

Standing in the Office: Shepherdless Offices and the Good Shepherd

In Syriac, conceptualization and naming are not simple acts of giving a name. A name does not merely define; it gives direction, exerts influence, and builds meaning and memory.

Therefore, in the Syriac world of thought, a name is not a passive indicator; it is an active and living element with the power of suggestion. Naming is more often than not performed with the aim of keeping memory alive in the context of leaving a trace and impact, symbolizing a value, exalting it, and projecting it into the future.

In this context, the name *Ro^oyo* (ܠܘܝܘܐ) is not limited to a singular meaning in ancient Syriac; on the contrary, it possesses a wide and dynamic field of meaning. Embracing the meanings of protector, one who herds the flock, shepherd, church administrator, spiritual leader, priest, bishop, leader, and public guide, the name *Ro^oyo* (ܠܘܝܘܐ) takes its origin from the verb *r^oo* (ܠܘܝܘܐ). This word expresses not merely a shepherd who herds animals, but a guide who protects humans, hearts, and directions as well.

For this reason, the title *Ro^oyo* (ܠܘܝܘܐ) gains meaning directly with Christ's words, "*I am the good shepherd*" (John 10:14–16). Indeed, in Syriac culture, Christ is viewed not merely as a teacher, but as the head of all shepherds/offices—that is, as the ultimate guide of truth.

In Syriac, the word *r^oo* (ܠܘܝܘܐ) possesses an extraordinarily wide field of meaning, and this breath deeply reflects the understanding of governance and guidance in Syriac culture. While this verb carries the meanings of protecting, observing, grazing, pasturing, herding the flock, directing, and guiding, it also encompasses dimensions of relationship and consent such as nourishing, being nourished, accepting, consenting, and liking. Along with these, it embodies mental, moral, and administrative meanings such as thinking, contemplating, falling into delusions, managing, governing, taking care, guarding, respecting, and being pleased.

Thus, in Syriac, shepherding is understood not merely as an external governance, but at the same time as an internal awareness, a conscientious responsibility, and a state of giving mental direction.

Derived from this root, *re^oyo* (ܠܘܝܘܐ) carries the meanings of pasture, meadow, grass, and fodder. *Re^oyo* (ܠܘܝܘܐ) represents the area where the shepherd takes the flock, where nourishment is received, and where the soul remains alive. On the social and spiritual level, this word evokes living spaces where people can take a breath and be nourished with justice and mercy.

Another word derived from the same root, *re^{cy}ono* (ܠܚܢܘܢܐ), gathers within itself the meanings of idea, intention, mind, brain, conscience, thought, intuition, intelligence, perception, ability, goal, and purpose. This shows that in Syriac culture, shepherding is not merely directing the outer world, but at the same time directing the inner world, intention, thought, and conscience. Thus, *Ro^{cy}o* / shepherd / office becomes the person who protects not only the flock, but meaning, direction, and the inner horizon of the human being as well.

For in Syriac, an office / *m^aḵomo* (ܡܚܘܡܐ) is not merely a position or a social status. It (*m^aḵomo*) is the place where the 'truth' / 'reality' of the human being stands with(in) itself.

Derived from the verb *ḵom* (ܡܚܘܡ), this word expresses standing up, resurrecting, reviving, supporting, taking initiative, persevering in one's word, straightening up in existence, and remaining true all at the same time. Therefore, *m^aḵomo* / office is not a step to climb up, but a moral status inside of which one stays with responsibility. *M^aḵomo* / office is a conscientious state that requires remaining constantly on foot (that is, on alert). A human being does not merely exist and stay there; they serve it, keeping it lively and alive by developing it. It is not a place to sit, but a place of standing, rising, being on foot, standing upright, resurrecting, and being intertwined with service—such is *m^aḵomo* / office...

Nevertheless, throughout history—and today as well—many offices have lost this inner meaning and have been deprived of it. The seats have remained filled, but the conscience has been emptied.

