

## **Text 7: The Priests**

### **Priesthood, Vocation, Training and Pastoral Service**

#### **Introduction**

1. I thank their Excellencies Bishops Robert Shaheen and Gregory Mansour and the organizing committee of this encounter particularly Father Alfred Badwi, pastor of the Chicago parish, for inviting me to participate in the discussion of the topics which are all derived from the Patriarchal Maronite Synod. This Synod was concluded less than a month ago and the task of implementing its recommendations and decrees in the various Maronite eparchies and institutions has already begun. The effort you are exerting in this encounter, with His Beatitude Patriarch Nasrallah Peter Sfeir is blessed through his personal participation, and the best way to initiate this implementation.

2. Before beginning the discussion of these topics: I would like to make two general remarks which concern all the topics that will be discussed in this encounter.

- The first remark, the patriarchal synod focused in all its studies on three central points in each topic: the first point dealt with the past history, analyzed the present and forecast the future from the mere Maronite point of view. For, the Synod did not want to repeat the teaching of the Universal Church about the topics under consideration, but wanted to put in evidence the maronite characteristics of these subjects in order to create general knowledge in the maronite and impress their mind with their identity, leading them to the renewal and to fulfill their role and their mission in the heart of the Church and the world.
- The second remark. The fathers of the synod insisted that the synodal texts, recommendations and decisions be implemented and gather dust on the shelves of libraries. Many expressed this belief knowing full well that our Church is in need of more actions than words. This method is being used for the first time in synodal texts. We hope that it will be a good initiative which will help the implementation of the synod and the spreading of its texts in the parishes among the faithful.

3. Now we come to today's subject which is the theology of the priesthood: the maronite concept of the priesthood is based on the service and leadership in the general Christian community.

The seventh text of the Synod dealt with this subject. There is no need to restate here its content, because you read it in its English translation. However, I will use it as a point of reference according to the following outline:

1. The meaning of the priesthood in the Maronite Church.
2. The meaning of service and leadership in the Christian community.
3. Intercalated subjects: the choice, the education and the married priest.

4. The essential elements of successful priestly service (bond with the bishop (Church), with the priests (the priestly body), with the community (Role and mission of the laymen).
5. Conclusion.

### **First: The Maronite understanding of the priesthood**

4. To define the meaning of the priesthood as understood by the Maronites we need to consult the liturgical books, particularly the ordination ritual and the Synod of Lebanon held in 1736 with the heritage that it transmitted to us.

#### **1- Meaning of the word “Priesthood”**

5. It is noteworthy that our Syriac Antiochene Maronite heritage distinguishes in the priesthood between two terms, each of which has a specific meaning. The Arabic “*Kahnoot*”, or priesthood, is either derived from the “Syriac *Kahnouto*, meaning, consecration, service of Mass and offering of sacrifice”, or from the Syriac term *Kohinouto*, meaning prosperity and development<sup>1</sup>. The Arabic word “*Kasouseya*” is derived from the Syriac word “*Kashishouto*” and means serving the people and leading the community<sup>2</sup>.

The use of the two words together in the liturgical sources prove their complementary relation in the person who receives the priesthood; this complementary relation is similar to the one that exists in the person of the unique and eternal Christ, the source of all priesthood whether in the Old or New Testament. Consequently, this is why the priest is called upon to commit himself to faithfully live the spirituality of his priesthood and what the service of the priesthood requires from him.

In the different orders of the Church, the Book of Ordination uses the Arabic word *Sharteounia* and *Kheirotonia* in Syriac, which are taken from the Greek word *Kairotonia* which means the ‘laying on of hands’. This book also uses the word *Syamid* in Arabic, which is taken from the Syriac *Syiom Edo*, which also means the ‘laying on of hands’.

This ‘laying on of hands’ means the call upon God’s grace and upon the gift of the Holy Spirit that will instill the priesthood and the episcopate in the candidate<sup>3</sup>.

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1. Patriarch Doueihy says, “What the Lord said holds true: “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?” (Matt. 24:45). Refer to Patriarch Estephan Doueihy, **The Lighthouse of Sanctifications**, vol. I, published by Rasheed Al Shartouni, Catholic Press, Beirut, 1895, The Third Lighthouse, pp. 201-202

2. Patriarch Estephan Doueihy, **Explanation of the Consecrations and the Xerotonia**, published by Rasheed Al Shartouni, Catholic Press, Beirut, 1902, p. 130.

3. Refer to Patriarch Estephan Doueihy, **Explanation of the Consecrations and the Xerotonia**, published by Rasheed Al Shartouni, Catholic Press, Beirut, 1902, pp. 89-90, 129-133. Refer also to **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, prayers of the laying on of hands before anointment with the chrism.

## 2- The Nature of the Priesthood

6. The nature of the priesthood in our Syriac Antiochene Maronite heritage is derived from the Holy Bible and is shown in our rites and our liturgical books. This is mainly due to the fact that the liturgy, which has always marked the faith of the children of our Church, is a pulpit for teaching from which the holy books are read, explained and thoroughly meditated, prayed and chanted. It revolves around the person of Christ, the only Son of God, in his work of salvation, which is presented to us by the Holy Spirit.

Thus, according to our understanding, it stems from “Jesus our God who is the only source and principle of the priesthood because he is the High Priest of our confession” (Heb. 3/1)<sup>4</sup>. He is the source of every priesthood, whether in the Old or in the New Testament. Thus, the priests who were before him prefigured him and were sanctified by him and the priests who came after him were established by him and served also through him.

In the priesthood that preceded the advent of Christ, our tradition points to three main types of priesthood which all stem from Christ the only “High Priest” and are fulfilled in him:

- The priesthood of Adam “whom God has fashioned since the beginning to sing his praises and to give him thanksgiving on behalf of all creatures”; he has established him master of all creation, making him High priest and king”<sup>5</sup>.
- The priesthood of Melchizedek who “was priest of God the Most High” (Gen. 14/18) “like the Son of God. He remains a priest forever” (Heb. 7/3)<sup>6</sup>.
- The priesthood of Aaron whom Moses established for the Jewish people so that he may offer sacrifices to God<sup>7</sup>.

7. As for the priesthood established by the “One and Eternal Priest”, Jesus Christ, for the service of the sacerdotal people -the Church- it is the Messianic priesthood. It is the priesthood initiated by Christ before time and fulfilled by Him through his incarnation and crucifixion; thus, completing the priesthood of the Old Testament. He is still completing this priesthood while sitting at the right hand of his Father always interceding for us (Heb. 7/25). It is the priesthood that becomes in Christ the oblation of the Eucharist, where Christ, the Son of God, who became man, and offers His human self as an offering to his Father and as redemption for humanity. This is

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4. Refer to the **Prayer of Ordinance**, Wednesday night, *Sedro* of the third stand, and the Sunday of the Priests in the opening prayers and in the *Husoyo*

5. This is the “natural priesthood”. Refer to the **Divine Offices**, in the *Sogito* of Friday morning and the *sogito* of Monday evening. And, **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, in the prayers of the laying on of hands before anointment with the chrism.

