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Civil status regarding entry into the clergy

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Abstract. For the Orthodox Church, the priesthood is the cornerstone of its role and what it means. From a functional point of view, the priesthood is an accumulation of duties and rights that are specific and found only within the Church, including the legitimacy of the exercise of these duties and rights.

Keywords. Civil status, Orthodox Church, the clergy, priesthood, duties, rights, legitimacy

Introduction

The word „priest” not only means the person who is at the head of a parish by performing holy services and providing spiritual guidance to those entrusted to him by offering religious support, it means a person who has responded to God's call. This call he felt and nurtured over many years in special schools, and finally after being examined he „received the grace of the priesthood through the priest's prayers and prayers, thus becoming a follower of the apostles.”¹

Priesthood or ordination, as it is also called, is one of the seven sacraments of the Church, and it takes place during the Mass when the priest, through the prayer he prays to God, "offers" the person prepared for this mystery the grace that helps him and gives him the power to perform the sacraments, to teach the faithful entrusted to him the word of God and to lead them to salvation. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ Himself speaks of the power that He gives to the apostles, and following the laying on of the priest's hands, the power to loose and bind sins: "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18).

Holy Scripture shows us that the Saviour Christ willed that the work of salvation of the whole nation which he had begun should be known throughout the ages and that its fruits should be appropriated by each one of us, "He chose twelve apostles out of the multitude of those who followed him" (Matt: 4, 18-22 and 10, 1-4; Mark: 3, 7, 9, 14, 16-19; Luke: 6, 13-16; 9, 1-2) and then "the Lord chose seventy (and two) more whom He sent to the cities and places where He was to come. " (Luke: 10:1).

¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ Archpriest in the Age*, in *Orthodoxia* magazine, no.2, 1979 (XXXI), IMBO Publishing House, Bucharest, Romania, p. 224.

From the very beginning, the Church has added to the norms of religion and the norms of its social side, the norms to which the Church has appealed being of a legal nature. The use of norms was intended to make the faithful upright through discipline and by accustoming them to the order and the performance of good deeds, while at the same time making them useful to their fellow men.

In the Collection of Canons of John Scholasticus the canons are mentioned: 34, 37, 74, 75 Apostolic, Canon 5 of the First Ecumenical Council, Canon 6 of the Second Ecumenical Council, Canons 9, 17, 19, 21 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council; Canons 14, 15 Antiochian, Canon 40 Laodicean; canon 4 Sardica, canons 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 18, 19, 59, 104, 107, 128, 129, 130, 132 Carthage; canon 9 of St Theophilus of Alexandria, means that John Scholasticus considered all three instances used by the Church: Eparchial, Metropolitan, and Exarchal-Patriarchal, with the corresponding procedure. The same instances and the same procedure also result from the Collection in 87 chapters, according to ch. 58, which states, "If a complaint is lodged against the bishop, whether by a cleric or any other person, it is required that in the first instance, their too-holy metropolitan investigate the matter according to our holy canons and laws. If the complainant raises questions about the decisions made, the matter should be referred to the Most Blessed Archbishop and Patriarch, who will make a final decision. Likewise, if any person files a complaint against the Metropolitan, that Patriarch will judge the situation similarly."²

1. Canonical conditions for entry into the clergy-Social conditions

Some The problems the 4th-century fathers encountered were some of the improper morals

they faced when recruiting presbyters. St. Jerome John Chrysostom lists some of the norms used in his time: "family aristocracy, wealth which had the advantage that the priest did not have to be supported from the Church's income, the passage in a certain party, protection, kinship, flattery."³ Some were welcomed into the clergy, so as not to side with their adversaries, others because of their wickedness: lest they do some mischief if they were to be overlooked. Such meanness of character was sometimes shown on the occasion of the election of priests. There were cases when the election of priests filled the churches with murders and turned the cities into ruins. Not to mention interventionism, especially that of women. This description also mirrors to a large extent the practices of our Church until yesterday, when social and political mores introduced so many unlettered people into the priesthood, pushing to the periphery or removing elements of value for good. Our upper class, which did not believe in God and despised the Church, was willing to do violence to the hierarchy by imposing so many moral and intellectual rags on it. It was a way of undermining the Church. Not to mention the power of political clubs. Need we remember that the priesthood is sometimes bought?

