

On Corrupt Bishops

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The column that Metropolitan Georges Khodr of Mt. Lebanon wrote in the newspaper an-Nahar for October 17, 2009.

That the Bishop be Blameless

One who sees himself as nothing becomes something when spiritual men say it to him. No one approaches the divine glory by his own power. The divine glory pulls him in and if a person approaches it, he feels that he is nothing and he remains effaced in his own eyes until the Day of Reckoning. Indeed, each one of us needs to know his own talents because in this is a recognition of God's gift. But one is lost if he thinks that his talents are his own possession. They only exist on account of God's favor, which He takes back when He so wishes.

Thus in the Church of God we accept each responsibility as a gift. This is the meaning of service and service comes down to you from above. If you are entrusted with it, don't allow yourself to feel that you deserve it. This is the meaning of God's creating, that your Lord brings you into existence every day as a "new creation." If you think that you have become vessel for God, do not forget that "we have this treasure in a vessel of clay." Happy are you if you contain the treasure with which you have been entrusted and woe to you if you think yourself by your own virtue to be more than clay.

In light of this, I read the words of Paul: ***“If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work, so a bishop then must be blameless*** (1 Timothy 3:1-2).” At the moment I’m not going into the position of what today we call “bishop [*usquf*].” At the time of the writing of the epistle, the distinction between the bishop and the priest did not yet exist, or at least the arrangement of orders was not yet the same in all the churches. Nevertheless, in our reading today of the word “position of the bishop,” we must understand that it also means the position that we call in colloquial Arabic the *mutran*, which comes from the Greek *metropolite*, meaning the bishop of a major city.

Be that as it may, this does not mean that Paul was praising desire for the position of the bishop and was encouraging people to want it. It is a gift from God and desire is against divine giving. The meaning, as it appears, is that if you desire it, then know that you desire something immensely important. For this reason you must be without blame. Those with spiritual insight—and not you—will discover if you are without blame.

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As for one who has been witnessed committing a filthy act of the work of the devil, it is not permitted to pause at his name for a single moment. One who pauses for a moment has entered into his filthiness. One who is afflicted with filthiness leads in filthy things because a corrupt person is necessarily corrupting.

Among the examples of blamelessness, Paul mentions that a candidate for spiritual leadership must be ***“sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome.”*** One in whom these virtues do not abound is subject to blame. There is not space here to discuss every virtue in detail. He must be wakeful, watchful of himself, possessing self-control. This condition is so that he may wake others to adopt the path of the Lord. No one sleeps in the Church, so there must be wakefulness in prayer and attentiveness to it and love for all people and the unity of the Holy People of God in repentance and constant

sacrifice for our brothers. But as for those who snore, the Church is no one's bed.

I move now to the man's being a good teacher, as Christianity is knowledge and teaching, since "***In the beginning was the Word.***" The church that is satisfied with rituals of which no one understands anything is worthless. One who was not given the gift of teaching and preaching is not worthy to be thought of for the position of priest or bishop. Such a one should be content to be a cantor or a silent monk or a servant in the temple, and these are blessed responsibilities, those of us who are appointed to them are content with them. Christianity is the explanation of the Holy Bible and the acts of worship and the tradition. Their study is at all levels and lasts a lifetime. If an ordinary believer is demanded to confess with his tongue, as the Apostle says, then it's even more appropriate for a servant of the Word, as we call him during his ordination, to testify to this Word. For this reason, our Church of Antioch requires that one who advances to the episcopate must have perfected his theological knowledge and have kept company with scholars. A mute has no vocation in the Church, even if his holiness is loftier than all those who hold positions. When some faithful brought a man to John Chrysostom in order for him to make him a priest, he asked them what they knew about him. They said that he was pious. He replied that this is not enough, since all Christians must be pious. He must be knowledgeable.

"Not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome," since the Lord said, ***"learn from Me, for I am humble and lowly in heart."*** Why did the blessed Lord choose these two virtues to describe himself? Because they are the loftiest. Only if you are lowly will God raise you and will you by your lowliness raise others. Only if you have desired humility and lived it will you go to that sacrifice to which the Savior went.

I do not know the semantic difference between kindness and humility. In the epistle to the Galatians, the Apostle mentions kindness and humility together and makes them fruits of the Holy Spirit in us. If we relate this to previous words of his, we understand that the Spirit of God produces in us a spiritual way of life.

Since Paul said that the bishop should not be quarrelsome, in my meditating on this in a number of matters, **I have discovered that the sharpest rebuke for a believer is one that is not accompanied by anger and that the best thing is to remind him, if he's overcome with anger, because reminding is a return to God, both for yourself and for the one you're reproaching.**

When the Bible says that the bishop should be without blame, it means that such a person exists, and that there are some matters that one can't play around with. Those who are responsible must examine, shine a close light on, and study in detail the life of the one that they nominate and elect. They must set up barriers to advancement to lofty stations. Barriers mean that you do not make a blameworthy man a deacon, and if you made a mistake in ordaining him, he should not advance to the priesthood. If you make a mistake, he should not then advance to the episcopate. A worthless episcopacy subjects the church -which that bishop tends- to worthlessness. One who loves money causes those who engage in bribery to approach the leader, and likewise robbers, and so the temple becomes a den of thieves.

Because the canons of the Church recognize that it is possible for these sins to occur, they mention the judgment of priests and metropolitans and sometimes as a result of this, defrocking, that is, expulsion can occur. For me, the Church which does not judge cannot determine virtue. The Church is the place in which we are purified. Jesus wanted us to be purified through the apostles and the successors to the apostles. **The corrupt are successors to their sins and not to the saints.**

Reform in the Church starts with its leaders. The Church does not wait a long time for its priests and bishops to repent. She does not let the evil of those who have had a great fall to get out of control. Its end result is expulsion.

Saint Basil the Great once defrocked a priest because he committed adultery. After many years, this priest was at a funeral. He approached the casket and touched the dead man and the dead

man rose. He went to Basil and said to him, "Do you need a greater sign than this of the holiness that I have acquired in order to send me back to my flock?" Basil replied, "Your holiness is between you and God, but I cannot return you to your flock because you scandalized them. It is not right for you to go to them again."

Who will give us the like of Basil the Great so that we feel that the group we are a part of is truly the Church of Christ?

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