

The Simplicity and Wisdom in the Life of Father Bishoy Kamel

Translated by Salwa Wahba

Wisdom –i.e. seeking what is right- is a natural thing for all people.

Where is the wisdom? It resides in realizing that you do not think that you know everything, for that belongs to God; nor that you don't know everything, for that is the road of the beasts. Man's position is somehow in the middle.

The religion cannot be practiced without wisdom, nor can the wisdom be justified without the religion.

The simple non-deceiving truth becomes clearer with its own sufficient virtues. This truth is defiled when it is adorned with outer ornaments.

Lactantius

Between the Simplicity of Children and the Wisdom of the Elderly:

One stands in amazement before the personality of our beloved Father Bishoy. You see him among the children like a child that lives in their world but with the wisdom of the elderly. In their simplicity, he carries them as with God's Holy Spirit so they can enjoy maturity and exercise the wisdom of the elderly. Amongst the elderly, you see him like an old man way beyond his years, exchanging their experiences, respecting their old age, and benefiting from their experiences; while they honor his wisdom and experience, not just as being one of them, but also as someone that transcends their wisdom. With this simplicity and wisdom, you see in him the complete non-duplicate personality, because his simplicity and wisdom are not fabricated, but are rather a true fruit of his experience of the life with God. He lifts up his heart unto God to find in His Fatherhood sweetness and warmth, as well as wisdom along with simplicity. He adheres unto Master Christ that he adores so much to receive much of His simplicity and humbleness, as well as of His divine wisdom. I can truly testify that his simplicity and wisdom were a live witness to his partnership with Master Christ, and a reflection of his experience with Him, as being a living Bible.

The Simplicity and the Depths of Faith:

Our faith is an invitation to a simple life, through which the believer meets with God as with his own father, throwing himself in His arms, drinking from His love and getting to know His mysteries. Every new morning the believer ascends with his heart, as well as with his mind, feelings, emotions and all his might, through God's Holy Spirit to enter into a new heavenly experience and to meet with God, his Deliverer, as if it was his first time. The simplicity and the depths of faith are two sides of one reality, or two inseparable sisters, for if one was taken away, the other would perish.

The Kind but Firm:

He was very kind, especially when dealing with sinners. He used to say: the priests and the church are not prosecutors that investigate and make accusations, nor are they judges that convict others; rather the priest is a father that serves the children of his Master. The longest confessions do not last for more than a few minutes, not because he hurried the confessors, but because they found in the joviality of his face and in his hopeful words what prevented them from turning the confession into listing detailed stories. Many times the confessor couldn't find what to say, and when he asked him: "Can I eat from the Eucharist?", his famous answer was: "Our LORD is simple, why do you want to complicate it?". This extremely kind person hates the sin and can't stand it. When in remissness some tried to turn the church into a hall for social activities, he stood firm in public after having advised them many times in secret!

He suddenly stopped in the middle of the road between the station of Camp Caesar and Ibrahimia. I asked him: "Why did you stop?" and he answered: "Yesterday I was thinking about our technique in the service, for we are very kind with the people and do not want to upset anyone, while Fr. So-and-so is very stern. I fear that we both are negligent in the holiness of the church and in the salvation of our brethren for the sake of satisfying the people". He continued talking with me, arguing with himself to put a limit to his kindness and firmness in dealing with people, so that the kindness would not turn to remissness, nor the firmness to violence and cruelty.

The Honor of Priesthood lies in Washing the Feet:

When I came to Los Angeles in August 1970, he told me in the airport: "You came in the right time, for I have been here alone living in dryness for the past 10 months. I need to spend time with priests to gain back my vitality".

In simplicity, despite his leadership spirit and the great fame he had inside and outside of Egypt, he considered himself in need to spend time with his fellow priests, not to organize and plan the service, but to receive from them what could bring him back his vitality in Jesus Christ.

What caught my attention the most was that in every occasion he used to distribute a picture of Pope Kirelos the Sixth, especially amongst the children. When I asked him that I never saw him do that in Egypt, he answered me: "In Egypt, our children live inside the church and know much about it. Here in the immigrants, if the new generation was not associated with the church leadership, it might lead to their separation from the mother church", as if what occupied him in distributing the Pope's picture was the adhering of the new generation unto the mother church.