Priesthood did not and does not confer the title of belonging to a social class, or a particular social rank. It does not rank among human ranks, because it is not given by men, but by God, because Jesus Christ called fishermen, tentmakers, and tax collectors to the priesthood. The priest lives not only for himself and his family but also for the people, he no longer belongs to himself but to the people. His priesthood is valid as long as and to the extent that he works and sacrifices himself for the salvation of every member of the people entrusted to his care. The

² Pr. Prof. Ion Bria, Priesthood in the Church, in "Ortodoxia", no. 7 - 8, 1971, p. 112.

³ Pr. Prof. Cădea Spiridon, St. John Chrysostom as shepherd of souls, in The Romanian Orthodox Church, year LXXV, no. 10/1957, October, p. 94.

bishop has the role of examining the candidate and deciding on his election. St. Paul tells Timothy: "Do not lay hands on anyone, or be a partaker of foreign sins" (1 Timothy 5:22). St. Basil the Great emphasizes in his "Moral Rules" that ordination is not to be given lightly or carelessly. The life of priests and deacons must be irreproachable. It is no excuse for the ordaining bishop not to have known the candidate.⁴ The bishop must make a severe examination of the one who wants to be a priest and use all his tact, hardness, and his determination to make the most worthy candidate succeed, even though he may have the majority of those interested against him.⁵

1. Physical conditions

The physical requirements for the priesthood are health, bodily integrity, and physical fitness. The first two are also required in other religions. "If the body is not robust," says St John Chrysostom, "the ardor of the soul remains reduced to itself and is not capable of moving on to achievements".⁶ Physical presence is a tribute to the Saviour and an addition to the beauty of priestly service. It is understood that not all priests can have a physical robustness worthy of crowning their spiritual robustness, but it is welcome and even necessary in the complicated priestly mission.

But physical presence is not enough. Some parents demand a strict education in body movements. St Ambrose makes a great fuss about the improper or inappropriate gestures of clerics. Some, he says, imitate the gestures of actors, of those who walk solemnly in processions and the mechanical movements of statues. It is not proper for the priest to run away, except in case of danger or necessity. His gait should be dignified, authoritative, grave, quiet, unaffected, unstudied, but correct. Propriety is a very great thing. Priests and all clerics, especially young ones, should not go often to banquets and on visits, especially to widows and virgins (nuns). When not working in Church, the priest should read. "We should be modest, gentle, close, serious, patient, measured in everything".⁷

2. Religious conditions

Religious and moral preparation are two inseparable conditions. Priesthood being a divine service requires from candidates a profound piety and a chosen wisdom, says St John Chrysostom. One aspect of the three functions of the priesthood is also represented by the sanctifying or sacramental function, that through which the closest contact with the Saviour is maintained, "requires of the candidate and the priest a chosen and profound religious sensibility, a strong sense of the divine."⁸

Indifferentism and routine in liturgical and sacramental acts and personal piety often come from this initial lack of vocation and continuous cultivation of religious sentiment. Since the priesthood is divine in origin and purpose, i.e., seeking the perfection of souls and the deification of the world, how can priests attain this goal if they are not deified? They and their families. The religious style of the priest's family has a great influence on his piety. The priest's whole family must serve God in one way or another. In the old Roman religion, it was customary

⁴ Saint John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, Basilica Publishing House, 2015, p. 48.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83-84.

⁶ Pr. Prof. Spiridon Căndea, St. John Chrysostom as shepherd of souls, in *The Romanian Orthodox Church*, year LXXV, no. 10/1957, October, p.992.

