmet, 'to the limit of endurance, with extreme rigor: for it was never really done to death, and even in profane authors the phrase 'caedere ad necem' (beat to death) is not to be taken literally, but as a figure of speech."³

In view of the practice of the times, therefore, St. Benedict's legislation about correction and punishment is not so rigorous as it may appear.

The text of the Rule quoted above must be examined in order to determine St. Benedict's principles about correction

¹ Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 2, p. 15

² Abbot Dilatte, Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict, Benziger Brothers, (New York), p. 209

³ Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 2, p. 15

and punishment. The first sentence of the quotation gives us a good indication of how he tries to avoid two extremes.

"Mingling gentleness with severity, as occasion may call for, let him show the severity of the master and the loving affection of a father."

It appears that he strives to keep gentleness and kindness before the Abbot as the method generally to be followed. Several times in the Rule he returns to the idea of a paternal attitude towards subjects. In general, it is safe to say, therefore, that St. Benedict favors kind and gentle treatment of offenders whenever that is possible. For the supervisor this is concrete advice. In most cases he will find that kindness will be the best way to gain the good will of his students.

"The well-disposed and those of good understanding," says St. Benedict, "let him correct at the first and second admonition only with words."⁴

Most young men in our boarding schools will come under the class of those who are well-disposed. Most of them possess good will, and if in a few cases that is not true, kind methods of dealing with such individuals will probably produce a better attitude in a comparatively short time. The number of those who are deliberately malicious will be quite small.

The general impression St. Benedict gives regarding correction, therefore, is moderation and kindness. There are

⁴Ibid., p. 16

other references in the Rule that bear this out. In chapter twenty-seven he gives the Abbot specific instructions about the treatment of those who have offended.

"Let the Abbot show all care and concern towards offending brethren because 'they that are in health need not a physician, but they that are sick.'"⁵

And a little later he refers to this same spirit of gentleness when he reminds the Abbot of the fact that he is dealing with weak souls.

"For the Abbot must know that he has taken upon himself the care of infirm souls, not a despotism over the strong."⁶

He closes the chapter with a reference to the Good Shepherd, obviously recommending to the Abbot a similar attitude towards those who have transgressed.

"And let him follow the loving example of the Good Shepherd, who, leaving the ninety-nine sheep on the mountains, went to seek the one that had gone astray, on whose weakness He had such pity, that He was pleased to lay it on his sacred shoulders and thus carry it back to the fold."⁷

Surely these quotations give us the impression that St. Benedict wants the Abbot to be very kind and charitable towards refractory brethren. He seems to recommend special love and care for them.

The supervisor of young men is likewise dealing with weak human nature, and because those under his care are young, should be all the more moderate, kind, gentle and patient.

⁵ Ibid., Chapter 27, p. 68

⁶ Ibid., Chapter 27, p. 69

⁷ Ibid., Chapter 27, p. 70

If St. Benedict urges the Abbot to be considerate towards those in the monastery, how much more would he most probably recommend such an attitude to those in charge of the young. He gives us an idea of his attitude towards them in his reference to the "aged and children" about whom he speaks as follows:

"Although human nature is of itself drawn to feel compassion for these life-periods, namely, old age and childhood, still let the decree of the Rule make provision also for them. Let their natural weakness always be taken into account and let the strictness of the Rule not be kept with them in respect to food, but let there be a tender regard in their behalf and let them eat before the regular hours."⁸

The supervisor who wishes to follow the principles enunciated by St. Benedict regarding the correction of faults, therefore, will make every effort to be moderate, gentle, and kind. He will use kindness and gentleness in preference to harsher methods, realizing that in the majority of cases the young have good will and usually respond to such treatment. He will correct them many times before he will employ sterner measures, according to St. Benedict when he says:

"If a brother hath often been corrected and hath even been excommunicated for a fault and doth not amend, let a more severe correction be applied to him."⁹

There are other indications in the holy Rule of the fact that St. Benedict prefers moderation, kindness and consideration. A number of texts not quoted previously show the same

⁸Rule, Chapter 37, p. 85

⁹Ibid., Chapter 29, p. 70

general attitude of the author of the Rule are the following:

"Let him be convinced that it becometh him better to serve than to rule."¹⁰

"Let him be chaste, sober, and merciful, and let him always exalt 'mercy above judgment'."¹¹

"Let him hate vice, but love the brethren. And even in his corrections, let him act with prudence and not go to extremes, lest, while he aimeth to remove the rust too thoroughly, the vessel be broken. Let him always keep his own frailty in mind, and remember that 'the bruised reed must not be broken'. In this we are not saying that he should allow evils to take root, but that he cut them off with prudence and charity."¹²

"In all his commands, whether they refer to things spiritual or temporal, let him be cautious and considerate."¹³

These quotations from the Rule together with those already quoted should suffice to impress on the supervisor the fact that St. Benedict's entire attitude towards offending brethren is one of kindness, charity, sympathy, and moderation. It is true, he does not tolerate vice; he does not allow to go unnoticed infractions of the Rule, but he makes it plain that he wants the offender to be dealt with in a kindly manner when amendment can be accomplished in that way. Only after repeated kindness does he call for sterner measures.

The supervisor should keep these directions of St. Benedict in mind. He should strive to be a kind father and not an uncompromising and severe taskmaster. Above all, in all his commands he ought to be "cautious and considerate".