6. Refer to **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, and the **Divine Office on the Morning of the Sunday of the Priests**, and the **Book of Mass** in the last blessing on feast days; and the **Book of Letters**, the reading of May 15 and July 16.

7. The “Torah Priesthood” of service. Refer to the **Ancient Book of Mass**, incense of Aaron. The **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, *Stronen* before *Husoyo* hymn.

the “true priesthood”, that is the only one that achieved a genuine and final mediation between God and men<sup>8</sup>.

It is the priesthood that God passed on through Christ to the bridal Church through the power of the Holy Spirit, and continues in the Church through the Apostles and their successors, the bishops, who in turn entrust it to “those who are worthy so that they may serve the Trinity in purity and give themselves totally to it all the days of their lives”<sup>9</sup>. He handed it first to “Simon the chief of the disciples, and through him to the Church forever”<sup>10</sup>, then to the “disciples and from them to the Church”<sup>11</sup>. The disciples had “deacons, priests and chief priests” who “unworthily accepted the priestly authority”<sup>12</sup>.

### 3- The Identity of the Service of the Priesthood

8. Our Lord Jesus Christ “whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world” (Jn. 10/36) “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20/28). He united His mysterious body with his priesthood in such a way that all believers become a sacred and kingly priesthood. He then established among them servants who enjoy the power of the sacred priesthood, exercising officially in his name his redemptive mission among people, serving them as teachers, sanctifiers and administrators.

The priest, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, which he receives from the bishop through the laying on of hands and through the service he is given, participates in the priesthood of Christ entering thus into a special and unique partnership with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: the Father sends him through the Son to live and work with the power of the Holy Spirit to serve the Church and to bring about salvation to the world. The priest participates in the mission of the bishop in a way that links him permanently to him, in such way that he becomes his assistant in the service that he has conferred on him. Hence, the priest is entrusted with the “deposit” which he received from the Trinity itself through the Holy Church “for her firm up building and for the glorification of the Holy Trinity”<sup>13</sup>; and for spreading the Good News, for service of the altar and the people entrusted to his care. He becomes a member of the priestly body, that the Church likes to call the “Children of service”; for they are the ones Christ sanctified them, adorned them, perfected them, chosen them and entrusted them with the divine mysteries and the treasures of the kingdom giving to them the keys of these treasures that they may distribute them to the needy”<sup>14</sup>.

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8. Refer to the **Divine Offices**, the eve of the Sunday of Priests: opening prayer and the hymn of ‘*Am Khalhoon Shmayooneh* and *Sogito*, and the *Fashito* hymn in the morning.

9. **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, prayers of the laying of the hands.

10. Ibid., *Husoyo*

11. Ibid., The Melody of Stronen

12. Ibid., the Prayer of Chrism

13. **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, prayers for the vesting of the new priest with the stole of priesthood.

14. **Divine Offices**, in the third rising of Wednesday night and Friday and in the Evening Prayer of the Sunday of the Priests; in the **Book of Mass**, the *Husoyo* of the Sunday of Priests where we read that Christ is the “glorifier of priests. He sanctified them to serve His mysteries full service”, and in the *Husoyo* of the Mass of the Twelve Apostles.

#### 4- “The Trust of the Word” or the Service of the Good News

9. By the nature of his priesthood, the priest is an entrusted person to the service of the Word and to the proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom. He unites the people of God first by the word of the living God, which they are entitled to fully receive from the priest<sup>15</sup>; he also preaches to everybody the Good News of the Gospel in order to form the people of God and to nourish them in fulfillment of God’s command “Go out into the whole world and preach the Good News to all people” (Mk 16/15). For this reason the priest centers his service on deeply understanding God’s word so that he can proclaim it and preach it at any occasion. This profound understanding makes the priest a “teacher”, who dedicates his life to the studying of the word of God and to presenting it intact to the people<sup>16</sup>. Whenever he openly preaches the Mystery of Christ to the faithful or even to those outside the faith, or when he presents the catechism or explains the doctrines of the Church, he is not preaching his own wisdom, but the wisdom of the word of God.

By doing this, he serves the true, divine message of God “and confirms and preserves the Church”<sup>17</sup> by living, understanding, and bearing witness to the mystery of God’s salvific plan. According to Syriac theology, the Church herself is the community of this salvific plan.

#### 5- “The Trust of the Sanctification” or the Service of the Altar and the Divine Mysteries.

10. The priest is the man of the altar and is the one entrusted with its Divine Mysteries. His service is “like a trust that the Church” handed over to him on the day of his ordination. What is noteworthy in the rite of ordination is the close link established between the priest and the altar, in such a way that he “engages himself to the altar of the town Church assigned to him. During the prayer of the laying on of hands, the bishop repeatedly lays one hand on the mysteries and one on the head of the chosen one<sup>18</sup>.”

The priest is also the middle man, so to speak (mes’oyo). God sets him in His House between Him and His people through the power of the Spirit, which he constantly invokes<sup>19</sup>. Like his Lord, and in his name he stands in the middle. He addresses God in the name of the people and the people in the name of God. He follows the community closely he is from and works in as much as he follows Christ the Only Eternal Priest, whom he incarnates in the middle of the community to whom he distributes the Mysteries and the treasures of His Kingdom. He is the man of kinship *par excellence*. He stands in Holies of Holies on behalf of the people; he is the intercessor, and for God, he is the man of praises. He is entrusted with his own sanctification

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15. Cf. 1 Timothy 4: 11-13; 2 Timothy 4: 5; Titus 1” 9.

16. **Book of Mass: Husoyo** from the Sunday of the Righteous and the Just.

17. **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, prayers of the laying on of hands

18. Ibid., **Xeirotonia**, the prayer of divine grace and the laying on of hands

19. The priest “is set in the middle between God and His people. He accepts the offering of the people and raises his prayers to Heaven. He calls upon the Holy Spirit in private and receives it in public through the bread and the Chalice of Salvation. The sinners, thus, come forth and take the flesh and the blood and are cleansed from their sins”. **Divine Office**, on the evening of the Sunday of the Renewal of the Church, *Mshiho Natirē L’Eedtokh* hymn.

and with the sanctification of his parishioners. He is the one who dedicated his life to serve “the Holies to the holies”. How worthy for him to draw the holiness from the one who is the source of holiness, from the one who has chosen, called and consecrated him for the service of His people “with perfection, purity and sanctity”<sup>20</sup>.

## 6- “The Trust of Ministering” or the Pastoral Service of the people of God

11. The priest is entrusted with “the grace and mercy of the Only Son”<sup>21</sup>, with the function of ministering and caring for his people “like Peter, the head of the Apostles”<sup>22</sup>. The priest heads them to the community of believers in the name of Christ the Head. He assembles the people of God in the name of the bishop and leads Christ in the Spirit to God the Father. He participates in his pastoral care and in the firm up building and preservation of the Church. He is the “minister and Shepherd” who was established by Christ to tend his people and shepherd his rational flock”<sup>23</sup>. He is the one who “struggles on its behalf”, its “guardian”<sup>24</sup>, the “physician who treats it” and “the faithful steward” (Mt. 24/45-51), and the “talents trader who will be asked to give on account of them”(Mt. 25/14-30)<sup>25</sup>.