The word that he could not stand was "the honor of priesthood". He used to repeat "the honor of priesthood lies in washing others' feet".

His Simplicity and Participation with the Saints:

His love unto the person of his Redeemer, our LORD Jesus Christ, used to lift up his heart towards heaven, opening the paradise before his eyes. He felt mutual love towards the heavenly beings and the saints of both the Old and the New Testaments. He also felt the friendship of his contemporary saints who have left this world.

He felt the unity of the victorious heavenly church in paradise with the struggling one. His talk about the collective church in heaven and on earth revealed his deep relationship with Master Christ.

With a simple heart, and in most of his work, he sought the aid of the saints, especially with regard to the salvation of the souls and in organizing a churchly work. I remember, for example, that he was concerned about someone's salvation, who was close to denying his faith for his fixation unto a non-Christian girl. After having struggled with him so many times with kindness and softness, along with many prayers and cries unto God, he asked him one day to drive him to Ava

Bishoy's monastery, although at that time it was very rare to find someone of the people visiting a monastery. When he entered the monastery church with him, they prayed together and went to the saint's remains. He noticed that he threw himself unto the pipe that contained the remains and started to cry. Our father left him for a while, and when that man returned to him, he told him that he could never return to that girl again and that he cannot deny his Christ no matter the price!

When St. Mary's church in Cleopatra was being built, he stood before the picture of St. Mary and cried, asking her to send St. George from heaven to perform this mission. Father Antonius Thabet told me that during a meeting with the Governor of Alexandria a fierce argument took place between several parties regarding St. Mary's church. The governor bluntly said: "Who said it was a church?" Father Antonius retells that in the midst of this extremely stormy atmosphere, Father Bishoy cried out and said: "St. Mary said it was a church!" Everyone got quiet, the meeting was ended, and nobody uttered another word!

When he was asked if he saw Virgin Mary, his famous answer was: "We always see her during the Divine Mass". He was not occupied with the visions, nor did he talk much about the miracles that occurred through the saints' prayers, but rather he was occupied with their prayers for mankind and for the growth and the unity of the church.

His Studies in Science, Education and the Bible of Christ:

Success was one of his features since his childhood, while all his students that he had taught chemistry and physics –or any other scientific course testified for his renewable knowledge and his teaching capabilities. He was even appointed a demonstrator in the Higher Institute of Education for his excellence in the psychological and educational courses. When he was anointed as a priest, he did not think lightly about what he had learned, but he realized that primarily and above all things he was a servant of the Bible.

Many times did he talk about some of the modern educational principles in that they are –in their essence- the product of Master Christ's way of dealing with all types and kinds of people, as well as St. Paul's style in his letters that were more concerned with the positive than with the negative aspects by strongly highlighting the good and the bright sides before dealing with the weaknesses and the faults, even the theological ones.

Many times did He warn against the turning of the priest into a psychological analyst or a social advisor. He did not ignore their roles; rather he would sometimes even send some people to spiritual psychiatrists for psychological treatment. Yet, the church remains clear in its path for salvation.

His Simplicity and the Second Mile:

Father Bishoy Kamel has written about the strength of "the second mile" and the practical love; he has also recorded that in his practical behavior. In the early 60's, as I have entered the church just before Saturday's afternoon prayer, I found a married young man attacking our father with brutal words in the church court, while some people were trying to address him. After taking the confessions, I quietly told our father that he wanted to apologize to him for what he did in his absence! Instead of going home, our father asked me to go with him to that man's house, saying: "He is my son and I am mistaken". I was very happy with our father's big heart and his love unto his children...

The young man was surprised when he saw us coming in and he threw himself on the floor to kiss our father's feet, but he pulled him back, hugged and kissed him, saying: "You were right... don't be upset, for I am mistaken!" The young man could not take this love and started to cry!

What a great and live image for the serving father and even for the true Christian that does not defend his personal dignity or carry hatred or a grudge inside him, but rather every love with the spirit of humbleness that is filled with wisdom!