¹⁰ Rule, Chapter 64, p. 138

¹¹ Ibid., Chapter 64, p. 139

¹² Ibid., Chapter 64, p. 139

¹³ Ibid., Chapter 64, p. 139

CHAPTER IV

"The Fool Is Not Corrected With Words"

(Rule, Chapter 2)

St. Benedict's appeal to making use of kindness and gentleness whenever possible must not be mistaken for weakness. There is no indication in the Rule that he will overlook wrong-doing or shut his eyes to vice. In his chapter on the qualities the Abbot ought to have he makes provision for the punishment of those who will not amend.

"He must sternly rebuke the undisciplined and restless."¹

And again:

"But we charge him to rebuke and punish the negligent and haughty. Let him not shut his eyes to the sins of evil-doers; but on their first appearance let him do his utmost to cut them out from the root at once."²

Nor does he condemn corporal punishment altogether, but he advocates it in extreme cases. It is well, however, to realize that he seems to recommend it as a kind of last resort when everything else has failed. In Chapter twenty-eight he refers to it as a last appeal as follows:

"After he hath applied soothing lotions, ointments of admonitions, medicaments of the Holy Scriptures, and if, as a last recourse, he hath employed the caustic of excommunication and the blows of the lash, and seeth that even then his pains are of no avail, let him apply for that brother also what is more potent than all these measures: his own prayer and that of the brethren."³

¹Rule, Chapter 2, p. 15

²Ibid., p. 16

³Ibid., Chapter 28, p. 71

We notice here that St. Benedict obviously did not intend corporal punishment to be the ordinary means of punishing offenders, but admits that there will be cases when it may be the only remedy.

"If a brother hath often been corrected and hath even been excommunicated for a fault and doth not amend, let a more severe correction be applied to him, namely proceed against him with corporal punishment."⁴

It is interesting to note that in Chapter twenty-three St. Benedict shows very clearly that corporal punishment is not to be used unless other means have failed.

"If a brother is found stubborn or disobedient or proud or murmuring, or opposed to anything in the holy Rule and a contemner of the commands of his superiors, let him be admonished by his superiors once and again in secret, according to the command of our Lord. If he doth not amend let him be taken to task publicly before all. But if he doth not reform even then, and he understandeth what a penalty it is, let him be placed under excommunication; but if even then he remaineth obstinate let him undergo corporal punishment."⁵

The supervisor of young men ought to adopt a similar attitude about the use of corporal punishment. He ought not to be hasty in calling upon it as the only way of punishing offenses. The supervisor who frequently uses it cannot be said to govern according to principles advocated by St. Benedict. Unfortunately, some of our schools have in the past used corporal punishment too frequently. There is much danger in its indiscriminate use. It may result in lasting harm to the individual if not used with great caution

⁴Ibid., Chapter 23, p. 70

⁵Ibid., Chapter 23, p. 64

and under circumstances that warrant its use. There should be certainty of guilt on the part of the student, justice should be tempered by kindness, and the punishment would be proportionate to the offense committed. These rules must be carefully observed when corporal punishment is inflicted. The laws of the state should be kept in mind, and permission of parents should first be obtained. When such safeguards are taken, there will be little danger of abusing this form of punishment.

It should be pointed out here that St. Benedict's ideas about correction and punishment harmonize quite well with modern theories. It is generally accepted that supervisors will be far more successful if they will seek to gain the good will of young men by means of kind and reasonable forms of correction. In the majority of cases there will be little need of harsh methods. Whether or not we agree fully with Father Flanagan's theory that "there is no such thing as a bad boy", he certainly has established the principle that most boys respond favorably to honorable treatment. St. Benedict repeatedly urges the Abbot to be kind, reasonable, and sympathetic towards offenders.

In regard to corporal punishment, the modern theory is that it should be used sparingly. There are those who condemn its use altogether, but there still remain those who hold that it has a place in supervision. They point out, how-

ever, that it should be used only when certain very definite conditions have been fulfilled. One of the most important of these conditions is that it should never be administered in anger. Punishing in anger always involves the danger that it is merely a means of giving vent to feeling, going to extremes. It should be administered only when other forms of punishment have failed.⁶ Smith has the following to say about it:

"As a rule it is effective only with small children, or the mentally retarded, and should never be used when the teacher can devise a higher appeal that will reach the offender. The sooner teaching ingenuity can get along without it the better, but in some cases spoiling the child is as sure a result of sparing the rod today as in former times."⁷

Because the supervisor is dealing with immature youth, therefore, he should strive to acquire the same virtues of patience, kindness, forbearance and sympathetic understanding that St. Benedict suggests in his Rule for the Abbot of the monastery. In regard to punishment for offenses, he ought to strive to use reasonable means, seeking to gain the good will of his students, and avoiding the harsh forms of punishment unless there is certainly no other way of procuring the desired amendment.

In closing this chapter, the writer wishes to offer a final thought that he thinks deserves much reflection. We

⁶Walter R. Smith, "Constructive School Discipline", (American Book Company), p. 186

⁷Ibid., p. 191

often hear statements to the effect that students in our boarding schools two or three decades ago were far rougher, far more disobedient, and caused far more difficulty for supervisors than do the young men in our schools today. The writer has often wondered whether the reason for that might not have been the fact that supervisors, to a degree at least, made these youngsters that way. Isn't it possible that many times they were not treated in the reasonable and considerate manner that St. Benedict advocates in the holy Rule?

