



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States

The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
May 2014

Role or Identity (8)

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

(6) The sixth challenge that meets the priest and his wife is the **Role Distance** in which the person put an internal psychological distance between him/her and the role required from him/her. Of course this distancing is well seen in the external behavior of the person as he/she withdraws from situations imposed on him/her by the role required from him/her. This distancing from the role is considered to be a psychic defense mechanism. The cause lying behind it is that the person is **not convinced** with the role put upon him/her and feels that he/she **was obliged to accept this role** for a reason or another and that this role is not convenient to

his/her identity and does not match his/her potentialities. This distancing may be **temporary** related to specific situations or events or it may be **continuous and deep** where the internal psychological distance put by the person between him/her and the role is so huge to the degree that it amounts to what is called **Role Estrangement**. The ultimate form of role distancing is what is called **Role Denial** where the person feels that **this role is stigmatized** and as a consequence of this, he/she denies that role although he/she is still required to play it.

Jonah the prophet is the clearest example in the Holy Bible of role distancing, estrangement and denial. God charged him with the role of a prophet rebuking the people of Nineveh crying against them that their wickedness has come up before Him. But Jonah was not convinced with the requirements of this role put upon him, and he *"arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord"* (Jonah1:3) because he knew that

God *"is a gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm"* (Jonah4:2). The word flee used here denotes strongly his distancing and estrangement from the role as well as denying it. Although the great fish swallowed Jonah and God recharged him with the required task with great patience and slow anger, yet he accomplished the role required from him in an external way while his heart remained estranged from the task he fulfilled.

Priest's wife and role distancing

- It happens sometimes that the candidate person to priesthood presses his wife to accept his ordination. This pressure and nagging can also come from the side of his father of confession, her father of confession, the priest who wants him to minister with him or even from the bishop who calls him to priesthood. In such a case the wife falls into conflict where she feels that she is not ready neither to accomplish this role nor to carry this cross and enter through the narrow gate. But at the same time she feels

guilty about hindering the work of God and the ministry especially that those who surround her may continue sending guilt messages to her frequently. In such a case, the wife may be obliged under the pressure of this guilt feeling to accept the ordination of her husband pretending to be satisfied and convinced while she remains all the time in a state of estrangement from the role of priest's wife.

- It happens some other times that the role of priest's wife is connected in the mind of the wife of the priesthood candidate with negative models to which she was exposed previously in her life. For example, the role of priest's wife may be connected in her mind with controlling and authoritativeness in the service, with partiality and favoritism or with misery and wretchedness ...etc. In such a situation, she is obliged to accept the ordination of her husband but she decides to distance herself from the role of priest's wife and to be estranged from it.

- The estrangement of the priest's wife from her role manifests itself in absolute reluctance and refusal of fulfilling the requirements of this role. She even sometimes intentionally hides that she is a priest's wife in any new community she

joins. This of course engenders a lot of troubles between and her husband who does not accept her passivity, reluctance and refusal of fulfilling the requirements of her role.

Then, what is the solution?

- Prophylaxis is better than treatment. So, it is a must not to put any form of pressure on the wife of the priesthood candidate in order to push her to accept his ordination. This acceptance must not be extracted by force. God alone is capable of fulfilling His will regarding the person's call to priesthood by putting peace and joy in his wife's heart like cold dew.

- The wife who said "yes", whether with satisfaction or under pressure, must know that her denial changes nothing in the reality and does not make her irresponsible before God. Behold Simon the Cyrenian who was coming out of the country and passing by found himself compelled to bear the cross with Jesus. May be he complained from this compulsion, but certainly he later on after Jesus resurrection understood well that God allotted him specifically with an exalted honor to share in the work of redemption, and that no one has been granted

this honor except him. So, O beloved sister, let your "yes" be "yes". As long as you have put your hand to the plow, even if by compulsion, do not look back. Go on with a steadfast heart depending on God who *"has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, the weak things to put to shame the things which are mighty, the base things of the world and the things which are despised and the things which are not to bring to nothing the things that are"* (1Cor.1:27-28). Put always before your eyes the saying of the Holy Bible, **"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"** (1Cor.1:9). For repeating this verse frequently and meditating on it deeply will grant you, through the grace of God, peace in your heart regarding the role put upon you and will declare you the honor and glory of your call.

(to be continued)