Simplicity rather than Complexity:

The word "simple" is the opposite of "complex"; thus the simple person is the one that has a clear goal and a one way. He realizes his goal and does not take any turns away from it, right or left. What could be this one goal but enjoying the partnership of the One God - the Holy Trinity; while the road is to unite with the One that said: I am the road. St. Augustine said: Christ is our road that we take and He is our goal, for through Him we can reach Him.

The Simplicity of Childhood:

The return to childhood implies going back to trusting God -our Father, so that we would throw ourselves in His arms and trust His tender and forgiving Fatherhood that prepares great glories and an eternal inheritance for us. His Fatherhood turns our lives into a non-stop feast, filling our souls with internal joy and taking away all fears and anxiety. He turns our lives into an enjoyable journey that, day after day, inflames our heart with His love that it would hunger and thirst to meet with Him and to receive His utmost divine wisdom.

The Simplicity of Doves:

Christ has attached simplicity with wisdom, for He called us unto the wisdom of the serpents that is attached to the simplicity of the doves [Matthew 10:16].

How does St. Augustine see the Simplicity of the Doves?

1. It does not know hatred at all. If its squabs were taken from the nest and slaughtered before it, it will not leave its nest nor will it cease to embrace new eggs to offer them as food unto others! Hatred has no place in its heart, mind or dictionary.
2. A group life that is filled with peace: St. Augustine noticed that doves might fight with each other, where one dove would peck its sister, but once some food is put in front of them, they would all gather around together and eat without a fight. When they fly, they fly in one group and in one direction, as if they are calling unto us to lead a group life that is filled with peace even if there were some differences or conflicts amongst us. This is what happened between St. Paul and St. Peter, where one has publicly opposed the other for he was blamed [Galatians 2:11]. However, each of them held every love unto the other, and they both served with one spirit and for one goal, even if they had different personalities and talents. The same thing happened between St. Paul and St. Barnabas when they had different views with regard to taking St. Mark with them in the second preaching journey. This had lead to taking two journeys in two different directions but with one spirit and without losing their peace.

St. Augustine declared that, in their simplicity, doves do not carry hatred even if there were some conflicts amongst them, while wolves do not know love even if they offered kisses unto each other.

The Wisdom of the Serpent:

I like in the doves that they do not hold grudges, but I fear the serpent's poison. However, there are some things that we hate in the serpent, but other things that we need to learn from it:

- a. When the serpent feels that it is growing old by the weight of the long years, it shrinks and forces itself to enter through a small hole so that its old skin would separate, enabling it to go out to a new life. You, Christian, ought to learn that from it. Listen to what Master Christ says: "Enter in at the strait gate..." [Matthew 7:13]. St. Paul has also told us: "seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man" [Colossians 3:9-10]. We ought to learn from the serpent: to die, not for the old man, but for the right...
- b. Learn this matter from the serpent as well that you would keep your head safe, i.e. keep Christ inside you. Didn't you notice what happens when killing a serpent and how it keeps its head safe, exposing its entire body to the beatings! It does not want that part to be beaten, for it knows that it is its life. Us too, our life is in Christ, for He has said about Himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" [John 14:6]. The apostle has also said: "the head of every man is Christ" [1 Corinthians 11:3]. Thus, he that keeps Christ inside him keeps safe the head that protects him.

The Depths of the Faith and the Simplicity:

When we talk about the depths of the faith and its wisdom, we would actually talk about the other side of the simple life. In its depths, faith lifts up our hearts to constantly taste the heavenly life, whilst being proud of God's blessings that have granted us to be His children through the water of the baptism and the experience of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit inside us, making us a holy temple of God by constantly renewing us so that we would truly become a live icon of our heavenly Groom. At the same time, our heart would get larger lest it would be able to accept with love all mankind as the beloved ones whom Christ had died for. With faith we can feel the sweet taste of pain as being a crucifixion with Master Christ. Like that we can experience the depths of the faith through the simplicity, and thus testify for the Gospel of Christ inside us.

What do the Fathers say about Simplicity?

Just as the body parts can't see without the eyes, likewise the good deeds can't be performed without simplicity; and just as if the sight was lost, all the organs would become in darkness, likewise by losing the simplicity all the good deeds would stop.