CHAPTER V

"Put Away the Evil One From Among You"

(Rule, Chapter 38)

One of the major problems confronting supervisors in boarding schools is what attitude to take regarding the expulsion of students from school for misconduct. Some look upon several repetitions of ordinary offenses as sufficient reason for dismissing a student. Others, again, go to the opposite extreme and condemn the use of expulsion altogether, contending that it is too severe even for serious transgressions. Is there anything in the Rule that will suggest St. Benedict's mind regarding this problem?

The preceding chapter brought out the fact that St. Benedict was very slow to apply severe punishment. For example, he recommends "frequent correction" and even "excommunication" before corporal punishment is prescribed.

"If a brother hath often been corrected and hath even been excommunicated for a fault and doth not amend, let a more severe correction be applied to him, namely, proceed against him with corporal punishment."¹

Corporal punishment, therefore, is not advised until much effort has been made to correct the offender in a less harsh manner.

What does St. Benedict suggest if even this severe punishment does not effect a cure? He continues:

Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 28, (Atchison, 1923) p. 70

"But if even then he doth not reform, or puffed up with pride, should perhaps, which God forbid, even defend his actions, let then the Abbot act like a prudent physician. After he hath applied soothing lotions, ointments of admonitions, medicaments of the Holy Scriptures, and if, as a last resource, he hath employed the caustic of excommunication and the blows of the lash, and seeth that even then his pains are of no avail, let him apply for that brother also what is more potent than all these measures: his own prayer and that of the brethren, that the Lord who is all-powerful may work a cure in that brother. But if he is not healed even in this way, then finally let the Abbot dismiss him from the community, as the Apostle saith: 'Put away the evil one from among you'; and again: 'If the faithless depart, let him depart', lest one diseased sheep infect the whole flock."²

We notice here how slow St. Benedict is to send the refractory member of the community away from the monastery. He advocates such dismissal only after various means of correction have been employed. He suggests, as quoted above, not only human means, but he goes even further and prescribes the prayers of the Abbot and the entire community for the improvement of the offending brother. This should give us an idea concerning the attitude a supervisor of young men ought to take regarding the problem of expulsion.

Does the supervisor honestly seek to make use of every means likely to help win the good will of the student who frequently disobeys the rules? Does he strive to be patient enough to wait for a change of heart? Or does he choose the earlier course and propose dismissal from school? Such an attitude on the part of the supervisor is a real danger. It

² Ibid., p. 70

is exceedingly difficult to work patiently and long with one who does not easily amend. It requires much patience and sometimes great forbearance. Very often the thought of expulsion comes to mind as the easiest and best solution. It is the easiest but is it the best from the standpoint of the student? Is hasty dismissal without very serious reason in harmony with what St. Benedict prescribes in his Rule for the frequent transgressor in the monastery? The supervisor, therefore, ought to ask himself whether he has sincerely striven to use every possible means of bringing about the desired reform. Furthermore, as St. Benedict suggests, he ought to make use of the supernatural help of prayer, for it is the most powerful means at his disposal. As a true disciple of St. Benedict, he cannot be too hasty in the matter of expulsion, but must strive earnestly to obtain the correction desired.

A comment should be made about the closing words of the quotation given above.

"But if he is not healed even in this way, then finally let the Abbot dismiss him from the community, as the Apostle saith: 'Put away the evil one from among you'; and again: 'If the faithless depart, let him depart', lest one diseased sheep infect the whole flock."³

True, St. Benedict, after urging every possible means of correction, finally suggests dismissal, "lest one diseased sheep infect the whole flock". But it should be observed that he

³Ibid., p. 71

does not advocate removal until it has become practically certain that there is no longer any hope for the individual. He does not seem to become disturbed about this "one bad apple in the barrel" until he has given that person every chance for improvement. He does not seem to be in a great hurry to expel him.

The supervisor of young men, too, must be on his guard not to employ the "one bad apple" argument too hastily and too freely. St. Benedict calls upon that reason for expulsion, only after all other means have been exhausted. There is a real danger that as soon as someone becomes a chronic offender, the supervisor may immediately advocate his removal from the student body for the sake of preventing harm to others. He may easily exaggerate this harm, and the more he thinks about it, the more determined he becomes that the culprit must be expelled in order to save the rest. Many times the harm done is not so great as it may appear, for he is usually not respected by most of his fellow students, nor is his example always imitated.

Is there ever a case, then, when a student who frequently breaks the rules ought to be dismissed for the sake of preventing harm to others? No doubt there are such cases, but they must be studied carefully. A student who is merely mischievous need not necessarily be expelled for his pranks. He may have an abundance of good will, but he may be unable to control himself properly. After a certain length of time he

may become a satisfactory student. If his transgressions are of a more serious nature, and if he has often been corrected to no avail, there may be reason to consider expulsion, provided there seems to be no more hope of improvement. Whatever we think of the theory that "there is no such thing as a bad boy", there certainly is a great amount of evidence to bear out the fact that most boys have good will and respond favorably if approached wisely.

