



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States

The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
March 2014

Role or Identity (6)

Challenges of the role of priest and role of priest's wife

(4) The fourth challenge that meets the priest and his wife is the **Role Conflict**. This conflict results when an individual encounters tensions as the result of incompatible roles as each role of them has its expectations and duties that must be fulfilled. For example, a priest can encounter a conflict between his role as a priest and his role as a husband, or his role as a priest and his role as a father. Likewise, a priest's wife can face a conflict between her role as a priest's wife and her role as a wife.

But what are the domains of this role conflict? And for which things these roles compete?

A) Competition for time: The main repeated complaint of the contemporary man in general,

and the priest and his wife in particular, is the great discrepancy between the amount of the required tasks and the available time for its fulfillment. One of the basic instructions that help one to acquire the skill of time management is to set a list, in a descending order, of the more urgent tasks and more important ones then to start managing time according to this list. The repeated scenario is the recession of the requirements of the role of husband (as for the priest) for the sake of the role of the priest, as well as the recession of the requirements of the role of wife for the sake of the requirements of the role of the priest's wife. Thus, the absolute priority, regarding time scheduling, is for the ministry with all its requirements on the expense of the familial life of the priest and his family. This can make the priest more exposed to **Burnout Syndrome**, and the priest's wife to negative feelings engendered from **psychological tension and stress**.

B) Competition for needs' fulfillment: Each role required from the priest, his wife and his children has its specific urgent needs. Apart from the competition for time, discussed in the above item, there are physical and emotional needs

associated with the role of the priest and the role of the priest's wife that can contradict, in variable degrees, the same needs associated with their roles as spouses, or as parents required to fulfill the pedagogic and emotional needs of their children. In case a priest and his wife fail in keeping a good balance between the needs associated with all roles, they remain then chased all the time with a **Guilt Feeling** about being incompetent toward both the ministry and the family, or chased by the **Role of Martyr** who does not cease blaming the other for not understanding him/her nor for fulfilling his/her needs.

C) Competition for resources: Resources here mean both material and financial ones. It happens many times that a priest and his family are obliged to a situation that is characterized by limitation of both material and financial resources. This in turn challenges the natural ambition of any husband and any father about setting for his wife and children a luxurious socioeconomic state. In this case, the priest's wife and children can play the **Role of Complainer** while the priest himself can be overwhelmed by the feelings of **being a Failure**

as he feels all the time that he is incompetent to fulfill his family's needs.

D) Competition for concepts and attitudes: Sometimes, the role of the priest and the role of the priest's wife require them to adopt some concepts and attitudes that may contradict the concepts and attitudes of ordinary couples. Examples for this are the concept of love, the concept of authority and submission, the concept of freedom, the concept of sex, the concept of money, the concept of boundaries, the concept of privacy, and the attitudes towards some political and social issues...etc. This contradiction between these concepts and attitudes can cause a **Communication Problem** between the priest and his wife from one side, and the priest and his children from the other side.

There are many **examples in the Holy Bible** about this role conflict:

- Eli the priest, who had judged Israel forty years, failed to resolve the conflict between his role as a priest of the Almighty God and his role as a father. This brought upon him a great punishment from God, *"In that day I*

will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them" (1 Sam. 3:12-14).

- Samuel the prophet, when he was old he made his sons judges over Israel, *"But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice" (1 Sam. 8:3).*
- Solomon the Wise was able to achieve the balance between his role as a king of Israel and his role as a son when Bathsheba his mother came to ask him for Adonijah. He gave priority to the requirements of his role as a king to judge with truth and justice and he refused what his mother asked for and condemned Adonijah to death (1 Kings 2: 13-25).
- Solomon failed in solving the conflict between his role as a king anointed by God to rule over His people and his role as a husband to many wives. The Holy Bible reported this sad failure saying, *"For it was*

so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David" (1 Kings 11:4). This resulted in a bitter end where God ordered to tear the kingdom of Israel.

- The Lord Jesus Christ Himself gave us a clear model when a conflict happened between His role as a Teacher for the people and His role as a Son to Virgin Mary. The Virgin asked Him to fulfill the requirements of His role as a son saying, *"Son, why have you done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously" (Luke 2:48).* He then replied to her and to St. Joseph the carpenter firmly and clearly, *"Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).*

Now, a question must be asked, **how one can resolve such a conflict between roles?**

- It is necessary at first to determine clearly the tasks, requirements and needs associated with each role required from the

priest and from every member of his family. A redistribution of responsibilities must be considered from time to time.

- An open frank conversation supported with prayers in a calm atmosphere of understanding is an essential factor in avoiding many conflicts. It is necessary that everyone must adopt a flexible sacrificing attitude with good readiness to apply all the criteria of love mentioned in 1Cor.13.
- Everyone must work, as much as he can, on accomplishing the balance between the requirements and needs associated with all the roles that are required from him. One must not give priority to one role on the expense of the other. It applies here the saying of the fathers: "The intermediate way has saved many people".
- The priest's wife and his family members must accept to carry the cross and to enter through the narrow gate of the priesthood. They must hand their life including all its material, financial and psychological aspects to God Who calls to the ministry. They must obtain faith in the Owner of the

vineyard who promised to fulfill every need according to the riches of His glory.

- It is necessary to focus on the quality of giving and not on its quantity. I mean that a priest can specify just one hour per day to spend it with his family with a full presence and genuine care from his heart. This hour can be more effective and deeper than spending more time with them with a distracted mind and blunted emotions.
- A priest and his family can choose a spiritual guide who can be, for example, an elderly experienced priest whom they entrust to expose the secrets of their private familial issues. They must then be submitted to his advices with full humility and humbleness.

(to be continued)