The supplication of Saint Ephrem of Nisibis (306–373) rising from centuries ago points precisely to this spiritual collapse: ***"Thorns have grown; Christ's seed of truth has been choked among them. Because of the slackness of the farmers, the cultivated fields have been trampled, left underfoot. Because the shepherds fell asleep, wolves entered the field as they wished and plundered it. There is no shepherd left to stand against them (ḵo^em/ḵoyem) and turn them back."***

What Mor Ephrem describes here is not merely external threats. "Thorns" can be explained through the semantic relationship of its etymological link with the root *re^{cy}o* (ܠܚܢܘܢܐ) / *re^{cy}ono* (ܠܚܢܘܢܐ) in Syriac, representing the negative-warning state of the 'thought' or 'thinking' condition: a corrupted thought, a dirtied intention, a loosened conscience. The "field" is the heart of the human being; it is the fabric of society. The "seed" is the living teaching of Christ. And when the

shepherd sleeps—that is, when *re^cyono* (ܠܥܘܢܐ) (mind, intuition, perception, and conscience) is abandoned—it is inevitable for wolves to multiply.

In Syriac, *ro^cyo* (ܠܥܘܢܐ), which means shepherd, is not merely the person who governs; they are the one who thinks, protects, takes care, guards, nourishes, and carries responsibility. It is not for nothing that the verb *r^aco* (ܠܥܘܢܐ) means both "to herd" and "to contemplate." This defines the essence of governing in Syriac culture: it shows the necessity of being nourished by thought in order to govern. To govern is first to understand. To give direction is first to carry a conscience.

Therefore, a human being who holds a position and office in family, church, politics, school, science, academia, health, culture, media, literature, business life, civil field, and public sphere must also venture to carry a facilitating heart if they set out with the spirit of the Good Shepherd (John 10:14–16). Because the Good Shepherd does not create obstacles; he opens paths. He does not place burdens; he carries burdens. He does not produce fear; he builds security. He does not remain indifferent; he assumes responsibility. He takes care and does not hurt. He completes and develops. For in a world where prejudices, ruptures, and conflicts are intense, the true virtue is not to multiply difficulties, but to keep conscience and morality alive—to grow meaning and development.

The saying, "The path of truth expands with the footprints of those who facilitate," describes precisely this. Facilitating is not a strategy, but a state of wisdom. It is the ability of a human being who has transcended inner darkness to leave light upon another's path. Therefore, the person who serves society in any field must first be able to be themselves and remain themselves. They must display a stance that lightens burdens, grows meaning, and multiplies morality and virtue, rather than rendering things heavier.

Because when they display this stance materially and spiritually, they discover their self-love, self-respect, and self-worth; they begin to write their own authentic story. This realization opens the path for the human being to govern themselves and transcend themselves. As distorted impulses such as arrogance, jealousy, anger, ambition, comparison, exclusion, ostentation of superiority, domination, and selfishness are transcended, the inner shepherd awakens. And the human being understands that some losses and renunciations are actually not an annihilation, but gates opening to the true self.

The opening of the gates leading to the true self is possible only when the officeholder remembers or accepts that they are a *talmido* (ܬܠܡܝܕܐ) / *tilmiz* / student under all conditions. For

in Syriac, the noun *talmido* (ܬܠܡܝܕܐ) is derived from the word *lʿmad* (ܠܡܕ). This means to unite something, to bring together, to join, to collect, to compile, to gather, to add, to bind, to enfold, to glue, to establish a connection, to learn, and to teach.

Syriac culture unites all these layers in a single truth: rather than desiring the prestige of the office, it is essential for the officeholder to care about this awareness and responsibility. In fact, this consciousness should be their focal point.

Because an office is meaningful as long as it is *mʿkomo* (ܡܚܘܡܐ); leadership gives life as long as it is *roʿyo* (ܪܘܝܐ). When true shepherding is forgotten, wolves multiply; when conscience awakens, the field green-ups anew.

Yusuf Beğtaş