



# The Church The House of Love

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### **The Mutual Relationships Between the Church Leaders:**

Many view the mutual relationships between the church leaders (across all levels) as merely an important administrative organizational work. If properly achieved, it would assist the church in fulfilling its role towards its flock and also to non-believers. On the other hand, if the church fails in fulfilling it, its congregation stumbles in their faith in the church and even in God Himself, as do the non-believers who then blaspheme the name of God.

Certainly, we can never ignore all this. Yet we must become aware that our relationships as servants of the Word, as priests of God Most High, our acceptance of priesthood from our Lord Jesus, the Divine High Priest, and our witness to God through the word of His Holy Word in us, all these are built upon a foundation of faith that touches our innermost depths and is reflected in our visible behavior.

If we care that all our work be accomplished without disturbance, in peace (1 Corinthians 14:33), then we should perceive that we are stewards of heaven, ambassadors of Christ, a living icon of the heavenly church, and the fiery chariot which carries the bride to the bosom of Father by His fiery Holy Spirit to be united with the heavenly Bridegroom.

Our mutual relationships are based upon a living practical faith that is a reflection of faith in the Holy Trinity, a sound awareness of the concept of the Church as the Bride of Christ, and a pleasing icon of the heavenly ecclesiastical life that is ruled entirely by love in its two cornerstones: love of God and neighbor.

### **The Mutual Relationships Among the Servants and the Fellowship with the Holy Trinity:**

St. Ignatius presented to us a marvelous portrait of the mutual relationships amongst the different ranks of priesthood, the bishops, priests, and deacons, as well as between the clergy and the whole congregation. He did not set down detailed rights or obligations for every rank, but focused on how these relationships testify to the living Trinitarian faith. His desire is that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be made manifest through these relationships.

The gospel by which the priests and the congregation live is a call to enjoy the mystery of the Holy Trinity in our daily lives, worship, and preaching. In the Holy Trinity, we can envision eternal and perpetual everlasting love. God is love and was never static (without movement) at any given moment. He was never in need of creation (heavenly or earthly) for Him to mobilize His infinite energy of divine love into action. From eternity there existed a powerful, dynamic love within the Trinity.

Our living gospel proclaims the absolute perfection of God the Father as fulfilled by the perfection of the Son and the Holy Spirit who are one with Him in the same divine essence. The perfection of every divine hypostasis does not diminish the perfection of the others but rather affirms it; for none of the hypostases can exist without the other two, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me" (John 14: 10). The perfection of the Father is in the perfection of His Word, and the perfection of His Holy Spirit.

As a church leader contemplates this marvelous divine image, in his unity with God he increasingly realizes that he could never desire to rule over others in dictatorial manner. Such a desire can find no pathway to his heart because he delights in the perfection of his brethren, subordinates, and those whom he serves. In their perfection he finds his own perfection, through the work of the Holy Trinity in him.





### **Evangelism and the Communal Work:**

During the apostolic and post-apostolic eras, the church was characterized by communal work on the level of the local village, the diocese, the apostolic throne, and the universal church. This true ecclesiastical life had an immense impact on evangelism. On one hand, it attracted the grace of God, who desires to work abundantly where love and unity dwell. On the other hand, it attracted sincere souls who seek the truth (which is inseparable from love) to see in the Church a true icon of heaven, and a practical, realistic portrait of the work of the Holy Trinity within humanity.

Within the communal church life, the world encounters the doctrine of the Trinity and perceives in it a living portrait of perfection, and an exceptional specimen of the democratic life, which abounds in fellowship (Koinonia). The believer does not seek his own interests at the expense of others but the collective good as his own. The belief in the one absolute God is often a prop for dictatorship, but Christianity upholds a truly democratic life with its faith in the Perfect Trinity.

The faith in the one perfect and absolute God would surely denote the imperfection of all other creatures. But faith in the eternal Trinity grants us a better understanding to comprehend perfection. Some ask: how can the Father be perfect in His heaven even though the Son and the Holy Spirit participate in His perfection and are not separated from Him? And they ask the same of the Son and Holy Spirit. To these we say that true perfection is not revealed through self-sufficiency, isolation or aloofness, but in the eternal divine movement of love within God and the everlasting mutual relationships. The Son and Holy Spirit participate in the Father's complete perfection, because they are one with Him in essence. In this way, faith in the Trinity demonstrates the spirit of fellowship and love. The perfect One reveals His perfection through that of others!