In addition to caring for all of his sheep, the priest, like His Master, cares for those whom God has graced with a special love and called them his little brothers namely the sinners, the sick, the poor, the prisoners, the oppressed, the cast outs, and especially the dying so that God can give them strength. He also cares for families, married couples, the youth and the children and provides them with education so as to reach Christian maturity. He also cares for those who are alienated from the Church or those whose faith is still new and introduces them to Christ and brings them closer to Him.

12. Addressing pastoral care and ministering to God’s people leads us to deal with the understanding of the word leadership as it is suggested in the proposed title.

Without doubt this word is new, but its meaning is implied in expressions used in determining the role of the priest and bishop in ministering to the church of God. For the terms, pastor, steward, head and minister and their synonyms imply the meaning of leadership in its ecclesial conception which is bound to the service and pastoral care of the congregation. The priest, through ordination, was given the authority for the glorification of God and the up building of the Church (see in the ordination rite, the prayer that accompanies the vestment).

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20. **Book of Mass**, prayer before Communion.

21. **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, Hesoyo.

22. The **Book of Ordinance**, Hesoyo of the Sunday of Priests.

23. **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, prayers of the laying on of hands; Book of Mass; the *Etro* prayer in the Sunday of the renewal of the Church.

24. **The Funeral of Priests**, *Kikro* hymn.

25. **The Funeral of Priests**, hymn of *lal min shoufra*; **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, in the *Husoyo*, the prayer of ordination, Book of Ordinance, hesoyo of the morning of the Sunday of Priests. These two texts of Mathew are the most cited in the Maronite liturgy and in the Syriac liturgy.

However, leadership in its modern understanding implies skill and technical knowledge in addition to the human gifts endowed by the priest needed so that the divine grace that he received through the laying on of hands bears fruit in the life of the Christian Community.

The priest is to separate his spiritual authority from the secular authority. To avoid falling in this trap, let him cast off the spirit of domination and of acting alone, and instead be humble and cooperate with others, discovering the talents of others and using them in building individuals and the Christian Community.

Following the central topic of the synod, and after explaining the concept of priestly service, we must now review its development starting with the past until today in an attempt to forecast what it will become in the future.

## **Second: The Priestly Service in the Tradition of the Maronite Church**

### **1- In the Past**

13. In our traditions, the priest found it easy to live his priesthood according to the Syriac Antiochene spirituality that nourished him everyday in his liturgical and spiritual life. He “sang the chorus, recited the daily prayers, celebrated Mass and never left out any particular prayer of the liturgical year”<sup>26</sup>.

The priest was a part of the town and its inhabitants, in it he had his house and his family, for he often was married and worked his fields. He was always present in the parish and shared the joys, sorrows, occasions, and work of the inhabitants. This presence played a great role in the priest’s pastoral teaching sanctifying and ministering service. In addition his religious and social status made him an important reference to the parishioners whether they were Maronites or non-Maronites, Christians or Muslims<sup>27</sup>.

In the practice of his pastoral service, the priest found in the texts of the Lebanese Synod, as well as in others, what he had to do to be a true shepherd and not a hired hand.

In his teaching service, he should have enough “books that will allow him to fulfill his teaching obligations towards his parishioners, such as guidance, exhortation and teaching catechism to children”. He had to gather the people and the children near the church “below the oak tree” “to teach them the principles of reading and writing in both Syriac and Arabic”. He did this since he often was the most learned person among his parishioners, when only a few were able to read and write. He had to “accurately preserve the records (where the baptized, the

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26. **The Lebanese Synod**, section III, ch. 2, item 9. Najm Press, p. 332.

27. We have an accurate description from missionaries and orientalists that depict how priests, deacons and monks practice their pastoral service. For example, Fr. Dandini the Jesuit, Fr. Richard Simon the Jesuit who translated the trip of Fr. Dandini to Mount Lebanon into French (1596-1598), Fr. Oger Roger the Capuchin (17th century), Fr. Sylvester De Saint Anian (17th century), Laurent Darfio, the French Consul (1679-1683), and others. Refer to these texts in: Fr. Youakim Moubarak, **The Quintet of Antioch-Maronite Dimensions**, part I, vol. II, the Lebanese Seminar, Beirut, 1984, pp. 805-877.

betrothed, the married and the dead are registered), the books and the title deeds; and he copied books in Arabic and Syriac”<sup>28</sup>.

In his sanctification service, he had to “offer Mass on behalf of his parishioners, to strengthen with the word of God and to distribute the Sacraments. Thus, he gave them the Holy Communion, he listened to confessions, he blessed marriages and betrothals, he baptized children, he anointed the sick with Holy Oil, and celebrated funerals”<sup>29</sup>.

In his ministering service, the priest, “servant of the parish” to whom the care of the souls is entrusted, had to know his parishioners and to care for them like a father, and for the poor and needy; this had priority over all other works. Finally he had to offer in his life the “example of good deeds”<sup>30</sup>.

As for his livelihood, the Lebanese Synod recommends that “the bishop should provide the priest and his assistants with enough income either from the income of the parish or from the money of believers who have to provide priests with enough income for their livelihood” whether the priests were married or celibate<sup>31</sup>.

14. The deacon also succeeded in his service and in following the footsteps of Christ the Servant. His duties included assisting the priest on the altar and the bishop in the service of love and charity. The Lebanese Synod specifies that the deacon should, “serve the priest at the altar and incense the church and the people, should read the letter of Paul and the Bible out loud, should present the sacred bread and wine to the altar, should distribute the Eucharist to the deacons, sub deacons, and the people, he should baptize in the absence of the bishop and the priest, after receiving permission from them, should preach the Good News to the people; and by permission from the bishop should be the treasurer of the church”<sup>32</sup>.

It should be noted that priests-monks used to undertake the mission of pastoral service in the churches of their monasteries or in assisting priests whenever the need arose. But, their service witnessed an important development after the monastic reform which took place towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and after the promulgation of new laws for monks and monasteries that were confirmed by Pope Clement XII<sup>33</sup>, adopted by the Lebanese Synod<sup>34</sup>. This Synod

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28. *Ibid.*, part III, ch. III, item 4 & 5. Najm Press, p. 330.

29. *Ibid.*, part III, ch. III, item 4 & 5. Najm Press, pp. 332-333.

Also refer to the Synod of Qannoubeen 1580 which states on “the servant of the Sacrament, which is the priest who has the right to grant the Sacrament: it is he who baptizes, and he has the power to tie and untie through the gift granted to him, for he was chosen to be the Shepherd of souls in his parish and church”. (Can. 3 On Baptism, Can. 3 On Confession).

30. *Ibid.*, part III, ch. III, item 2. Najm Press, p. 327.

31. *Ibid.*, part III, ch. III, item 3. Najm Press, p. 329.

Also in the second section, chapter 14, Najm Press, p. 243, we read, “when ordination bound the clergyman to the authority of the bishop who ordained him and to his power, such as he had no right to do anything related to divinity without prior consent of the bishop. Each clergyman was related to a specific church where he had the right to take decision, serve according to his degree and ensure his livelihood”.

