



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States**

**The Monthly Message
to the Fathers, the Priests**

April 2021
Spiritual Warfare (4)

This month's message deals with the war of the rigidity and stereotyping that reject any change or improvement in service under the assumption that any change goes against the church's pristine teachings and traditions; so much so that practices become conventionalized making conventionality good and innovation bad. As the article unfolds the essence of the message will become clear.

Stereotyping Defined

By definition, stereotyping means "conforming to a fixed or general pattern or type especially when of an oversimplified or prejudiced nature." Another definition characterizes it as "frequent repetition of the same, typically purposeless movement, gesture, posture, or vocal sound or utterance." In that sense stereotyping can easily lead to a dangerous disposition known as stalemate or inertia which is a situation in which further action or progress carried out by opposing or competing parties seems impossible and in which neither side can gain an

advantage or win. Thus a tendency to do nothing or to remain unchanged becomes the norm.

Stereotyping Reviewed

Let us examine stereotyping in the light of both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament God's commands were clear "*If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity*" (Leviticus 5:17).

St. James reiterated what is written in the Old Testament, "*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all*" (James 2:10). Therefore, it is clear that the Holy book is against breaking the laws.

In the New Testament our Lord Jesus Christ made it clear that He respected and fulfilled the Old Testament laws saying:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-20).

When St. John the Baptist was reluctant to baptize His Lord and Savior, “*Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. 14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him*” (Matthew 3:13-15).

From both the Old and New Testaments, it is clear that God's laws are to be kept to the dot.

Stereotyping Rejected

There is a big difference between keeping the law and the methods of applying the law. Experts of stereotyping were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They were the most strictly rigid Jewish sects who opposed any changes allegedly complaining about everything Jesus Christ did or taught accusing Him of breaking the laws of Moses by healing on the Sabbath, and calling Himself the Son of God, “*Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.'* Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by” (John 8:58-59).

Jesus Christ was vehemently displeased with the Jewish leaders' stereotyping methods.

“*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind*

guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:23-24).

“*But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation*” (Matthew 23:13-14).

Stereotyping: Rigidity Versus Flexibility

Although the Lord Jesus Christ has emphatically stressed the importance of not breaking the commandments, yet He did not refrain from expressing His opinion concerning flexibility for the sake of practicality. “*At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, 'Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!' But He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord [b]even of the Sabbath.*” (Matthew 12:1-8).

St. Paul is also another great supporter of flexibility, “*For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you*” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

He admonished St. Timothy saying, “*Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you*” (1 Timothy 4:12-16).

Stereotyping: Constants versus Variables

Having explained the difference between stereotype and flexibility, it behooves us to examine where our church service stands between the hammer and the chisel of both.

The nature of service in the west is tremendously and holistically different from that in the motherland Egypt and the Middle East

in general. Those home countries are characterized by homogenous societies where oneness in race, color and culture is the dominant factor unlike in the west where the immigration land has become a melting pot of heterogeneous races and cultures. All of a sudden, the church is compelled to embrace everyone who comes knocking on her door seeking spiritual help and nourishment regardless of their ethnic background, education, language, work history and previous residential places. Such state of the art resembles to even an exceeding extent St. Paul's service among both Jews and gentiles. Therefore, it has become a necessary prerequisite for priests serving in the West to be fortified with wisdom and discretion in order to be able to present Jesus Christ suitably to each and every different member in their congregation.

As such it is important to distinguish between constants and variables, truths and viewpoints. Priests who are serving now in the land of immigration and especially during this era & generation of knowledge and communication tools, may find it difficult to make this transition thinking that the methods of service learned back home or earlier in their life (even few years ago) and the language, style and approach used are the only means of service and anything else is graded as sacrilegious or blasphemous at best fruitless and useless. However, that should not be the case. One constant element is what has St. Paul has recommended to the Galatians, “*For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor*

as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Galatians 5:13-15).

Stereotyping: Dangerous Consequences

While it is good to remember what we have learned from our mentors and spiritual fathers, as St. Paul has said, "*Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct*" (Hebrews 3:7); yet, when serving in a totally different medium it is very essential to seek holy wisdom and discernment in order to understand how to embrace everyone albeit their differences, remembering the book "The Five Languages of Love" which has been often mentioned in sermons and presented to spouses as a practical guide to the need of more than one method or way in conveying love, kindness and forbearance. If priests insist on one method of application as the only 'true' method, they will lose the people they are serving because those people will retreat when they see intolerance of variation and diversity which is the main trait of the present era.

Reading and studying the Holy Book of Acts and St. Paul's epistles will offer valuable lessons on safe flexibility and equip us with the art of accepting the concept of methodology innovation while still preserving the unshakable constants of our faith and dogma.