Man attains perfection not by glorifying himself or by being self-sufficient, but by being united with others in love. The perfect man is not he who nourishes his own ego to receive vain glory and benefit himself, but he who loves others and accepts their love for him. From this perspective, the Lord Christ sent His apostles for ministry to preach the salvific work of God, "two by two before His face." (Luke 10:1) The two work together in the one Lord, before His face, for each of them to find the perfection of his life, ministry, preaching, and success, in the perfection of his brother.

The work of the servant – as a true Christian – is to throw himself in the bosom of Christ, so that Christ may elevate him by His Holy Spirit from glory to glory, may renew his youth daily, and may perpetually sanctify his life. He would bring him to the bosom of God the Father, where his soul would settle down and sing with the righteous Job, "He clothed me with His righteousness" (Cf. Job 29:14). He has become perfect in the Father's eyes because he has become hidden in Christ.

The servant's heart desire is to be justified every day from his sins and weaknesses through the work of the Holy Trinity. Through his own justification, the gates are opened before others to set forth alongside him and partake of God's exalted grace.

The servant who finds his delight and perfection in the perfection of every human, as much as is possible, cannot help but rejoice when he sees his fellow servants walk along the way of perfection, and succeed in everything he does.

The apostle Paul tells his people, **"You are my joy! You are my crown,"** not only because he will be rewarded for serving them, but because seeing them rejoice, he counts their joy as his, their heavenly crown as his crown, their sufferings as his own sufferings, and their chains as his chains.

The servant who does not rejoice over the success and perfection of his fellow servants in their own lives and ministries, is surely outside of Christ, for Christ desires the salvation of the whole world and the glory of every human soul.

Christ fervently desired to die that we may live, and to suffer to add sweetness to our



sufferings. How then can we not desire to decrease while He increases in us, in our fellow servants, in the whole congregation, and even in nonbelievers?! When the work of the Holy Trinity is made manifest in us, we do not seek what is for ourselves, but what is for God in us, in our fellow servants, and in the whole congregation.

### **The Church the House of Love:**

If service is a call to delight in the church life as a personal relationship with God and a communal relationship with others enflamed with the love of God, then the relationships between the servants themselves is considered a practical interpretation and an actual sermon of the true ecclesiastical life.

St. Paul is often depicted with firm features, probably because of his great ministry, seriousness, and the dedication of his whole life for service. He would courageously preach anywhere: in Jewish synagogues, in the marketplace, on a ship, in prison, or in court. Yet upon reading chapter 16 of his epistle to the Romans, you find him a man overflowing with intense holy emotions, particularly with the church leadership and their families. Among his words:

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus” (Romans 16: 3-4)

“Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord” (Romans 16: 8)

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine” (Romans 16: 13)

But what is amazing is that this man, whose heart is so fiery in his ministry, stated without shame: “When I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia” (2 Corinthians 3:12-13). How can a door be opened to him by the Lord for preaching, yet he finds no rest in his spirit because he did not find Titus his brother and had to depart to Macedonia? Being an ecclesiastical man full of fervent emotions, he could not endure the absence of his brother Titus, despite his strong personality and his remarkable relationship with God in his life and ministry.

It is therefore befitting for the servant not only to cooperate with his fellow servants, but **even more so, not to endure serving in their absence!**

### **Fatherhood:**

**Here, I would like to mention a real-life example from the ministry of the departed Fr. Bishoy Kamel.** It so happened that there was a certain controversy between him and a prominent deacon in the church, who was a role model for his fellow deacons despite his young age. Persisting on his point of view and not accepting that of his confessor (Fr. Bishoy Kamel), Fr. Bishoy requested him to change his confessor and recommended myself (Fr. Tadros Malaty) to him. At about midnight on the same day, Fr. Bishoy came to ask me to treat that deacon with compassion, and leave the role of lovingly rebuke to him (Fr. Bishoy). He said to me, “Do not be harsh on him, and let him confess to you for a year or so, and when you find out that he has got back his peace toward me, return him to me.”

Such a rare and magnificent portrait of shepherding! I often hear some priests complain that other priests show compassion to those with whom they were strict. But all what preoccupied the heart of Fr. Bishoy was to offer every soul to God by the Holy Spirit, so they would enjoy the riches of the divine grace. Throughout Father Bishoy’s 25-year ministry as priest, I never felt for a single day that he was ever offended if someone decided to leave him and confess to another priest.

And when he would start up a new church, he would choose the best deacons we have to serve in it, and ask them to minister in the new church, saying to them, “I do not want to see you here in vespers, in liturgies, or in Sunday School. We established this church to see the work of God in it.” He wanted every church to grow and for the divine work to succeed in it, even more than his own church.

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