32. Part III, ch. II, item 4. Najm Press, pp.312-313.

33. Bull entitled “The Apostolic Service”, dated March 31, 1732.

34. Part IV, ch. II, Najm Press, p. 459-499.

ordered that “the bishop entrusts monasteries or priest-monk with the service of souls only when there is a dire need for that and when secular priests are not available”<sup>35</sup>; it also ordered the monks to not distribute sacraments “without the permission of the bishop or the servant of the parish”<sup>36</sup>.

## 2- In Present Times

15. In present times, rapid social, economic, cultural and pastoral changes are taking place. The most important of these are:

- a Wave of migrations from mountains to cities, the adoption of new modes of life, the migration of Maronites to new countries and their adoption of new cultures, traditions and modes of life of these countries.
- the development of social life whereby people became closer to one another and live in a society more open to the diversity of confessions, religions, cultures, political tendencies, intellectual trends and social status.
- cultural, scientific and technological development, and the emergence of the phenomenon of globalization, modern communication; the spread of intellectual and ideological trends, in addition to cults and sects<sup>37</sup>.

All of these transformations and others have contributed in changing the reality of the parish and in changing the concept of pastoral service. They drove our Church, which is incarnated in the world, to take into consideration and bring about new methods to help her to read the signs of the times through the inspiration of the Spirit; and to continue its special mission in serving the Good News and in fulfilling the salvational work of God in the new places she is found. They also motivated priests to find new dimensions for their tripartite pastoral service through which they can become a live and transparent image of Christ, the Good Shepherd.

16. In the service of education, we notice today that a good number of priests are not content anymore with the education they have received in the seminary or in the school of theology. They are now searching to further their education in human, theological and biblical sciences in order to deepen their spiritual, ecclesiastic, human, and pastoral culture and to cater to the growing needs of their people. Hence, they began to teach and to guide not only through preaching but also through biblical evenings held at homes, and through the participation, movements, apostolic organizations, schools and different guiding councils. In this work, they recur to the assistance of monks, nuns, committed laity and educators in specialized centers. On the other hand, they participated in seminars and spiritual retreats to deepen their relation with Jesus Christ, the Only and Eternal Priest and the Good Shepherd, to renew their commitment to

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35. Part IV, ch. II, item7. Najm Press, p. 466.

36. *Ibid.*, item 8. Najm Press, pp. 466-467.

37. For more explanation refer to the text of the **Parish and Pastoral Work** from the proceedings of this Synod

living the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Prayer, since they do not have enough time to do that in their daily life.

In order to answer a deeper spiritual need, some met outside the monthly diocesan meeting, in priestly communities within a sector in the diocese or became members of local or international priestly or religious associations and are living their openness to the Universal Church.

Since our priests today, married or single, have become similar in their human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral capacities and are working in the same social circumstances, but are often submerged by the pastoral concerns and do not allocate enough time for continuous education or often do not have the necessary material means to buy books and magazines; and since they are asked to bear the responsibility entrusted to them in the name of ministerial service and in the name of the basic right of the people of God to benefit from the Word of God, the Sacraments and the service of love, which are the basic elements that the priest cannot neglect, it was imperative to provide them with continuous education.

17. In the service of sanctification, we notice that priests are endeavoring to meet the growing needs of their parishioners. They celebrate the Holy Eucharist on a daily basis with their people and for their people. We find them in many of the parishes preparing the Mass with the believers and allowing them to participate in the celebration. Thus, liturgical committees and choirs become active, apostolic movements grow and active participation is enhanced. As for the remaining Sacraments, we find them asking the help of religious men and women, especially of the laity, in order to establish specialized committees to undertake the tasks of preparing for the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, or for preparing for the celebrations of first communions that are taking place in the parishes nowadays, or for preparing for marriage or for visiting the sick. Yet, this participation does not exempt the priest from assuming full responsibility in following the believers and conferring the Sacraments despite his busy schedule and limited time.

18. In the ministering service, we find that priests are attempting to face the new pastoral status quo reflected in the increase of the size of parishes and the number of their inhabitants and in the fact that many priests do not live in their parishes. Thus, they are trying to find new ways of getting acquainted with their parishioners, listening to them, following up on them and supporting them in all circumstances. They are working in an apostolic spirit to provide care for those in need of love that is the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, the unemployed, and those burdened with family, social, and economic problems. In this, they seek the help of family committees and committees in the service of charity. They also try to benefit from the use of the computer, the internet, the press, and the media (TV) in order to expand the network of communication with their near, distant, and migrant parishioners, to follow up on their news and to provide them with news about their parish and their fellow parishioners.

As for the material life and for ensuring decent living for the priests, we find that most of them have a decent standard of living. This is due to the fact that believers are still contributing to the salary of the priest; and some dioceses have begun establishing social cooperative funds to ensure social security and pensions for their elderly priests.

Yet, due to the growing social needs, some priests are concerned and search for jobs that might help them ensure a living, and provide for their families if they are married. Often these jobs are in the teaching domain, which provides them with a salary and a means of completing their teaching service. They also prefer teaching in the schools of the diocese so that they can stay in touch with their parishioners and secure, at the same time, their national security coverage, a pension, and the right of enrolling their children in schools at lower fees.

In the face of this state of affairs, and in the face of the growing needs and the multiplication of tasks undertaken by the priest, some voices are calling for the revival of the diaconal service. The dioceses of the countries of expansion, especially in the United States, were the pioneers in launching such an initiative. Hence, they reinstated the tradition of the ordination of permanent deacons and sub deacons, most of whom are married. By doing so, they probably followed in the footsteps of the Latin Church, which revived the diaconate service after Vatican II. Yet, this was primarily done in order to cater to the pastoral needs and provide a more comprehensive service for Maronites in the countries of expansion.

This drove Pope John Paul II to encourage the Catholic patriarchs and bishops of Lebanon “to revive the status of the permanent diaconate and to provide these deacons with a proper education and a decent standard of living that is on par with their personal status”<sup>38</sup>.

19. As for monk-priests, they are still present in abundant numbers and are committed to the pastoral service in the dioceses of the Patriarchal see and the dioceses of the countries of expansion. They share the responsibilities and concerns of parish priests and provide pastoral service within the monastic community through which they preserve the spiritual benefits and statutes of monastic life.

It is worth noting that many monk-priests serve the parishes, commit themselves to accompanying and guiding the apostolic movements and organizations, especially those concerned with the youth, and manage along with consecrated men and women different institutions, such as schools, hospitals and orphanages. Thus, they are providing abundant services and are enriching the Church with their special gifts and talents.

If some bishops and parish priests are suffering from a crisis in their relation with monk-priests vis-à-vis the determination of pastoral duties and the implementation of the ecclesiastical decrees ratified by the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches<sup>39</sup>, love remains the strongest and through it we will be able to find solutions within the ecclesiastical institutions.

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38. **Apostolic Exhortation, New Hope for Lebanon**, item 63.