O serious and straight student, be happy with your simplicity, with which you can stand in the road of truth and goodness, and don't be ashamed if you were called a child. This name suits you well, for you really deserve it: By this name we would know that you are pure and free of all evil, because being called "a child" refers to the purity and being called "simple" refers to being free of fraud. Just as the people in this world have names that reveal their jobs titles and positions in the community (doctor, engineer, etc.), likewise the student is called "simple". Thus, can you be called with the name of God, because the word "simple" refers to such a unique matter [Homely 5]?

The true fear of God is the product of the true faith, for he that truly believes, would truly fear the One he believes in.

The faith is born from the natural simplicity; and it is kept safe and is confirmed through this simplicity. The simplicity keeps safe the faith, while the fear of God keeps safe His commandments [Homely 6:261].

Mar Philoxinus of Mabugh

Let's count the cost of the extremely high spiritual tower and think thoroughly and carefully about it in advance. Let's primarily take into account the clear mistakes in order to dig deep and remove the venality and the wastes of the lusts, so that we would be able to lay down the strong foundations of simplicity and humbleness on the solid ground, or rather on the Bible rock [6:84]. In this way, the tower of spiritual virtues would hold and rise up to the highest heavens in complete safety and without shakiness.

Fr. Isaac

What do the Fathers say about Wisdom?

Our knowledge is Christ, and our wisdom is Christ... With Him, we would tend towards Him. With the knowledge, we would tend towards the wisdom, all this without leaving the one and same Christ. Patience is the companion of wisdom.

St. Augustine

Christ is the One that declares what is hidden [Matthew 11:25-27] and plants understanding in our hearts, for through Him and in Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" [Colossians 2:3]. He has the glory and the might along with the Father and the Holy Spirit from generation to generation and forever and ever, Amen.

St. Kyrillos of Alexandria

Why didn't he say: "He made us wise", and instead said: "Wisdom is made unto us" [1 Corinthians 1:30]? So as to show the overflow of the blessing. He meant the same thing by saying: "He gave us himself". Note how he has completed the talk in a fitting sequence. First, He made us wise by saving us from the faults. Then, He made us righteous and saintly by giving us the Spirit, thus redeeming us from all evil so that we would become "of Him". This is not an expression of a relationship of existence and being, but rather a talk about the faith.

I came to you, not with the excellence of speech or of wisdom, nor have I spoken of anything amongst you, save that "Jesus Christ was crucified".

The human wisdom denies the cross, while the faith reveals the power of God. The wisdom does not fail to declare the matters that the people search for, but it encourages them to be proud of what they have reached, while the faith does not only offer them the truth, but it also encourages them to glorify God.

St. John Golden Mouth

There is no use of studying the different sciences if the soul had no righteous life that would satisfy God.

The truly wise man can only have one interest that is to obey the Almighty God from all his heart and to satisfy Him.

He knows one thing and one thing only, that is to get on to what satisfies God to the best he can, thanking Him for His tender care that works in everything that happens in his life.

Just as it is only proper to thank the doctors for curing our bodies, even if they have given us bitter and unacceptable medicines, likewise it is not proper for us to be ignorant that all things work together for the better good through the divine care and, thus, deny God's favor in the matters that seem painful unto us.

St. Anthony the Great

God has given motives to all animals to keep their race. Therefore, Christ has warned us to exercise with reason and wisdom what the animals do by nature, running away from sin like the animals run away from the toxic food and seeking goodness like they seek the useful herbs.

He says: "Beware for yourselves", that is, differentiate between what is healthy and what is deadly.

Since there are two ways to watch for ourselves, where one is through the physical eyes and the other through the functions of the soul, and since the physical eyes cannot reach the goal, he spoke here of the work of the soul.

"Beware" means look around you in every direction with a wakeful eye to watch for yourselves. There is richness, arts and every other life entertainment around you; yet you ought to take special care for nothing but yourselves.

St. Basil the Great

God cares for the soul, that is the situate of the capabilities, the feelings and the emotions in every man, so that it would be wise and receive the knowledge, enabling its wisdom to function properly in the midst of the life of the body and its feelings and senses to be [Hebrews 5:14] righteous.

Origen the Scholar