There is one case when expulsion is certainly to be recommended for the sake of preventing harm to the rest, and that is when the young man is positively a bad moral character. In that case St. Benedict's admonition, "Put away the evil one from among you", should be carried out. But this must be established without doubt. Great injury can be done the individual if action is taken on a hunch or on hearsay. The supervisor must be extremely cautious and must not make accusations until he has made certain about the matter. Everyone has a right to his good reputation, and it should not be jeopardized by carelessness on the part of a supervisor.

The writer is of the opinion that even when there is such a case, if the boy can be retained in school without too great a danger of influencing others, there is reason why this should be done. After all, our boarding schools give us an unusual opportunity to do untold good for such boys if we watch for the occasion. The writer thinks that

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Father Quin's statement in reference to admission of ~~16~~ ^{OCT 16 1944} boys

"toughs" into pious societies for boys can be applied here.

"With scarcely any reservation," he writes, "I would answer this query affirmatively, provided the 'toughs', like wild creatures for the tamer, can be caught young, say at sixteen or earlier. In the present matter, however, the age question seldom assumes practical importance, as unfortunates old enough to be quasi-irredeemable will scarcely offer themselves for enrollment. 'What then!', exclaim social purists, 'is your high physical standard required only for association with one that is low morally? Are we not speaking of pious societies?' Yes - of societies pious like the Church, whose holiness is transcendently displayed in the retention and improvement of the fallen; of societies pious like Christ Himself, come 'not to call the just but sinners to penance'. Assuredly the religious organizer of youth should ever be mindful that 'they that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick'. While votaries of worldly greatness look with eaglelike steadiness into suns of earthly wealth and position, it is for him who would labor with the lowly toiler of Nazareth to contemplate unflinchingly all that is poorest and most abandoned.

"Therefore, prize a boy's friendship and confidence less for the good you see in him than for the evil you can take out of him. Rejoice, as one possessed of apostolic fitness, if your heart beats all the warmer welcome to a youngster's advances because he has a dirty face, ragged clothes, drunken parents, an irreligious home, and is reputed 'a good hand at swearing'.

"As youthful hearts are easily remodeled, no violence is done our societies by usually opening them to those in need of moral cleansing. Occasionally, to be sure, some young life may be so exceedingly depraved as to absolutely demand ostracism; but in the earlier teens cases of the kind are rare. Nemo repente turpissimus. Unfortunates of that age may be drifting to the worst of disorders, but as yet, owing simply to insufficient evil experience, they are hardly so confirmed in their vicious habits as to be unfit for membership."⁴

Such should be the attitude of the supervisor in a beard-

⁴Quin, Rev. George, E., S.J., "The Boy-Savers' Guide," Benziger Brothers, New York, p. 179

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ing school. St. Benedict expresses the same spirit when he admonishes the Abbot in a similar tone:

"Let the Abbot show all care and concern towards offending brethren, because 'they that are in health need not a physician, but they that are sick.'"⁵

And again:

"The Abbot must take the utmost pains, and strive with all prudence and zeal, that none of the flock entrusted to him perish. For the Abbot must know that he has taken upon himself the care of infirm souls, not a despotism over the strong; and let him fear the threat of the Prophet wherein the Lord saith: 'What ye saw to be fat, that ye took to yourselves, and what was diseased you threw away'. And let him follow the loving example of the Good Shepherd, who, leaving the ninety-nine sheep on the mountains, went to seek the one that had gone astray, on whose weakness He had such pity, that He was pleased to lay it on his sacred shoulders and thus carry it back to the fold."⁶

The supervisor of young men, therefore, ought to follow St. Benedict's spirit in regard to expulsion of a student from school. He ought not too hastily recommend such action, but should make every effort, even sacrifice, to win the good will of the offender and bring about the result desired. Only when it has become very certain that a student is having a definitely evil influence on others, and this can in no way be checked, should dismissal be urged. Outside of such a case, the supervisor will ordinarily not be wrong if he will patiently strive to be kind and charitable to the offender, seeking in that way to gain his good will and eventual cor-

⁵Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 27, (Atchison, 1923) p. 68

⁶Ibid., p. 69

rection. If he zealously follows such a course, he will follow the example of our dear Lord Himself, he will be a supervisor after the heart of his loving Father, St. Benedict, and without doubt he will have a profound and lasting good influence over many a young man.

CHAPTER VI

"Death and Life Are in the Power of the Tongue"

(Rule, Chapter 6)

The desire to convey one's thoughts, opinions and experiences is a very common human weakness. Whether we have much useful information to impart or not, nevertheless we like to talk. Many times those who are given to this habit are not the ones who are extremely well informed. It seems that much talking may sometimes be a way of trying to create the impression that one possesses much information.

This habit of talking too much sometimes causes great difficulty for the supervisor of young men. Because of his youth and zeal he imagines that much visiting and conversing with his charges is a very essential part of his work. He is naturally pleased with the attention his young friends give him and begins to feel that there is a vast amount of good accruing from it. He fails to realize that much talking can undo the good he may otherwise accomplish, and may eventually cause him much trouble. He is not aware of the fact that indiscretions easily occur, and that his efficiency as a superior may be greatly reduced as a result.

Lest he give the wrong impression, the writer wishes to state that he does not appeal for an attitude of aloofness on the part of the supervisor. He fully appreciates the fact that he should be friendly and not like a stranger to his

subjects. Yet, this friendly spirit must not be overdone to the extent that there will be too great familiarity and too much time spent in talking just for the sake of talking.