39. Refer to Canons 415, 282, and 284.

## Third: Intercalated Subjects

### 1- The Choice, the Vocation, and the Education

#### 1.1- In the Past

20. In the traditional practice of the Church, vocation to the service of priesthood, which is different than a monastic vocation, required that parishioners meet whenever a new spiritual need arose in order to choose an appropriate person from among them to perform the needed priestly service. This person should have the necessary qualifications and characteristics acknowledged by everyone, whether he was married or single. Finally, they would present him to the bishop.

According to the *Book of Al-Hoda*, choosing candidates for the priesthood was usually done on the basis of the “trust of priests and the elderly, as well as on the trust and consent of the parishioners and after receiving their signatures. This method was adopted so as to avoid any schism within the community that might affect the church”<sup>40</sup>.

Patriarch Doueihy confirms this procedure by saying that the “community of believers wants the ordination to be done on the hand of the parishioners so that they may examine the ordained and call for him”<sup>41</sup>.

In the rite of ordination, the archdeacon or the sponsoring priest presents the elected individual to the bishop in the name of the community of believers who have chosen him and who bears the responsibility of presenting him.

In pastoral practice, the established general rule is for the people to choose the one who is fit to serve their ecclesiastic needs according to the required conditions<sup>42</sup>.

21. Regarding the qualifications and the required characteristics, the choice of the people was subject to measures and conditions set by the canons. The most important among these are:

- human, intellectual and spiritual growth: This means that the chosen one should be in his thirties<sup>43</sup>, should follow in the footsteps of the Savior who revealed himself to the world at the age of thirty and began to educate people. The chosen one should be at least “twenty-five years of age so that churches will not be offended with the lack of priests”<sup>44</sup>. He “should be learned, and experienced in ministering service”<sup>45</sup>, “he should be well-versed in

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40. **The Book of Hoda**, published by Abbot Boutros Fahed, Aleppo, Maronite Press, 1935, p. 179.

41. Patriarch Doueihy, **Explanation of the Consecrations**, *ibidem*, p. 211.

42. As a Jesuit Father says in 1845: “Here, according to the general rule, the lay is not elevated to the order of priest unless the people present him to the bishop. This rule does not accept any exception with respect to the priests who undertake the mission of serving souls. Refer to: P. Louis-Xavier ABOUGIT, letter à Mgr. Mislin, Camérier de S.S. Pie IX, in : **Recueil de lettres intitulées Mission de Syrie**, B.N. Paris. 1854.

43. **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, introduction of ordination.

44. Patriarch Doueihy, **Explanation of the Consecrations**, p. 186. **The Lebanese Synod**, part II, ch. XIV, item 26, Najm Press, p. 256.

45. Patriarch Doueihy, **Explanation of the Consecrations**, p. 186. Cited from **the Book of Hoda**, Fahed, p. 179.

rhetoric and science; he should be pious and should seek God's help to remain celibate and abstinent"<sup>46</sup>.

- good reputation and character among relatives and strangers: "He should perform good deeds and steer away from evil. He should be humble and modest, not violent and inclined to lose his temper. He should not be an alcoholic and a seeker of petty gains. He should be content, calm, polite, hospitable, etc. Close acquaintances and people from outside the church should attest to his conduct"<sup>47</sup>.

All of the above conditions are established "according to the requirements of the priesthood and each the need of the community of believers and the administration of holy sacraments"<sup>48</sup>.

The bishop confirmed this choice after a thorough examination and would send the chosen person, who perhaps had never thought of priesthood before, to a good priest or to a monastery or to a seminary to receive the proper spiritual, theological and intellectual education.

Then he convoked him in the name of Divine Grace and ordained him a priest through the laying on of hands—on the altar of the parish that chose him. Through this process an "engagement" bond is established between the bishop and the priest. Finally, the bishop presents the priest to the parishioners present so that they too may receive him and begin the journey of engagement, whereby they should shoulder the responsibility of providing for him and he should bear the responsibility of serving them in the service of education, sanctification and ministering.

This is a tradition that dates back to the Apostles and the first Church<sup>49</sup> and is based on constant theological principles.

## 1.2 Theological Constants

### *a. The Need of the Church*

22. The need of the Church is the first constitutional element of the vocation for priestly service or diaconal service. The Church cannot set up a new service unless there is a need for it. Thus, the 'need' is what determines the new service that should be filled. This comes before determining the required qualifications and before calling the proper servant. Thus, first the need

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46. **The Lebanese Synod**, *ibid.*, item 250, Najm Press, p. 255.

47. **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, note. He is citing Can. 3 from the Council of Chalcedon, the Letters of St. Paul to Titus 1:5-9 and Tim. 1 3:2-7.

48. Patriarch Doueihy, **Explanation of the Consecration**, p. 186

49. This is what Peter did when he chose Matthi'as (Acts 1: 15-26) and the seven assistants (Acts 6: 1-6). That is how he said Barnabas and Saul to work in the Church of Antioch (Acts 13: 2-3). This how the Apostles and their successors set new servants in the first Church to cater to her needs. Among those servants: prophets (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor.: 12:28; Eph. 4:11); teachers (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph. 4:11); senators (Acts 11:30; 1 Tim.: 17; Titus 1:7-9); deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

is set, then qualifications are established, and then the Christian community is asked to choose the appropriate person<sup>50</sup>.

### ***b. The Role of the People in Choosing***

23. The role of the people or the Christian community is very important in choosing the proper person for the required service. The community knows the person who possesses the required qualifications<sup>51</sup> that are acknowledged by everyone<sup>52</sup>; it chooses him according to the personal status appropriate for it, single or married. It bears his responsibility<sup>53</sup>, presents him to the bishop, accompanies him after his ordination, supports him in his ministry and provides him with a decent living.

After the community of believers chooses the appropriate person, he is asked to remain in his civil status since he was chosen based on his qualifications and based on the fact that his present status agrees with the need of the community of believers. If he is single, he should stay as such and should consecrate himself to God in the service of churches and the people of God; if he is married, he should preserve his married life and live it by fearing God and respecting His commandments. This was recommended in the *Book of Al-Hoda*<sup>54</sup> and confirmed by the Lebanese Synod<sup>55</sup>.

In pastoral practice, it was customary for the people along with bishops to choose married men to serve the parishes<sup>56</sup>. The reason for that was that the married man had presented evidence of human and Christian maturity in caring for his family and had given a guarantee of stability in his town and parish<sup>57</sup>.

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50. This how Peter, head of the Apostles, suggested to set an apostle to replace Judas (Acts 1: 20). And this is how “the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1). In both cases, Peter and the Twelve determined the requirements and asked the brethren to choose.

51. 1 Tim. 3:2-6/8-13; 1 Titus 1:6-9.

52. 1 Tim. 3:7.

53. **Xeirotonia in Priesthood**, the prayer of divine grace.

54. Published by Fahed, pp. 177-178, wherein he recommends, “that priests be of good conduct and free in the houses of God in their bodies and their behaviors so as not to be distracted by their women, children and money. If they were married, they should their married life by obeying the Commandments of God”.