Articles on the Christian History

The Seventh Century

Islamic Invasion of Egypt

The Islamic religion appeared in the Arabian Peninsula during the first quarter of the seventh century. When Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, died in 632 AD the new religion had already gathered a number of impressive victories on the battlefield. In 632 AD wars were launched against those tribes that would quit Islam. After that a series of battles and invasions followed from 634 AD up to the end of the rule of the Umayyad Caliphate in 732 AD with the Rashidun caliphs Abu Bakr and Omar ibn al-Khattab, with Khalid ibn al-Walid as their most important military leader.

The Muslim conquest of Egypt ended the centuries long period of the Roman/Byzantine reign over Egypt (beginning in 30 BC). Byzantine rule in the country had been shaken, as Egypt had been conquered and occupied for a decade by the Sasanian Empire in 618–629 AD, before being recovered by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. The Caliphate took advantage of the Byzantines' exhaustion and captured Egypt ten years after its reconquest by Emperor Heraclius.

After the establishment of the invasion in Egypt, in his book "Conquest of Egypt" the historian Ibn Abd al-Hakam, wrote that Amr ibn al-As told his successor Umar ibn al-Khattab that the conquest of Egypt was the best assistance and power to the Muslims because of the richness of the country. The invasion of Syria was an extension of that of Egypt. Amr ibn al-As reached Sinai (al-Arish), then Bilbeis and the Babylon Fortress (present Old Cairo). The defeat of Babylon was followed by the surrender of all the other fortresses in Delta and upper Egypt. In 642 AD, the fall of Alexandria marked the completion of the total besiege of Egypt. A retreat treaty was signed with the

Byzantines and the Romans marking the end of their conquest and the beginning of that of the Muslim leaders the first of whom being Amr ibn al-As.

In her book, "The Peripheries of the Arab conquest of Egypt", Sana El Masri wrote, "Since the onset of the Arab invasion Amr realized the enormous difference between the Copts' wealth and the invaders' poverty. Therefore, he tried to change the whole picture by forcing on the Egyptians to grant each of his Muslim friends one dinar, attires and footwear in addition to the taxes that were already in place, the three-day hospitality law and a portion from their crops yield."

In his book, "Al-Mawā'iz wa-al-I'tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār" (about the planning of Cairo and its monuments), Al-Maqrizi supported the same historical tales writing, "... After the Arabs got finely dressed up with the Egyptians' expensive clothes, some of the elite Copts asked Amr's permission to be released from service and return home to their villages and families. So, Amr asked them if they liked his rules and regulations. Having no choice but to show acceptance, they were to be set free on the condition of paying two hundred thousand dinars. Ahmad Bin Yahya Bin Jabir Al-Baladhuri in his book, "Futuh al-Buldan" (page 253) supports this tale writing, "After that, according to the so called 'law of the three-day hospitality' the Copts were burdened with providing three-day lodging, food and clothing for any Muslim and his horse wherever he would be found."

Abdullah Khorshid, in his book "The Arab Tribes in Egypt" wrote that during the attack on the Babylon fortress, the

skirmishes that took place, among Az-Zubayr ibn Al-Awam, Amr ibn al-As and Sharhabil Ben Hajbah Al Muradee, clearly revealed the barrenness of their countries, their bad reputation and their piracy (page 214).

These are just historical glimpses offered in this book that relate the Islamic invasion of Egypt. It is left to the reader, if possible, to imagine the hardships inflicted on the Copts, the authentic owners of the land.

The Burning Down of the Alexandria Library

Al-Maqrizi in his book, "Al-Mawā'iz wa-al-I'tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār" (page 195) wrote "concerning the Christian library of Alexandria, Khalifa Umar Ibn Al Khattab wrote to Amr ibn al-As saying, 'If these books contain anything else other than what is written in the Quran, then they are useless; and if these books contradict what is in the Quran then they are harmful. Therefore, they should not be preserved. So, by both arguments they should be burned and abolished.'" Hence, Amr ibn al-As ordered that those very precious books be used in the bathroom fireplaces.

Gregory Bar Hebraeus known by his Syriac ancestral surname as Bar Ebraya or Bar Ebroyo, ... Abū'l-Faraj Ġrīgūriyūs bin Tājuddīn Hārūn bin Tūmā al-Malaṭī wrote, "The books were distributed among four thousand bathrooms and the burning fire lasted six months." This piece of historical event appeared in the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Eleventh Edition; but was later removed from the Fourteenth Edition. However, some Muslim scholars mentioned these atrocious incidents in their writings.