⁷ Pr. Prof. Căndea Spiridon, Married or celibate priests?, in *MA*, year. VI, 1961, year. 9 - 10, p. 580 - 599.

⁸ *Ibid.*

for the priest's entire household to serve that deity. According to Dion of Halicarnassus, Romulus obliged the wives of priests to serve the deity together with their husbands.

4. Moral training

Moral training is a supreme law for the priesthood. This is because the ultimate moral purity is holiness, and absolute holiness is one of the essential attributes of God. Before asking for the vote of the electors and presenting himself to the bishop, the candidate must make an honest and severe examination. He cannot say: "I didn't know myself."⁹ Doing his soul searching and finding that he is not up to the mission he wants to retire. Many people can acquire the technical preparation for the sacramental acts, but fewer acquire the purity of soul, the balm of moral purity. If a false architect took it upon himself to build a house, but instead of doing so he broke the material and the house he had made collapsed immediately, would he not be punished? The same would happen to one who, bringing into the priesthood a false soul, built carelessly and lost souls.¹⁰

An aspect of morality is also determined by the sides of his life that he must cultivate with the virtues that represent the beautiful bouquet of moral and spiritual graces. This bouquet must be dominated by the lily of burning love for Christ and His Church. The Church is the body of Christ, and he to whom this body has been entrusted "should take care of its excellent condition, give it a beauty beyond compare, and keep his eyes fixed on all sides, lest a spot, a wrinkle, or any other such blemish should mar its grace and presence."¹¹ But the beauty of the Church cannot be maintained and enhanced by the means of the ordinary man. "Therefore the priest will have to far surpass other men in the art of beauty and the moral sublime."¹²

In some theological studies the life and work of the priest are associated with the work of athletes who also need coaches and doctors to perform and also need a lot of physical training, therefore the priest must far surpass the human being in the spiritual life because he has to fight not only with the seen powers but especially with the unseen powers and to preserve and care for the body of Christ they have received in their care. "Let the priest surpass other men by the virtue of his soul, by his exemplary character, as much as Saul surpassed in stature all the people of the Jews, and even more than that."¹³

5. Intellectual training

"The priest must have a solid and elevated culture. As a spiritual guide, he is constantly confronted with the many and varied problems of thought, feeling, and attitude of his flock. In this regard, he must have a vast cultural arsenal."¹⁴ Science and philosophy. By his mission or teaching function which he holds from the High Priest, the Archpriest Jesus Christ the Logos, the priest must possess as much divine and human science and philosophy as he can and never cease to increase it continually. First of all the priest must master the Holy Scriptures as the treasury of revealed divine truth. Rarely has the Christian priesthood known Holy Scripture as

⁹ Protosinghel Olivian Bindiu, The moral life of the priest, a determining factor in his pastoral activity, in "Biserica Ortodoxa Romana" no. 11-12, 1989, p. 68.

¹⁰ Prof. Teodor M. Popescu, The Age of St. John Chrysostom, in Orthodoxy, year IX, no. 4/1957, October-November, p. 164.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Saint Ephrem Sirul, On the Priesthood, Sophia Publishing House, Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 2004, p. 42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

in the patristic ages when there was a more intense knowledge and living of biblical wisdom and holiness. But the Holy Fathers did not limit themselves to Holy Scripture, through long and thorough studies they appropriated all the knowledge of the past and the present, considering that without this knowledge all the others are worthless. Here is how St. Gregory the Theologian expresses himself in this regard: "To intend to teach others while you have insufficient knowledge, or as the proverb says, to learn pottery from large pots, that is, to try to implant piety in the souls of others before you possess it yourself, seems a foolish and proud approach; foolish because you do not realize your ignorance and proud because you engage in an activity you barely understand."¹⁵

St. Gregory severely criticizes the lack of scientific training and piety of many priests who were sometimes philosophers only up to the waist, that is, halfway. The acquisition of this science and piety is indeed done with much labor, but nothing equals it in the sight of God. "If for dancing and flute-playing learning and exercises are necessary, involving considerable effort, including financial resources and hard work, as well as dedication and suffering in long journeys and the endurance of troubles, to become master of one of these arts, should we consider that wisdom (which is the synthesis of all the sciences), being superior to all the other arts and containing in its absolute perfection, so much so that even God, though he has many other names, rejoices especially when he is called wise, is such an easy and trivial thing that it is enough to wish to become wise?"¹⁶ The great theologian of Nazianzus thus vehemently combats ignorance.