St. Benedict understood the dangers of talking too much and tells his monks something about the advantages of silence. It would be well for every supervisor of young men frequently to read the chapter on silence in the holy Rule. Among other things he says the following:

"Let us do what the Prophet saith: 'I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I have set a guard to my mouth, I was dumb, and was humbled, and kept silence even from good things.' Here the Prophet showeth that, if at times we ought to refrain from useful speech for the sake of silence, how much more ought we to abstain from evil words on account of the punishment due to sin. Therefore, because of the importance of silence, let permission to speak be seldom given to perfect disciples, even for good and holy and edifying discourse, for it is written: 'In much talk thou shalt not escape sin.' And elsewhere: 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue.'¹

There are many occasions when the supervisor will do well to consider silence or at least fewness of words rather than much talking. Although St. Benedict refers here principally to the spiritual advantages of silence, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" the supervisor in his work may gain much by its timely and prudent observance. He may actually succeed or fail according to the control he has over himself in his speech. The matter is just that important, and there are supervisors who are very important, and there are

¹Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 6, p. 30

supervisors who are very unsatisfactory on account of their lack of restraint.

We shall consider a number of occasions in which a supervisor must carefully guard his speech. One of these was already referred to in the opening paragraphs, namely, visiting and talking too much with the students. Although the supervisor should be among the students during recreation, it is not necessary to spend all his time visiting and talking without any restraint. He may spend more time by himself or with his confreres, especially with his fellow supervisors. Surely he ought not to give the students the impression that he does not enjoy the company of his community. This could easily cause students to have doubts about the charitable feeling that exists between them. It is not necessary for the supervisor completely to avoid his confreres just because he is a supervisor. Sometimes those who thus spend all their time with the students will sooner or later not be wanted even by them. Familiarity still breeds contempt.

Being with students too much is one extreme, of course, but not being with them at all is the other. At times we find that supervisors do not care to spend any time with the students and seek to get away from them whenever there is an occasion. That is not conducive to successful supervision. The first rule is to be on the job, and that means to be somewhere in the vicinity at least. To hide somewhere in the monastery is not considered close enough to give the surveil-

lance required of a good supervisor. He ought to strive for a middle course in this matter, neither visiting and talking too much, nor keeping himself entirely removed from his work.

Another occasion which calls for caution in regard to speech is the subject of one's conversation with students. The supervisor may easily commit injustices against his own confreres as well as against other students if he is not discreet. Students seek opportunities to talk about their professors, attempting to extract comments from the supervisor about them. Such conversation must be prudently avoided. Nor should the supervisor allow students to speak disparagingly about fellow students, but he should discreetly discourage all uncharitable conversation. Much of this can easily be avoided if the supervisor will not converse too freely and imprudently with his students, always bearing in mind the warning: "In much talk thou shalt not escape sin".

The chapter on Silence in the Rule closes as follows:

"But coarse jests, and like words, or speech provoking laughter, we condemn everywhere to eternal exclusion; and for such speech we do not permit the disciple to open his lips."²

It should not be necessary to warn the supervisor about coarse jokes. Certainly this must be avoided. A desire to tell stories that excite laughter is also dangerous. This does not mean that the supervisor may never tell a good story.

²Ibid., Chapter 6

Obviously, in itself there is no harm in that. But young supervisors sometimes want to pride themselves in telling stories. They make the mistake of overdoing it, and before long they and not their stories become amusing. There is hardly any reason why a supervisor should want a reputation as a great story teller. It shows a lack of restraint, and the supervisor should always strive to give an example of quiet moderation and self-control. Here should be mentioned also the fact that it is not proper, surely not charitable, for the supervisor to call students by offensive nicknames. Even though the students adopt such names for their fellow students, the supervisor should avoid using them.

Another very bad practice is the blustering type of speech that some use when talking to students. This they do both in private conversation as well as in public. Both are exceedingly reprehensible. Such a manner of addressing students is anything but gentlemanly. And should not the supervisor be a gentleman? Some justify this harshness on the score that one must be firm and direct with young men. True, firm but not ungentlemanly. One can be firm and direct without "barking". Did Christ generally speak like that? From what we read about Him, He surely did not. In the Bible does He not say of Himself, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart"? And was St. Benedict a blustering type of superior? It is very hard to understand on what grounds of educational

psychology supervisors justify such unkind manner of speech.

The supervisor must be careful about his speech when he addresses students publicly. He should make every effort to avoid scolding, anger, calling names, and making threats. He will usually obtain better results if his appeals in public are made kindly. Scolding often does little good towards winning the good will of students, and that is very important. His dignity and influence will suffer if he is given to fits of anger in public appearances. He must strive hard to avoid it. Calling students offensive names is altogether uncalled for; it can't be justified. No supervisor should ever allow that to occur.

Some supervisors have difficulty maintaining silence in the study hall. One of the reasons for this may be that he himself does too much talking. How can he expect the students to keep the rule of silence if he himself is continually going about in the hall talking in a disturbing fashion. If the supervisor made it a point to be very quiet and would speak but rarely with students during such periods, he would very likely have better order in the study hall.

