

ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSABILITY

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from one who has been entrusted with much, much will be asked." (Luke 12:48)

The decision to release Fr. Vasile Susan of St. Mary's Romanian Orthodox Church in Chicago from the parish and the Episcopate was wrong. Archbishop Nathaniel made a big mistake.

Why should I write? Why should I speak out? To the extent that I am Romanian Orthodox, in this great country, founded on solid principles of faith and freedoms, I am greatly disturbed by the turmoil in our midst. I'm compelled to speak out and I will back my arguments and statements with biblical quotations in order to seek the truth. My intentions are not to offend anyone, but should anyone be offended by the truth or biblical quotations, they should seriously ponder and reflect, in the hope that good things would come out of this. The following are representations of my personal thoughts and convictions.

When speaking to the faithful the Bible says; **"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God"** (Ephesians 2:19). The Bible also says **"that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"** (1 Timothy 3:15). Therefore, as any other man, woman or child, I too belong to God's family. Through our common Romanian cultural origin and faith, we are one and the same people.

How does trouble start, grow and get out of control?

The general environment Archbishop Nathaniel creates in his Episcopate is sometimes truthful and yet sometimes ambiguous, made up of half-truths, deception, manipulation and self-centeredness. It's a combination of many things. His handling of the issues that concern us all is unclear, evasive and in many ways departing from the truth. Jesus said: **"You will know them by their fruits"** (Matthew 7:16). In Mark 10:43 we read, **"Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant."**

The problem Archbishop Nathaniel has with Fr. Susan is a result of this very environment that the Archbishop creates by deviating from the word of God. In his service to God, Fr. Susan draws attentions to the Archbishop's wrong doings, and is dismissed as a parish priest. Aren't we servants of God first, and above all else? I question neither the Archbishop's biblical knowledge nor his authority, but I question his actions. Having biblical knowledge is one measure of Christian maturity; the others are conduct and character. Christian life is much more than creed and conviction. It is a life of truth, love and hope. Your Eminence, you have gone astray both by creating such an environment and by dismissing Fr. Susan!

It is a fact that the majority of the priests in the Episcopate led by Archbishop Nathaniel are Romanian born. Through this, it is from there that they took their first breath of air, learned to speak, walk, said their first prayer, and later studied for the priesthood. Through this the priests and all others are undeniably connected to Romania. Part of Fr. Susan's heart is there, and most assuredly is everyone else's who finds the word Romanian written on top of their church, or claims connection to that country. We are one in spirit and in culture with our place of origin.

Our Romanian connection is a constitutive part of our identity which has grown more complex over the years by embracing this new country. In Archbishop Nathaniel's letter of dismissal to Fr. Susan part of the reason for his dismissal is that "his heart has been elsewhere." If we follow this reasoning then most of the priests should be dismissed from the Episcopate. I beg to differ with the Archbishop on this issue. It is abundantly apparent that Fr. Susan's heart is in the Episcopate, since it's the Episcopate's problems that Fr. Susan wanted to correct. Had his heart not been there, he would not have cared. Only when one cares, does one become involved!

The Archbishop is very well aware that the majority of priests and laity alike yearn for Church unity, so he consistently squashes every attempt of discussing this issue. He further emphasizes his thoughts of keeping the Church divided by dismissing Fr. Susan for allegedly having his heart "elsewhere".

At the 2003 Episcopate Congress, when the unity issue came up, the Archbishop dismissed it by saying that this issue was not on the agenda. Could lack of attention to this important issue create tension, frustration, resentment and reason for concern among the priests?

Of course it does! Isn't the Archbishop also perceived as coward for running from the real issue and preserving a false sense of peace and control of said problem?

Of course he is! The truth is that if the Archbishop was in control he would have already resolved this issue by now. The apostle Paul had the solution - straightforwardness. **"Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another"** (Ephesians 4:25). So why not put this issue to a vote, and see what direction your people want to go. Why control and manipulate people's futures? Who gives you the right to do that? I am certain God doesn't!

Does the Archbishop fail to meet his people's needs and fail to address the task of unity with equal dedication? According to the Bible, he does! The Bible says: **"as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith"** (Galatians 6:10). The Bible also says that, **"if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself"** (Galatians 6:3). So what the Archbishop ought to do, according to the Bible, is not to avoid the issue, but put it on his priority list. He should not make excuses, procrastinate or wait for better circumstances.

