

THE GIFT OF ADMINISTRATION

by James W. Skillen



You've heard the comments and read the reports: Cory Aquino is now moving to the right in the Philippines and may not be in full control of her government. Israel's coalition govern-

ment is too divided to function effectively. Ronald Reagan allows others to do most of his administering. The South African government is gradually losing ground to both the right-wing opposition within "Afrikanerdom" as well as to the black opposition movements.

Turning from politics, we could look at corporate executives, televangelists and university presidents. In every case, the question of administrative competence and skill arises.

Whether administering a small office or a large plant, a medium-sized church or a huge corporation, the question of administrative gifts and qualifications comes to the fore. This November we will elect the next chief administrator of our republic. What qualifications are we seeking? Which *ought* we to seek? At least three characteristics are crucial to sound administration, and they are described most accurately from a Christian point of view.

First, successful administration requires that the administrator recognize that he or she is a *steward* of people and things that he/she neither creates nor fully dominates. Good administrators discover and bring out

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the best in others; they nurture and encourage communication and cooperation. Good stewards simply cannot function as autocrats, as would-be gods who imagine that the sun rises at their command. To administer means to "minister to" others, to serve them, to care for the human and natural creature that God has made.

Second, recognizing one's stewardship of people and things that God has created should lead to an attitude of *humility* in office. To be humble does not mean to be hesitant, shy, reluctant or indecisive. Rather, it means to act as an inquisitive explorer who seeks to find out how God has made His world. It means mining the insights and drawing out the wisdom that others can contribute to the job at hand.

Finally, a stewardly administrator seeks to *name* things properly. To name people begins, very simply, with discovering and identifying their talents and abilities. Just as corporate line charts and job titles permit an organization to work as an integrated unit, all the parts of any complicated thing must fit together and be allowed to fulfil their proper function. Each part has its own proper place and identity within the larger entity. This makes it crucial for administrators to properly identify the gifts of people under their stewardship.

For example, faithfully and justly administering public law 130 years ago required that slavery be abolished because the misidentification of black people as property had to be changed.

Similarly, organizations that treated people as mere extensions of machines during the height of the Industrial Revolution had to change to give greater recognition to the real identity of people, who cannot be reduced to machines.

Most important of all, perhaps, to the administrative task of naming is that it begins and ends with identifying the needs and expectations of the institution or office that one administers. Every organization has unique needs, meaning that business or military success does not necessarily qualify one to be a government administrator. A state is not a business; a school is not a law firm; a home is not a club; a church is not an industry. Many administrative failures begin when the administrator follows some grandiose dream that transgresses an institution's limits. Some Christian organizations try to do all things for all people and end up failing to do anything well.

The gift of administration is a gift of God by creation and redemption. It is a humble stewardship of naming and serving through which we help communities lift up to God the talents and resources He has given His creatures. This is not a private possession of Christians, however. Through faithful administration, Christians can help humanity understand Who really runs this world and how the ultimate Administrator wants the world to serve Him. □

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