Saint Paul is the classic example of the wise man, that is, the teacher, preacher, and worker in the Christian community: "He makes laws... for male and female individuals, for parents and children, for the married and the single, for those who practice abstinence and those who enjoy pleasures, for the wise and the unwise, for the circumcised and the uncircumcised, for those who belong to Christ and those who are part of this world, for those who obey the spirit and those who obey the body."¹⁷ For some he thanks, he rebukes, he calls his joy and crown, others he imputes their folly too. He gladly associates with those who walk in the right way but stops those who walk in the way of perdition. Now he condemns, now he judges indulgently, now he grieves, now he rejoices. Now he exalts himself with the exalted, now he humbles himself with the humiliated, now he declares himself the least of the Apostles, now he boasts that Christ speaks in him. St. John Chrysostom, in his turn, pays homage to the incomparable science of St. Paul the Apostle, with whom the greatest geniuses of ancient Greek culture cannot compare: "If I were to ask for the grace of Isocrates' style, the elegance of Demosthenes, the gravity of Thucydides, and the sublimity of Plato, I should put first the testimony of Paul's science."¹⁸

The priest's knowledge and philosophy should be as broad and varied as possible. The Holy Fathers have successfully practiced the accumulation of priceless spiritual treasures from the Holy Scriptures and the vast areas of secular culture. They studied not only during their youth but also after entering the clergy. St. Gregory of Nazianz and Ambrose establishes that the priest has no limit in instructing and being instructed. Some of the Fathers possessed certain profane sciences, such as medicine, law, philosophy, rhetoric, grammar, music, arithmetic,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Prof. Ioan G Coman, The meaning of priesthood in the Holy Fathers, in "Theological Studies", no. 9-10, 1949, p.49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

geometry, natural sciences, etc., to such an extent that they gathered together consecrated masters and authorities to whom the profane themselves came to learn.¹⁹ The cases of Origen, Tertullian, the Cappadocians, and the Blessed Augustine are known.

Conclusions

Today's Orthodox priesthood will gain much by adorning itself with the image of the biblical and patristic priest.

Nowadays everyone is dissatisfied and lives in constant fear and anxiety, which leads to insecurity and therefore to a spiritual void. Very many people live in vanity and corruptibility and "indulge" in sensuality in various forms, turning to the Church only when they are very confused and lost. Living and enjoying worldly pleasures does not mean that we have or can find meaning in this life, because without a baseline, without an absolute nothing gives life meaning. That is why when we are lost and when we stray from the right path we turn to those who witness by their living the idea of the absolute that is God, even if they are fragile and unworthy. The Church, through the lives of her servants, shows us that we can live on this earth with faith and hope regardless of the hardships, troubles, and disappointments we experience.

To enjoy and live an authentic, Christian ministry, the priest needs to know the faithful he has received into his care, those for whom he intercedes before the Throne of God. Priesthood is a synergistic divine-human ministry that brings before God the person who serves God, a ministry rooted in communion with God. To lead man to God, the priest must approach a contemporary man and meet him in a Christian spirit. This spirit he must also impart to the faithful, because, by the general priesthood, they too share in the mission and service of the Church.

The Christian priesthood, in comparison with other forms of the priesthood, is a divine ministry that does not receive a distinct rank in the human hierarchy. It serves as a sign of love for Christ and people, with the ultimate goal of bringing about man's salvation. For this reason, the candidate must prepare himself and adopt exceptional conduct in the exercise of the priesthood.

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