We know from the Bible that God created man in his own image and likeness. Like Him, we can think, love, reason, differentiate between right and wrong, and we have a moral consciousness. God has also given man the freedom to sin. The easiest way for us to sin is to try to control the circumstances around us, as well as our personal future and the future of others. In doing so, we consciously or unconsciously take on the attributes of God. Nevertheless, this is wrong. We must be His faithful servants, obedient, humble, and loyal, show good character in action, and not pretend to be God. How does the Archbishop's control and manipulation of the unity issue, of loving relations and fellowship in our Romanian community fit in?

Outwardly, Archbishop Nathaniel encourages dialogue, the loving relationship and fellowship with the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America and Canada, whereas covertly, he discourages or encumbers it. The priests from the Episcopate have to ask Archbishop Nathaniel for special permission to receive or serve with the priests from the Archdiocese. I thought this issue was resolved when the dialogue was started more than 10 years ago. Through this special requirement for permission, Archbishop Nathaniel makes loving relations and fellowship in our Romanian community conditional. We find nowhere in the Bible the stipulation these relations are conditional.

Expressions of love, care, and understanding in human relations should be free, heartfelt, and meaningful. In the Bible, St. Paul said that a good life is all about love: **"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing"** (1 Corinthians 13:3). The Bible also says: **"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"** (John 13:35). To paraphrase the 7th Beatitude **you are blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That is when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family** (Mathew 5:9). St. Paul says in Romans 12:18: **"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."** St. Paul also wrote: **"Therefore, receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."** St. John said: **"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren"** (1 John 3:14). The Bible clearly stressed that relationships, not achievements or acquisition of things, are what matters most. And that is why Jesus **"stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother"** (Matthew 12:49-50). So, being included, God's family is the highest honor and the greatest privilege you will ever receive. Control and manipulation is nowhere to be found! It is also wrong. Such tactics are used by the Archbishop to keep us divided, for his own selfish needs.

Contradictory and conflicting attitude on the issue of unity:

When the Archbishop was asked how the unity issue is progressing, his answer was, as always, inaccurate - that there's dialogue and the relationships are warm and progressing.

I am not aware of any substantive steps made towards unity. Were these answers clear, truthful, sincere, defined, or were they evasive, confusing, unclear, and inaccurate? Weren't these actions self-promoting in lack of any substance? Does anyone, I mean anyone, know where we really stand? Is there any doubt as to who is responsible for the confusing and ambiguous environment?

In his dismissal letter to Fr. Susan, the Archbishop outlines his authority to transfer, remove or dismiss priests from parishes. If this is indeed the case, and he intends to use this power without consulting with the Episcopate Council, in no way does this show humble characteristics of a servant of God. On the contrary, it shows the character of a self-centered man, a dictator. A true servant of God would actually give this matter serious consideration and allow due process to take its course.

A humble man would make this matter known to the Episcopal Council, put all evidence on the table, and search for a resolve. **"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you"** (James 4:6 -7). Has it ever occurred to the Archbishop that he could be wrong? The Bible says: **"Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls"** (1 Corinthians 10:12).

I do not think the Archbishop has given enough time and thought before he took the decision of releasing Fr. Susan. He forgets that outspokenness is a personality trait, and not a flaw of character. He looks down on people whose views differ from his on issues of importance. He expects total and blind subordination from his followers, because of the office he holds, even when he departs from the truth. Could this be wrong? The Bible says: **"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil"** (Ephesians 5:15-16). It also says: **"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin"** (James 4:17). The Bible also recommends that everyone periodically give himself a self-evaluation in order to avoid going down the wrong path, and correct himself timely. **"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren"** (James 1:14-16).

Self-evaluation is in the Bible: **"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves"** (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Your Eminence, you must reestablish credibility which is a necessity in your position of leadership. Jesus said: **"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from one who has been entrusted with much, much will be asked"** (Luke 12:48). You must have credibility in order to be trusted and followed. Such credibility and trust can only be established if you are consistently honest and uphold the truth at any cost. The collation of circumstances to self promote your image is not in the service of God, and neither is running away from the real issues you must be facing. A critical self-evaluation is necessary. It will allow you to see that you have departed from the truth. You can re-enact spiritual growth only if you are cognizant of your departure. As such, you should be able to replace lies with truth. The Bible says: **"Sanctify them by Your truth, Your word is truth"** (John 17:17). I am certain you know that salvation requires redemption. The Bible says: **"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"** (John 8:31-32).

