



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States

The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
June 2014

Role or Identity (9)

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

(7) The seventh challenge that meets the priest and his wife is the **Role Ambiguity** in which one feels confused due to lack of clarity of the nature of the tasks he is expected to fulfill. This usually happens when there are no specific rules determining the expectations from that role. This in turn increases the feelings of strain and makes the role incumbent feels no satisfaction in performing this role. Sometimes these negative feelings associated with role ambiguity may be intense to the degree that they lead to role estrangement, role denial or even role abandonment when available (please revise the previous article).

There are **four main dimensions of role ambiguity**:

- 1) Goal/Expectation/Responsibility Ambiguity = What is expected? What should I be doing?
- 2) Process Ambiguity = How to get things done?
- 3) Priority Ambiguity = When things should be done and in what order?
- 4) Behavior Ambiguity = How am I expected to act in various situations? What behaviors will lead to the needed or desired outcomes?

God's call to Moses is a clear example in the Holy Bible about His care for His servant not to fall in role ambiguity. He showed great patience and long suffering in answering all the questions of Moses and He clarified to him all the above four dimensions.

- As regard the goal/ expectation/ responsibility: *"Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exodus3:10).*

- As regard the process: *"I will certainly be with you" (Exodus3:12); "Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say" (Exodus4:12); "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother?...Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do" (Exodus4:14-15); "And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs" (Exodus4:17).*
- As regard the priority and order: *"Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them ... Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt ... But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go...So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt ...and after that he will let you go ... you shall not go empty handed ... So you shall plunder the Egyptians" (Exodus3:16-22).*
- As regard how to act in various situations: *"And they say to me, 'What is His name?'*

what shall I say to them?" (Exodus3:13); "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you'" (Exodus4:1); "...but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus4:10).

In fact, God was keen to avoid any role ambiguity and to clarify precisely all the dimensions of the required role not only with Moses but this was also His method with Gideon, Joshua, David and Elijah; and when He called the twelve disciples and sent the seventy apostles; and when He appeared to Saul of Tarsus.

If this was God's method with the prophets and apostles, is it the same with the priest and his wife?

- **As for the priest**, the rite of his ordination is keen to clarify what he is expected to do, how to do it, what are his priorities and how

he should act in different situations. This is specifically clearer in the pledge of commitment the priest reads in the beginning of his ordination and in the catechesis the bishop says to him at the end.

- **As for the priest's wife** many people claim that her role is ambiguous. They give an evidence on this claim that the Holy Bible talks in detail about priesthood, its prerequisites and its tasks in both Old and New Testaments nevertheless it ignores to talk about the priest wife who is only mentioned in, "*And he (the high priest and the priest) shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman or a harlot, these he shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife*" (Leviticus 21:13-14). Beside the only priest's wife mentioned in the Holy Bible is Elizabeth, Zacharias' wife. Nothing is mentioned about her except, "*And they*

were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6).

But this is not true. **Far be it from God to call someone to serve Him and to leave him in ambiguity and confusion.** The adept fathers of the church who were filled with the Holy Spirit recognized this matter and set in the rite of receiving the recently ordained priest that the bishop says a specific catechesis to the priest's wife at the end of this rite in order to avoid any ambiguity she may feel towards the nature of her role. This catechesis says:

"Rejoice, O father, with this grace that God granted you. And you, O blessed daughter and partner of the faithful God's servant, accept this honor that God granted to you. You became now a helper to him in preaching the Word and in guiding the stray girls and women. Keep praying, supplicating and reading the Holy Bible. Care for the poor,

the needy and the miserable as you care for yourself. Deal with them with patience and compassion as you have become a mother to them. Establish the Dogmas in all people. Do not forget to entertain strangers because likewise were the chaste women in the past; as they were depending on God, patient, long suffering and giving thanks to Him. They were adorned with piety and obedience and were dedicated and faithful to all people. Honor all people. Be always like a fruitful vine so that God bestows you all His deep beneficences and His abundant good; and makes you like a blessed fruitful bright tree that shines with the light of virtues. We entreat Him to unite the sons of the holy church through your struggle, your love, your zeal, your compassion and your faithfulness. Thus you can gain the Joy of the eternal life, He protects you from the enemies' plots, He delivers you from every evil and He establishes you in the Orthodox

faith. That is why we double our congratulations to you with the voice of joy".

The essential dimensions of the role of priest's wife are then:

- As regard the goal/ expectation/ responsibility: "partner of the faithful God's servant".
- As regard the process:
 - 1) "Keep praying, supplicating and reading the Holy Bible".
 - 2) "Care for the poor, the needy and the miserable as you care for yourself".
 - 3) "Deal with them with patience and compassion as you have become a mother to them".
 - 4) "...because likewise were the chaste women in the past; as they were depending on God, patient, long suffering and giving thanks to Him. They were adorned with piety and obedience

and were dedicated and faithful to all people".

5) *"... through your struggle, your love, your zeal, your compassion and your faithfulness".*

- As regard the priority and order:

1) *"A helper to him in preaching the Word".*

2) *"... and in guiding the stray girls and women".*

3) *"Care for the poor, the needy and the miserable".*

4) *"Establish the Dogmas in all people".*

5) *"Do not forget to entertain strangers".*

- As regard how to act in various situations:

1) *"Honor all people".*

2) *"Be always like a fruitful vine".*

3) *"Unite the sons of the holy church through your struggle".*

What a wisdom and discernment the early church fathers obtained; those who wanted to take away any ambiguity! What a great blessing and reward God promises to give to the priest's wife on the bishop's mouth when he says to her, ***"So that God bestows you all His deep beneficences and His abundant good; and makes you like a blessed fruitful bright tree that shines with the light of virtues... Thus you can gain the Joy of the eternal life, He protects you from the enemies' plots, He delivers you from every evil and He establishes you in the Orthodox faith. That is why we double our congratulations to you with the voice of joy".***

Yes, indeed we double our congratulations to you, and we ask God to help you and to take away from you any ambiguity and confusion. Amen.

(to be continued)