It is safe to say that many supervisors talk too much when on duty. In many instances they could easily speak less and still do their job well. When correcting students in the study hall or other places where order is desired, the correction can often be made by a mere look without speaking at all. Why should he disturb the entire group, then, by a

noisy public correction? As a rule the supervisor should not become too demonstrative but should perform all his duties as quietly and unnoticed as possible.

The supervisor will do well, therefore, often to read what St. Benedict says in his Rule about the value of silence. Truly, success or failure may be determined by his control of speech. And the young supervisor can safely tell himself that he will be in great danger in this matter. Much caution will be necessary not to fail. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

CHAPTER VII

"He Should Show Them All That Is Good And Holy By His Deed"

(Rule, Chapter 2)

St. Benedict understood the power of good example. In the second chapter of the Rule he admonishes the Abbot to teach more by the good example of his life than by his words. He insists that his actions reflect his teachings and reminds him of his grave responsibility should he fail to live up to the teachings he requires of his subjects.

"When, therefore, anyone taketh the name of Abbot he should govern his disciples by a twofold teaching; namely, he should show them all that is good and holy by his deeds more than by his words; explain the commandments of God to intelligent disciples by words, but show the divine precepts to the dull and simple by his works. And let him show by his actions, that whatever he teacheth his disciples as being contrary to the law of God must not be done, 'lest perhaps when he hath preached to others, he himself should become a castaway', and he himself committing sin, God one day say to him: 'Why dost thou declare my justices, and take my covenant in thy mouth? But thou hast hated discipline, and hast cast my words behind thee.' And: 'Thou who sawest the mote in thy brother's eye, hast not seen the beam in thy own.'¹

There is little doubt about the seriousness with which St. Benedict regards good example. He is fully aware of the fact that teaching to be effective must be put into practice by the one who teaches. To add force to his admonitions, he calls on the divine sanction of eternal punishment, "lest he himself should become a castaway."

Good example is also of paramount importance for the

¹Rule, Chapter 2, p. 13

supervisor of young men. He deals with immature youth whose characters are still in the formative stage and who are easily influenced by the conduct of those around them. Because the young usually seek someone whom they can look up to and idolize, those in responsible positions in the school will have a great influence on them. The supervisor must always bear this responsibility in mind. He should frequently think about the reasons why good example is such an important factor in the proper training of young men.

Cardinal Mercier, the late great Archbishop of Malines, insists on the vital importance of good example because it contains in itself all the determining principles of action. It demonstrates an idea in concrete form; it invites imitation by proving that it can be done; it sanctions what is being taught.²

Educators generally agree on the utility of illustrations and concrete examples in teaching. This is especially true in the case of the young. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to teach them altogether in the abstract. The teacher who uses many visual aids will usually be the more successful. In the same way we can best teach young people the ideals of good conduct by giving them good example. No matter what position one takes in regard to environment and heredity, there is no

Mercier, Cardinal, "Retreat to His Priests," (Ch. Beyaert, Bruges) p. 301

question about the importance and power of the former. Children naturally look up to their parents as ideals of right conduct. This is more effective than abstract teaching of acceptable behavior.

It is said that the way of precept is a long way, while the shortest way is that of example. This is true because there is more than mere abstract thinking. The supervisor must bear this in mind. He should remember that those under his care will look up to him for a concrete example of right conduct and will readily observe his faults and weaknesses. Because he fully understood this great power of good example, therefore St. Benedict commands the abbot to "show them all that is good and holy by his deeds more than by his words."

The second principle of action contained in example is that it invites imitation because it demonstrates beyond doubt that imitation is possible. This can be observed often in children when they try to imitate their elders with the self-confident boast, "I can do that". Such is but their way of professing their belief that whatever others can do should be possible also for them. There are numerous instances of those who accomplished great things because the ideal set by others imbued them with the strong determination that they could do the same. Had the lives of others not convinced them of the possibility of imitating their cherished goals, had they been taught only in the abstract, the result would indeed have been different. This bears out Longfellow's statement that the

"lives of great men all remind us, we can make our lives sublime". Boys many times become great ball players because they picked out a hero and strove industriously to become like him. How many outstanding players would we produce were we to teach the theory of baseball only in the classroom and never allow a youngster to witness the stars of the game in action? Girls often choose their professions on the basis of individuals whom they learned to love and whose lives they desire to imitate. In the same way boys many times want to become doctors, lawyers, or teachers because of a particular person in one of the professions whom they respect and idolize. Had not the lives of others made these high ambitions seem possible, their determination to pursue the calling they decided to follow would indeed have been less strong. The supervisor has the serious responsibility of letting "his light shine before men" so that the youth under his care may constantly have before their eyes a living proof that the same high ideals of right conduct can be attained also by them.

The third principle of action embodied in example is that it sanctions the teachings of him who sets the example. It shows that he is sincere in his belief. This is the more true when the action is performed in spite of inconvenience or even great difficulty. Many believe in the sincerity of the martyrs precisely because they remained unshakable in their faith, re-

ardless of their own material interests. When a man lays down his life for a cause, he is not joking. Men can hardly be blamed, therefore, when they put their trust and confidence in the saints, for they gave ample proof of their sincerity in believing the doctrines they professed. The supervisor must sanction the things he proposes by his own example even if this causes great inconvenience. How can the young be expected to take him seriously when they know that he does not carry out in his own life the ideals he orally proposes to them? A simple illustration will make this clear. Let us suppose that the supervisor points out to the students that smoking is forbidden except in those places specially set aside for it. But he himself takes the privilege of smoking wherever he chooses. With such insincerity on his part goes a gradual but sure indifference to the rule on the part of the students. They will not take his ideals of conduct seriously if he does not prove to them by his example that he is sincere.