Your Eminence, the easiest and the fastest way for you to clarify the controversy involving Fr. Susan, is to reconsider your position regarding the dismissal to Fr. Susan. Furthermore, you must give the people at St. Mary the exact reasons why you found it necessary to take such an action. As for the rest, you must rectify the ambiguous environment you created, and I believe the problems with Fr. Susan and others will go away by themselves.

You must stop dwelling on the old divisive problem in our community which no longer exists. You must choose to let go and forget the old way of acting, **"that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts"** (Ephesians 4:22). Adjust, change, and transform your thinking because it often needs readjustment after self-assessment.

The Bible says: **"be renewed in the spirit of your mind"** (Ephesians 4:23). The Bible says that we can only be transformed from the inside out, if we let go of our painful and sorrowful past. Then and only then, can we move forward. The Bible says: **"Put on the new man who was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness"** (Ephesians 4:24).

To the priests of the Episcopate who have spoken to the Archbishop about his mishandling of Fr. Susan's issue, I salute you. You are probably the same people that speak out on other relevant issues as well.

To the priests who have been silenced by intimidation and succumbed to fear I have this to say: you will begin to show how much you care if you lovingly speak the truth. **"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear"** (1 John 4:18). It's much easier to remain silent rather than provoke confrontation but I ask you, how can you remain silent in Fr. Susan's dismissal without just cause and due process? Doesn't this dictatorial tone and pattern of deception threaten your job security in the future? When others show a sinful pattern isn't it your duty to point it out? Isn't fear of speaking out the cause of your unhappiness, torment and gossip? Did it ever occur to you that your lack of care to participate in smaller Episcopal problematic issues and just drifting along will ultimately be threatened with bigger problems? At this point all of you should honestly fear similar outcome when disagreements with the Archbishop come up! Maybe its time for St. Paul's solution of straightforwardness: **No more lies, no more pretenses. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ we are all connected to each other and after all when you lie to others you end up lying to yourselves.** So why not speak in support of your brother, who for sure tackled the Archbishop's wrongdoings for all of God's servants, not just himself, when he spoke the truth. Free yourselves of the guilt of silence. Put into practice what you learned.

If you, the priests in the Episcopate, are one group that wants to stay and grow together in spiritual life, you must support each other. It's your duty! St. Paul says: **"that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me"** (Romans 1:12). Did it ever occur to you that if all of you speak at once the Archbishop will not be able to fire all of you, and he may actually find it necessary to correct himself? I have known Fr. Susan for many years, and I hold him to the highest esteem. I find him to be a man of character.

Unlike some, he is unafraid to speak the truth. I have been many times in the church he served and I have seen that he was well-respected and dedicated to serving God and the parishioners of St. Mary. I am not aware of any trouble between him and his congregation. I am certain that Fr. Susan and the parishioners of St. Mary's were astonished by Archbishop Nathaniel's letter of dismissal. They were astonished by the fact that there were no substantive reasons mentioned; no problem of character, and no mention of due process. Fr. Susan's "mouth" being the first reason for dismissal the Archbishop cites, is a personality trait and not a flaw of character. There is no litmus test for measuring where someone's heart is either. Archbishop Nathaniel is vague regarding the reasons why Fr. Susan has been dismissed. These reasons must be spelled out precisely and entirely. Incredibly, the Archbishop is extremely specific in citing his absolute power and determined to use it! The truth is that this rubbish, as stated in the letter of dismissal, will not hold any water in any court of law. Let's not forget how abusive a dictatorship can be. That's exactly the reason why we are in the USA; to escape and avoid this sort of abuse of power.

What would we have done without St. Paul the Apostle, who had a similar personality trait: outspokenness? Did Jesus dismiss him? Did anyone dismiss him? Isn't it obvious that this sort of man is determined to make a difference!

It is character problems, my friends, that should constitute reasons for dismissal not personality traits. The Archbishop has forgotten that the Bible encourages people to speak up. In the Bible it is not merely suggested, nor are we kindly asked, it is commanded **to recognize his glory, to honor his glory, to declare his glory, to reflect his glory and to live for his glory.** This in fact is reinforcement that in the service to God, all of us must use everything in our power and character to follow His word - the truth. **"Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God"** (Romans 6:13).

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