55. Part II, Ch., XIV, item 35, pp 261-262. The fathers of the Synod say, “it is an old tradition and custom known for the Easterners to have deacons and subdeacons and priests keep their wives to whom they were wed before taking on a sacred degree; the Roman Church did not forbid them to marry but rather supported them. That is why we did not forbid those of lower degrees from getting married, nor did we forbid those of sacred degrees to continue in their previous marriage”. Then the Fathers of the Synod add, “A good advice to married clergy” according to St. Paul the Apostle.

56. It is enough to read what Fr. Dandini, the Papal Delegate, wrote to the Maronites between 1596 and 1598: “priests, consequently deacons and subdeacons, can, if they were not monks, get married before ordination. Further, it seems they are compelled to get married for the people to accept them, especially if they were young. The bishops place strange hardships to ordain such priests unless they enter a monastery or they get married”. Jérôme DANDINI, **Voyage au Mont-Liban**, éd. Richard Simon, Paris, Billaine, 1675, pp. 103-104.

57. This is what Patriarch Boulos Meouchy reiterated in a preparatory letter to the Second Vatican Council, « the mission of the married clergy is traditional and allows the shepherd to remain near his flock for life. This is the clergy, who through his own stability, helped preserve the faith in the mountain”. Letter to Fr. Robert Clement dated 22 February, 1960, in the **Proche Orient Chrétien** Journal, 12 (1962), pp. 123-126.

### *c. The Calling of the Bishop*

24. The bishop, the successor of the Apostles, makes the decision to accept the person chosen by the people; and is the one who sends him to receive proper education. Then, he calls him in the name of Divine Grace during the ordination, which takes place in the Eucharist to express to him the calling of God, which is taking place “today” and “now”<sup>58</sup>, and bestows upon him the priesthood by the laying on of hands, all the while invoking the “Holy Spirit to descend upon him”<sup>59</sup>, making him apt for the service being granted him.

The bishop transfers to the ordained the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Sacrament of Priesthood. Even though the Christian community joined in the Eucharist participates in the calling of the Holy Spirit, the bishop remains the main servant of the Sacrament of Priesthood and ordination. He is the head of the local church and her reference since he is the successor of the Apostles and the representative of Christ.

### *c- Education*

25. As per the principle that says that education should be on par with the need of the Church and the people, our Maronite Church was a pioneer in her milieu and age through the priests and monks she educated based on her needs and requirements. In the past, the education of priests was quick and primitive during a time when people knew not how to read and write; today, it has become difficult and demanding with the progress of culture and knowledge among the people, especially since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

At first, bishops sent the candidates to a nearby monastery or to an educated and pious priest where they used to receive a quick and hasty education. They were taught “grammar and morphology in Syriac and Arabic; then music and the Church’s calendar”. Those “in whom they discovered an aptitude for learning, they promoted to the study of advanced sciences: rhetoric, poetic composition, philosophy, surveying, arithmetic, astronomy and other sciences, such as mathematics. He was later taught the principles of canon law and the explanation of the Holy Bible and dogmatic and moral theology, especially that which was found appropriate for the reception of the Sacraments and their distribution, including knowledge of the necessary rites and rituals”<sup>60</sup>.

26. When a renewal swept over the Catholic Church in Europe as a result of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which ordered bishops “to establish schools near cathedrals, bishopric sees and large churches that catechized children and graduated them in Church sciences”<sup>61</sup>, the Maronite Church benefited from the establishment of the first seminary in Rome during the

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58. *Ibid.*, prayers of the laying of hands, mentioned five times.

59. *Ibid.*, the prayer of divine grace.

60. **The Lebanese Synod**, part IV, ch. VI, item 3, Najm Press, p. 535.

61. **Council of Trent**, session 23, Can. 18 On Reform.

• *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna, ed. Istituto per le Scienze religiose, 1973, 3<sup>e</sup> édition, pp. 750-753.

• MICHEL, "les Décrets du Concile de Trente", in: HEFELE – LECLERQ, *Histoire des Conciles*, t. x. 1<sup>ère</sup> partie, pp. 501-505.

papacy of Pope Gregory XIII in 1584. This school graduated the officials of the Maronite Church, who launched a renewal of their Church.

The fruit of this renaissance was the Lebanese Synod (1736), which tried to apply the principles of the Council of Trent and which recommended the establishment of “seminaries in bishopric sees and large monasteries, like our Maronite School”<sup>62</sup>. Patriarch Youssef Estephan<sup>63</sup> was the first to implement this recommendation when he founded in 1789 the School of Ain Warqa with the aim of educating priests that would lead their people to the forefront of civilization. This school graduated a large number of priests, bishops and patriarchs who instituted a religious, literary and ecclesiastic revival. It was known as the “mother of Eastern schools” and the “Sorbonne of Lebanon”.

27. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, foreign missionaries came into Lebanon and schools proliferated. They competed in educating the Lebanese and in attracting them to their civilization and their multiple Christian confessions. Here we cite the foundation of the Eastern Seminary by the Jesuits in 1843 in Ghazir, which later moved to Beirut in 1875 after the establishment of Saint Joseph University.

In the face of this cultural tidal wave, the Maronite patriarchs and bishops worked, in the footsteps of Patriarch Estephan, to establish seminaries in order to educate priests who could compete with the high level of education that existed at that time in Mount Lebanon<sup>64</sup>.

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62. **The Lebanese Synod**, part IV, ch. VI, item 6, Najm Press, p. 546. The fathers of the Synod said, “Schools should be established in cities, towns and large monasteries, and should be preserved”, they called “all those presiding over dioceses, cities, town, villages, farms and monasteries, individuals or groups, to cooperate on promoting this beneficial work. First, they should set a teacher where there is none, write down the name of the juveniles who are ready to receive education and order their parents to take them to school, even if they had to drag them”. (ch. 6, item 1, pp. 529-530).

63. It should be noted that Patriarch Youhanna Makhlof had turned the Monastery of Our Lady of Hawqa in the Valley of Qannoubeen in 1624 into an apostolic school that educates those seeking priesthood and sends those with signs of genius to the Maronite School in Rome. But, this school did not live except for 9 years.

64. The schools were as follows:

- The School of St. John Kfarhay, founded by Patriarch Youhanna Helou in 1812 for the Diocese of Jbeil and Batroun.
- The School of St. Maroun Al Roumieh, founded by Patriarch Youhanna Helou in 1817.
- The School of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus- Rayfoun, founded by Patriarch Youssef Hbeish in 1823.
- The School of St. Abda – Harharya, founded by Patriarch Youssef Hbeish in 1830.
- The School of Our Lady - Ain Saadeh, founded by Patriarch Toubiyya Aoun, the Archbishop of Beirut, in 1852, in the aim of educating the clergy of his diocese. After it closed its doors in 1975, it was reopened by Archbishop Boulos Matar in 2002 by the name of St. Augustin – Kafra.
- La Sagesse School – Beirut, founded by Archbishop Youssef El Debs, the Archbishop of Beirut and the student of Ain Warqa, in 1875 to educate the Maronite and Catholic youth and to counter the Protestant campaign in Beirut.
- The School of St. Joseph – Qornet Shehwan, founded by Archbishop Youssef Geagea, Archbishop of Cyprus, in 1885, in the aim of educating the clergy of his diocese.
- The School of St. Anthony of Padua – Karm Saddeh, founded by Archbishop Estphan Ouwved in 1885, in the aim of educating the clergy and the youth of his diocese. Archbishop Boulos Moussa had started its establishment in 1837.