It was stated elsewhere that the supervisor is the representative of Christ. His is the great responsibility of showing to those under his care how to live a Christian life. Christ Himself first showed the world how to do this. It is the supervisor's duty to put this life into concrete form. It should be pointed out that Christ's example embodied all the principles of action referred to previously. By giving us His Divine Son, God arranged to place before our eyes the

principles of Christianity in visible form. He could have given man His revelation and stopped there. But he understood His own handiwork and realized that man needed more than abstract truth.

Furthermore, Christ showed by His life that the same type of life is possible for us. He specifically tells us to follow His example.

"I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also."³

And elsewhere He says:

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls, for my yoke is sweet and my burden light."⁴

And again:

"If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have a treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."⁵

These statements of Christ Himself constitute an invitation to follow Christ, its possibility being implied.

The third principle of action spoken of above, the sanction of the teaching the example contains, is also found in the life of Christ. He put into execution what He taught despite inconvenience, hardship, and intense suffering. He gave final and undeniable proof of His sincerity when He laid down His life for the cause He sponsored.

Now the supervisor's serious duty is similar to that which

³John, 13, 15

⁴Matthew, 11, 29

⁵Matthew, 19, 21

God imposed upon His Divine Son, namely, to teach Christianity not only by word but also by example. What a great responsibility! Keeping this always in mind, how can the supervisor of young men be indifferent about the example he gives the young characters entrusted to his care?

CHAPTER VIII

"Let Him Show the Loving Affection of a Father"

(Rule, Chapter 2)

One of the qualities that St. Benedict is most eager for the Abbot of a monastery to possess is a paternal spirit towards his monks. The supervisor of young men will study with profit the statements of the author of the Rule regarding this fatherly attitude. If one in charge of the young follows the suggestions given by St. Benedict on this particular subject, he will be a better supervisor.

At the very beginning of the Rule, St. Benedict indicates what kind of attitude he himself had when he writes as follows:

"Listen, O my son, to the precepts of thy master, and incline the ear of thy heart, and cheerfully receive and faithfully execute the admonitions of thy loving father."¹

We notice here that the writer takes the position of a "loving father" towards his community, and he refers to his subjects as "sons". According to Abbot Dilatte, the authors of other legislative codes of this kind took a more impersonal attitude when they wrote. St. Benedict, on the other hand, seems to become quite familiar with his reader from the outset and addresses him in a very intimate manner.²

Even though St. Benedict uses the term "master" in the

¹Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue

²Dilatte, Abbot, "Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict," Benziger Brothers, New York, 1921, p. 1

same connection, it does not contradict his general attitude. This is justified on the grounds that he wrote near the end of his life. The wealth of practical wisdom he gained both in the spiritual life and in that of a superior, entitles him to speak with a great amount of assurance. It is probably for that reason that he refers to his teachings as "the precepts of thy master". Furthermore, he bases his Rule largely on the principles of the Gospels; consequently he does not teach altogether in his own name, nor does he propose doctrines of his own making. He teaches with the Church, making application to the monastic life with which he had become familiar. His thorough knowledge of the teachings of the Church, together with his long experience in the role of superior, therefore, justifies his claim to "master" of the religious life concerning which he is about to write.³

It seems that St. Benedict entertained a fear that the phrase, "precepts of thy master", might possibly affect the intimate relationship he seeks to establish between himself and the reader, for he addresses him by a title of endearment soon afterwards.

"What, dearest brethren, can be sweeter to us than this voice of the Lord inviting us? See, in his loving kindness, the Lord showeth us the way to life."⁴

A little later he specifically mentions the fact that

³Dilatte, op. cit., p. 1

⁴Rule, Prologue

he does not want to make his precepts too rigorous, demanding what may seem too stern only when it becomes necessary. Furthermore, he asks the reader not to become discouraged because the beginning of such a new life will obviously be somewhat hard.

"We are therefore about to found a school of the Lord's service, in which we hope to introduce nothing harsh or burdensome. But even if to correct vices or to preserve charity, sound reason dictateth anything that turneth out somewhat stringent, do not at once fly in dismay from the way of salvation, the beginning of which cannot but be narrow."⁵

When he speaks about the qualities of the Abbot, St. Benedict shows that he wants him to be known for his fatherly spirit and asks him to live up to that title.

"The Abbot who is worthy to be over a monastery ought always to be mindful of what he is called, and make his words square with his name of superior. For he is supposed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery, when he is called by his name, according to the saying of the Apostle: 'You have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry "Abba" (Father)'.⁶

In pointing out to the Abbot how he is to correct those who have transgressed the rules, he indicates very plainly that he wants him to proceed with the tender spirit of a kind father.

"For in his teaching the Abbot should always observe that principle of the Apostle in which he saith: 'Reprove, entreat, rebuke', that is, mingling gentleness with severity, as the occasion may call for, let him show the

⁵ Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue

⁶ Ibid., Chapter 2

severity of the master and the loving affection of a father."⁷

In the chapter dealing with the election of the Abbot, St. Benedict asks the superior to be on his guard lest he become hasty in his judgments and inconsiderate in his actions, asking him to be moderate and discreet.

