

July 2013

Authority and Decision Making in Catholic Schools, by Richard M. Jacobs, OSA

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Recommended Citation

Lindsay, H. (2003). Authority and Decision Making in Catholic Schools, by Richard M. Jacobs, OSA. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 7 (2). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol7/iss2/9>

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BOOK REVIEWS

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AUTHORITY AND DECISION MAKING IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

RICHARD M. JACOBS, OSA, NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION, 2002.

Reviewed by Heather Lindsay

Authority and Decision Making in Catholic Schools by Richard Jacobs is the third in the Monograph Series, a series of books written to instruct Catholic school leaders. These books focus primarily on helping administrators fulfill the chief role that they bear, namely purposing, helping the school translate, “a vision about substantive purposes into concrete activities” (p. vii). The series is founded in the belief that, “when the principal and faculty communicate and enact a compelling vision of schooling that coincides with the interests of parents, pastors, and civic leaders, students benefit from the school’s program” (p. viii). In this installment, Jacobs gives his readers a clear outline of the authority that has been bestowed upon them as leaders of Catholic schools and also depicts the forms that the authority is found in. His goal is to integrate philosophy, theology, and history with the best in theory and practice.

Jacobs begins discussing authority and its need within any arena, especially that of a school. Jacobs purports that, “principals exercise authority by channeling the talents and energies of teachers and students into more positive and productive ends, which is precisely what schools exist to accomplish” (p. 7). Following the lead of Y. R. Simon in *Philosophy of Democratic Government* (1993), Jacobs claims that there are two forms of authority. Under both forms, the mature within a group lead the immature away from their own self-interests toward the common good. Sometimes the mature use authority that is more masculine, paternal as Jacobs refers to it, using brute strength to stand behind what is best for the common good. This sort of authority is more focused on justice and is referred to as the mind of faith. The mature may also use more feminine, or maternal, authority which focuses more on mercy and is the heart of faith. In order for leaders to be effective, they must balance both forms of authority, and leaders who are capable of balancing both, “offer great hope that the civic community and its members can be perfected” (p. 15). The authority, both paternal and maternal, must be substitutional, pedagogical,

practical, essential, and humble to foster the maturity of the members within the organization. Each aspect is essential when using authority to make sure that the authority does not become monarchical or anarchical.

Jacobs uses specific references to the Holy Scriptures to explain authority and its use. Examples of authority are purposefully cited from the Gospel according to Matthew; Jacobs opines that the scriptures written in Matthew were, “intended for women and men who desired to undertake an apprenticeship in the Christian way of life” (p. 35). This seems like the proper parallel to make for leaders who are looking to model their own leadership after Christ. First, the story of John the Baptist is discussed. From this story, the readers learn that authority and its practice grow first and foremost out of a deep relationship with God and must exemplify humility in ministry to the community. Next, Jacobs looks at the Sermon on the Mount claiming that the “antithesis of authentic discipleship is hypocrisy” (p. 43). Readers are encouraged to make sure that they are being authentic using words that match their actions. Last, the author looks at the commissioning of the 12 disciples and inspires all leaders to minister to the community of teachers around them.

Jacobs puts forth that theory and theological grounding, although helpful, is only part of the journey toward becoming a successful and productive leader within a Catholic school. Good leaders use authority, in all of its forms, to help in persuasion, deliberation, and propaganda for their school. Each leader is to do even more than simply enact these practices; each leader should pay attention to the other theological ideas and theories previously discussed to find a rationale for making decisions. Jacobs does offer several key areas where the day-to-day workings of the school will put these theological ideas and theories to the test. With each scenario, the leaders must keep themselves grounded in the theories in order to help create schools where teachers and students are reaching to create a better “City of Man” and “City of God” (p. 105). Jacobs encourages all leaders to focus on the two types of communion-causing communications, professional discourse and faith-forming discourse that lead all toward creating the “City of Man” and “City of God.” Jacobs states that these communications and our connectedness related around a “Christo-centric purpose – is, for Catholic educational leaders, the foundation of authority and decision making in Catholic schools” (p. 112). If leaders can successfully incorporate all that is proposed by Jacobs, they should be more solidly grounded in the philosophical, theological, and historical bases of Catholic schools and be more adept at helping their schools in meaningful purposing.

Although this book could be useful for many different groups of people, it is written especially for those interested in pursuing Catholic school administration and for neophyte administrators. The book reads fluidly, and Jacobs makes a point of helping the reader see connections between the text and real-life examples. The book is very user-friendly with room in the margin of each page to make notes related to what is written. Also included are many different guiding questions to channel the reader toward main points. Several of the guiding questions also push the reader to a more in-depth understanding of the

topic and urge the reader to decide, from his or her own experience, how this would apply to a personal situation. This journal format offers readers a place to record notes that they can refer back to in the future when mired in a complicated problem. The work also includes many text boxes where Jacobs highlights main points and gives more information on topics contained in the main body of the work.

While a wonderful resource for Catholic school educators, there are some aspects of the book that could diminish a reader's interest. Those particularly interested in a more Scripturally-based text might be disappointed. While Jacobs does offer some very insightful points regarding Scripture, he devotes even more energy to explaining connections to ancient Greek writers. This secular basis could turn away some readers who are looking to base their administrative style solely in Catholic teachings.

Knowing that the audience for this book was meant to be those new to administration, Jacobs offers a great number of examples for each of his topics. However, his level of detail and analysis can be overwhelming at times.

Overall, this text is a wonderful resource for a new administrator. It provides a concise, yet thorough, explanation of authority and its use within the Catholic school. The journal-based layout of the text provides a wonderful learning tool for its readers and the insights provided by Jacobs will allow all readers to reanalyze and strengthen their administrative style.

REFERENCE

Simon, Y. R. (1993). *Philosophy of democratic government*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. (Original work published 1951)

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