Also, Patriarch Boulos Massaad (1854 – 1890) worked on sending seminary students to France to educate them with the help of the Saint Louis Association for the Maronites<sup>65</sup>. Patriarch Youhanna (John) Haje (1890-1898) worked on re-opening the Maronite School in Rome in 1892 after it was closed in 1798.

28. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after World War I, most of the seminaries were closed except for the Eastern Seminary in Beirut, which became the only source that nourished our Church with educated priests.

Demands increased for the establishment of a central Maronite seminary that would unify the education of the Maronite clergy and improve it. This wish came true with Patriarch Antonios Khreish, who bought the Monastery of Ghazir from the Jesuit Fathers in 1976 and turned it into a central Maronite patriarchal seminary that welcomed all the Maronite candidates for the priesthood<sup>66</sup>.

#### *d. The Bond of Engagement*

29. Through ordination – performed by the laying on of hands – a bond is established between the ordained and the Christian community through “engagement” on the altar and in the church and town where he was ordained priest or deacon<sup>67</sup>. Repeating the name of the altar, the church and the town ten times during the rite of ordination is to emphasize this bond as stipulated by the canons<sup>68</sup>. This is also necessary to encourage the parish to bear the responsibility of providing for its servant<sup>69</sup>.

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65. Founded in Paris in 1876 in the aim of educating the Maronite clergy.

Refer to **Bulletin de l'Association de Saint Louis des Maronites** (1876-1914).

66. It should be noted that many attempts were registered during that time. Most important of which:

- 1- Transforming the Monastery of the Jesuit Fathers in Ghazir into a Maronite Seminary during the time of Patriarch Antoun Arida in 1934.
- 2- Transforming the School of Ain Warqa, then the School of St. Abda – Harharya, into a Central Maronite Seminary managed by the Association of Lebanese Missionaries, then by parish priests, during the time of Patriarch Antoun Arida, then Patriarch Boulos Meouchy between 1944 and 1965.
- 3- Opening the Maronite Seminary in Salamanca – Spain and receiving 30 scholarships from the Papal University of Salamanca during the time of Patriarch Antoun Arida in July 1948, under the management of the Association of Lebanese Missionaries.
- 4- Opening the Maronite Seminary of Our Lady of Lebanon in Washington in 1961 and inaugurating it in September 1962 by Patriarch Boulos Meouchy. This step was an acknowledgement of the importance of the Maronite expansion in Northern America and the necessity of preparing priests for their dioceses.

67. *Ibid.*, the bishop says: “He preaches himself on the altar of the Church of ..... in the town of .....where those who have presented him will bear the responsibility”.

68. The warning we read in the introduction of Rite of Ordination cites Canon 15 from the Council of Nicaea, “if the place of the service of the priest or the deacon is unknown, then the laying of the hands should not take place, since the hands should be laid on the name of the place where he will fulfill his service”. In the explanation of the Xerotonia, Patriarch Doueihy explains, in canon 6 of the Council of Chalcedony, “no one should be ordained in an absolute manner, neither bishop nor priest nor deacon, nor to any ecclesiastical service, unless he is tied to a city, village, shrine or monastery. The Holy Synod has decreed that his ordination shall be void and he shall be incompetent to serve”. Refer to the Explanation of the Consecrations, p. 192.

69. **The Lebanese Synod**, part II, ch. XIV, item 12, Najm Press, p. 243. This text cites Canon 6 from the Council of Chalcedony. Also, part III, ch. III, item 1, Najm Press, p. 325.

## 2- The Married Priest

30. Our Maronite church has kept the tradition of the early church particularly the one of the Eastern Church that admitted married men to the priestly ministry, despite the development that occurred after the Lebanese Council. This Council, influenced by the Council of Trent, decreed that the candidates for the priesthood should be educated in boarding schools for seminarians where only celibate men would be admitted. This trend toward having a preference for celibate men became pronounced after the Maronite Roman College graduates began returning to Lebanon to assume their responsibilities, and after the decisive role played by the Jesuit fathers who were entrusted with the direction of the Oriental Seminary in Ghazir and Beirut, this preference was attributed to the high intellectual formation enjoyed by celibate clergy in comparison with married clergy.

But the old tradition was kept alive until the middle and the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>70</sup>. Certain eparchial seminaries kept receiving married candidates for the priesthood as well as men who have chosen celibacy.

31. An opposite trend appeared in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century particularly in the Seminary of Ghazir where a good number of seminarians began choosing marriage before ordination. This trend created a pressure as a result of the fact that the candidates who have chosen marriage were more numerous than those who have chosen celibacy. This development had a negative influence on the ones who preferred celibacy. More over, often the married candidates used to be ordained priests one year following their marriage when they were not more than 30 years of age. They had to assume the responsibility of the family and the parish at the same time in addition to what the foundation of a family requires in the way of expenses that exceed their financial capacity, and what a young family needs in the way of human demands for its stability. Many parishes were unable to satisfy the financial needs of the married priest.

The Maronite Synod of bishops took notice of this situation and a few years back made a decision that will preserve the tradition while taking in consideration the new developments. It decreed that the one who chooses marriage should not be ordained before the age of 35 and after many years of married life during which he had found a suitable source of income for his family

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70. Such as the case of the parish of Ehmej in Jbeil, who presented a petition on 23 May, 1967 to Patriarch Boulos Meouchy stating, "We the undersigned, inhabitants of Ehmej, part of the patriarchal diocese, would like to express our allegiance to your esteemed person and would like to ask you to accept Youssef Boutros Abboud Hardan to the Seminary. This stems from our need of a parish priest since Fathers Boulos El Khoury and Gebrayel Gebrayel can no more perform their parish duties due to old age. Since the death of Father Tanios Herdan had left a great void in the spiritual and social fields, we are obliged to fill this void with 2 priests, at least, since the belated performed several parish duties. Since the suggested individual has high ethics and virtues; and since we have known him as a child, knowing that he is 42 years old, married with 5 children (4 boys and 1 girl): the eldest is 10 years old and the youngest 9 months; and since his current education allows him to accede to priesthood, And since the family will be provided for during his stay at the seminary and we will shoulder this responsibility without adding any burden to the patriarchy, We reiterate our plea to accept him in the seminary. Refer to the Archives of Bkerke, Patriarch Meouchy.

and managed his household. Moreover, the decree reserved the Ghazir Seminary for the candidates who have chosen celibacy. And the others will go to other seminaries such as the ones (of Karm Saddeh or Kafra).

This brief exposé does not cover the whole subject. But the following two remarks will shed some light on some of its aspects.