"In all his commands, whether they refer to things spiritual or temporal, let him be cautious and considerate. Let him be discerning and temperate in the tasks which he enjoineeth, recalling the discretion of holy Jacob who saith: 'If I should cause my flocks to be overdriven, they would all die in one day'. Keeping in view these and other dictates of discretion, the mother of virtues, let him so temper everything that the strong may still have something to desire and the weak may not draw back."⁸

The attitude of St. Benedict is plainly one of mildness, moderation, and sympathy. This does not mean weakness, however, and when it is a question of sin and vice, the author of the Rule takes a strong stand. He urges immediate and uncompromising action against all wrongdoing. Yet, his fatherly spirit constrains him to legislate regarding the manner in which the sinner is to be treated, and he demands that the sin be stamped out without losing affection for the sinner.

"Let him hate vice but love the brethren. And even in his corrections, let him act with prudence and not go to extremes, lest, while he aimeth to remove the rust too thoroughly, the vessel be broken."⁹

St. Benedict does not want the disciples to fear the

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Ibid., Chapter 2

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Ibid., Chapter 64

⁹ Ibid., Chapter 64, p. 139

Abbot, and in spite of the fact that the latter must not allow evils to take root, he must nevertheless strive to do everything in such a way that the brethren cannot but love him.

"In this we are not saying that he should allow evils to take root, but that he cut them off with prudence and charity, as he shall see it is best for each one, as we have already said; and let him aim to be loved rather than feared."¹⁰

One of the most touching statements St. Benedict makes in the Rule is the expression of his attitude towards those who have been punished for a fault. He shows here how sympathetic he is towards weak souls, and how carefully he wants them to be treated in order to bring about their correction.

"Let the Abbot show all care and concern towards offending brethren because 'they that are in health need not a physician, but they that are sick'. Therefore, like a prudent physician he ought to use every opportunity to send consolers, namely, discreet elderly brethren, to console the wavering brother, as it were, in secret, and induce him to make satisfaction; and let them cheer him up 'lest he be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow'; but, as the same Apostle saith, 'confirm your charity towards him'; and let prayer be said for him by all."¹¹

And in closing the chapter on the concern the Abbot ought have for those who have been punished, St. Benedict recalls one of the most beautiful illustrations of tenderness in the Gospels. It seems that he is not yet satisfied that he has sufficiently stressed the importance of a sympathetic attitude towards the weak; consequently he repeats the fact that the Abbot must be sincerely concerned about those who have trans-

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., Chapter 64, p. 70

gressed.

"And let him follow the loving example of the Good Shepherd, who, leaving the ninety-nine sheep on the mountains, went to seek the one that had gone astray, on whose weakness He had such pity, that He was pleased to lay it on his sacred shoulders and thus carry it back to the fold."¹²

There is sufficient evidence, therefore, that St. Benedict wants the Abbot of a monastery to exhibit a kind, sympathetic and sincerely paternal attitude towards the members of his community. He is not to be a stern master, an uncompromising ruler, a harsh Lord; he is to be a loving father of the monastic family entrusted to him. He is to regard his subjects as dear children in whom he is to be intensely interested, and whose welfare he keeps uppermost in mind. They, on the other hand, are to have filial confidence in their superior; they should feel free to go to him for encouragement, for advice, for help. The more readily they do this, the more certain the Abbot is that he is putting into execution the ideals laid down by St. Benedict.

Everything that has been said about the Abbot regarding the possession of a kind and fatherly attitude can be applied equally well to the supervisor of young men in our boarding schools. He, too, must look upon his subjects as dear children entrusted to his care; he, too, must maintain a deeply paternal interest in each and every one of them. He must keep

¹²Ibid., p. 70

in touch with them sufficiently well to know what their needs and difficulties are, and how he can be of assistance to them. He must counsel and encourage them, knowing that many times the young need such guidance. The supervisor is in an excellent position to do this, but he must first of all win their affection and confidence, for the young generally do not confide in those whom they do not love and respect.¹³

The supervisor, therefore, must strive earnestly to acquire this paternal spirit towards those under his care. It is one of the most important requirements for success in supervision. In fact it is so essential that without it he can hardly hope to do what is expected of him. With it, he will probably not fail seriously in fulfilling the many grave obligations the office imposes on him. Furthermore, the right attitude in this respect will include in large measure the other qualities discussed in preceding chapters. The deep sense of responsibility he should possess, impartiality, caution and consideration, the right attitude towards corporal punishment and expulsion from school, prudence in speech, and charity in all his dealings, all these will flow quite naturally from a truly paternal spirit.

The supervisor who is truly concerned about taking care of youth entrusted to him according to the principles of

¹³Douglass, Earl R., "Organization and Administration of Secondary Schools", (Ginn and Company), p. 273

St. Benedict, will do well to examine himself frequently in regard to this fatherly attitude. Without this virtue he will hardly be successful, and he will undoubtedly make many mistakes. Keeping the best interests of each student always uppermost in mind, and loving each with the affection of a kind father, he will forestall numerous fatal errors and will undoubtedly prove himself a supervisor after the mind and heart of his own patron and father, St. Benedict.

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