32. The educational level provided for married priests now, along with the formation and pastoral preparation they received, gave them a new respect. Nowadays the faithful are not concerned with the situation of the priest as much as they are concerned with his pastoral care and apostolic zeal. We have many examples of successful married priests to whom their parishioners are attached in appreciation for their competent work. While we find some celibate priests who do not enjoy the priestly qualities enjoyed by their married priests colleagues.

Moreover, there is now a special concern for the priests' wives. They are given spiritual and pastoral formations that enable them to accompany their husband becoming true helpers for them, shouldering with them the responsibility of their mission. Because, a great majority of them are well educated unlike they use to be in the past.

In principle nothing prevents married priests from serving parishes in the countries of expansion wherever there is a need according to the old tradition of our Church which was not abrogated by the Roman Church, but restricted only to the Eastern regions.

From a practical point of view, the matter is left to the local Maronite authority which has all the elements to make a fitting decision to be followed up with the Holy See even if the matter could be dealt with successfully on the level of the Maronite synod of bishops as a whole.

In this third section of our general topic we are mindful that there are other subjects dealt with by the synodal text that we omitted here, such as the seminaries, the new education and the vocation in its new meaning. We will deal with these questions in future talks.

#### **Fourthly: Successful Service and Leadership**

33. Success in priestly service and spiritual leadership is not a personal objective or a project that a priest strives for to show his talent and be praised and appreciated by his superiors. On the contrary it is an ecclesial project the priest adapted and devoted his life to with all his human, intellectual and spiritual talents.

However, the success of the ecclesial project has its requirements on the level of the choices, convictions and initiatives. Consequently, one must create a network of relations that guarantees this success.

##### **1- The relationship with Christ the Good Pastor**

34. The priestly service is a continuation of the priesthood of Christ in its three dimensions: preaching, sanctifying, and ministering. The priest will be on the way to success in as much as he follows Christ and carries in his heart Christ's pastoral love and imitates in his relations.

For this reason he must root his spiritual life in Christ through the perseverance in reading the Holy Bible in individual and communal prayer, in meditation in living the spirituality of the sacraments that he administers in the daily celebration of the Eucharist and in his openness to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Then his spiritual expertise will increase and become personal.

With this expertise the priest will be able to live the virtue of chastity and a life of simplicity and abnegation. As a result his heart will not be attached to money, but on the contrary, he will help the needy with whatever he has becoming generous and hospitable with others.

## **2- The relation with the bishop and the Church**

35. The bishop confers the order of the priesthood to the candidate through the laying on of hands and the gift of the Holy Spirit to assist him and be his representative in the pastoral service for the glory of God and the up building of the Church particularly in the parish that he entrusts to his pastoral care.

The priest must keep a close bond with the bishop putting in practice his directives while preserving the spirit of initiative. There, the priest who adopts the project of the bishop that is the Church project will be successful. But the one who acts independently from his bishop and in disagreement with him will fail because by doing so, he places himself outside of the ecclesial framework even if he is admired by a few people.

## **3- The relation with the priests**

36. The priest through ordination becomes a member of the priestly body, headed by the bishop. In as much as he strengthens the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity and mutual help with his brother priests he will be happy and successful. Thus, the participation in general or in particular and the exchange of experiences, the undertaking of common projects, the caring for retired priests or for those who have difficulties, the protection of the reputation of the others and in showing their positive side, all, denotes a true brotherly spirit and a real affiliation with the same body-that one should work at developing and keeping safe. It is worthy of noting that disagreements among priests will reflect negatively on them and on the image of the church they represent. Also the negligence of one's duties or the competition for positions disfigures the image of the priests and has a negative influence on priestly vocations.

## **4- The relationship with the Christian Community**

37. The synodal text has underscored the close relationship between the priest and the parish that is between him and the Christian Community that is entrusted to his pastoral care. The Christian Community has the right to request certain services of their priest and the latter has the obligation to provide for them the needed spiritual nourishment that is found in God's Word, the distribution of the sacraments, and the establishment of spiritual and social bonds that tie them together with a spiritual solidarity and love.

The official ecclesial texts sum up the relationship of the priest with his parishioners, with the words of “pastoral love”. This consists of knowing them, serving, protecting and feeding them (Jn 10).

If this love takes root in his heart, he becomes in his entirety for the parish and a “devoured man” like one of the Saints said.

The relationship with the parishioners, without doubt, differs according to social situations from one country to the other. But the essential elements of this relation today consist of discovering the talents and gifts that exist in the parish councils and institutions. Thus, the working together and not alone, nor the imposition of decisions are the methods that lead to success. The imposition of decisions will lead the people to aversion and to keeping their distance from the church, moreover, it is contrary to the evangelical spirit.

I do not have all the data concerning your parishes, but allow me to point out what I consider to be necessary today for our church in this domain:

- be concerned with the youth, bring them close to the church so that they may discover its roots.
- creating a network of connections with the parishioners who do not know their church. We know of some initiatives undertaken by a few priests that were successful.
- endeavoring to give a religious, ecclesial and Maronite education that puts in evidence the characteristics of our identity in response to the saying: “We are Catholics, there is no difference, if we practice our religious duties in the Latin or the Maronite Church.
- avoiding siding with factional political positions, particularly where there are new comers from Lebanon, but supporting the position taken by his Beatitude the patriarch with the Maronite Synod of bishops, because it is a national position. However, at the same time make sure all Lebanese in their various factions are welcomed in their parishes.

## **5. The Continuing Education**

38. It is the right of the faithful to have their priests continue their intellectual formation and education particularly in the spiritual, theological, biblical and pastoral fields. So that they will be able to serve and lead his people.

The continuing education presupposes the use of modern means of spreading the mission of the priest that will reach all the categories of the faithful, young and old.

Despite the many occupations that fill the entire life of the priest, he must organize all his time so that he may devote a part of it to education and prayer. If there is no determined time devoted for reading during the day or the week, the various occupations will overwhelm the priest; then the priest will begin to repeat what he learned without renewal, and the faithful will become tired of these repetitions and will abandon him.

## **Conclusion**

39. The synodal text is rich and deals with various topics, we only dealt with few of them. The text should be read carefully in its entirety.

What we discussed in this brief exposé is sufficient to show us the richness of our heritage that must be discovered through profound studies that will cover the part that was published and what remains unpublished. So that this heritage becomes one of the sources of the education of our priests in whichever seminary they might be, here or elsewhere. Moreover, our church should have a unified curriculum for the education of the priests that will be modified according to the conditions of the places while preserving the essential elements of it. For the future of the church depends on her priests and on the role of their mission in the various parish communities. The identity, the spiritual renewal and the commitment in the various fields depends on the awareness of the priests and of the right direction they provide. The preservation of our identity in the vast lands of expansion of the Maronite church can be realized only through the church affiliation, in which the priests play a critical role, without discounting the role of the bishop.

40. The experience of the patriarchal synod which brought together Maronites of different countries has shown that the return to the roots is indispensable. We wish and hope that the priests, even if by turn would freely come to live for a period of time in Lebanon, and follow during this time a pastoral, traditional and spiritual program so that communication be kept between the two wings of the church.

The recommendations that follow this text constitute an introduction to continue the profound study of this important subject.

Thank you for your attention and patience.