

Church-Servers, the Deacon

The name deacon in own sense designates a third rank of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. On initial assignment the deacons were servers at the meal of the Lord, i.e. at the fulfillment of the liturgy. They were also ministers of the word of God. The present circle of their liturgical actions is determined in an exact sense by the primary head of the establishment. They serve at the administration of Holy Communion for the bishops and presbyters, but do not perform sacraments, except for baptism as a last resort, according to the image fulfilled by his laity. They uplift prayers as assistants and read the Gospel.

“According to the certificate of ordination” the deacon is obliged “at the Divine liturgy and at other sacraments performed by the priest (1), and at other divine services and rites, to serve”, “in obedience to the priest (see page 680 note 1), contributing and working for all the good” (2); “the service of the deacon: to prepare the sacred vessels for the service, to properly raise up prayer for the people (i.e. within oneself) and for the people (i.e. loudly for all to hear) in church, for this to be ordained and blessed, on the ambo in honor of the Gospel and the Apostolic epistles (3): and those things not specifically belonging to the priest (if, for example, last during the Divine Service he is called to administer the Unction or to baptize an ill person), to teach the people from the Divine Scriptures, the Divine Commandments and the way of life according to Christian law, from the dogmas and the commentaries of the church luminaries, the God-bearing fathers (4). More than this nothing that belongs to the priest is appropriate”.

The Deacon in the case of the absence of the priest or because of his illness can not lead the vigil or obednitsa services (5), lead or sing the burial service for the departed, serve the molieben or the panakhida (6); in general, the deacon, as only a server, is the person assisting the priest in the performing the sacraments and other liturgical actions and can not perform any kind of Divine Service without the participation and blessing of the priest. It is true that the church rubrics on some days of the year permit the serving of some of the services, for example, the compline, the midnight service and others, “privately” (see for example page 524) but from here it may not be concluded in any way that the deacon may lead the services of compline, vespers, matins and so forth in the temple and as if these services were led by the priest.

In the order of the church services (in their beginning, in the middle, and also at their end), usually, are clear instructions on the participation in performance of the Divine Services of the priest and on the necessity of his

blessing during the performance of church services (for example: “the priest at the beginning does”, “the priest begins”, “having been blessed by the priest”, “an exclamation from the priest”, “the priest prays”, “the priest says to the deacon”, “the priest says the dismissal”, “the priest does the dismissal”; in other respects there are remarks: “if there is no deacon the priest says”, but there are no remarks: “if there is no priest, the deacon says”. As is evident the church services are adapted by the Church for their performance by the priest, quite often together with the deacon, but certainly with the participation of the priest and from his blessing.

The priestly blessing to teach, the exclamations, the many prayers and closing priestly dismissals say that the deacon has no right to say, between the former as well as those, and others what begins, is accompanied and fulfilled in each general church service in the Orthodox Church. From here it is clear, that the deacon may not and must not begin, nor independently perform, any general church service without the participation of the priest. The Deacon is the servant, and not the performer of the Divine Services; he has no right without the blessing and the participation of the priest to vest himself with the sticharion (7), to cense, to recite the litanies. The Deacon’s Certificate of Ordination clearly expresses the command to the deacon “to *serve at* (but not to perform) the Divine Liturgy and other sacraments performed by the priest, and at *other divine services and orders*”.

Independently deacons may perform (without a vestment, in the rason) only those Divine Services, that are also permitted to the laity, namely those in which begins with the rubric: “if the priest says: Blessed is our God, and we say: amen; if there is no priest, we say: Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus the Christ our God, have mercy on us”; thus the so-called home canons and prayers begin; the church services all without exception begin with the blessing of the priest and without him in any case they may not be performed.

If the priest illegally blesses the deacon to perform in place of himself he must stand before the church meeting. The priest receives by ordination in his rank the authority only *personally* to perform the known priestly functions and the known function of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, but he has *no right of assignment* to whomever of the full powers of his priesthood. In this case is one of the essential ways of distinguishing the holy rank of the bishop from the rank of the presbyter. Differing from the deacon by many privileges in the divine service, the presbyter is similar to him in that personally, by himself, he can not change anything in the precisely specified norms of activity, which properly belongs to him, and the clergy with whom he concelebrates. Therefore, the priest blessing deacon to

perform instead of himself the church order of services (as, for example, the funeral procession of the departed), and he himself is carried away with the right of the bishop, exceeds his position, and blessing the deacon to fulfill this is the same crime, i.e. the excess of authority given him by ordination.

But also inarguably the right of assignment belonging to the bishop *is not unconditional*: even the bishop cannot give to each of the clergymen any kind of an assignment, but only that consistently with the degree he carries, and with his clerical position. The bishop cannot order, for example, the deacon to sanctify an altar, perform the liturgy, or other priestly activities; because to fulfill these priestly activities there simply is not enough authority in the assignment, but an ordination to the degree of presbyter is necessary. If even the bishop is inarguably constrained in the application of the authority belonging to him; then the priest may use it: he is personally obliged to send a petition for his need, and must not charge the deacon to direct a service, for which he is not authorized even by the bishop's ordination. In general the spirit and letter of the priest's canon do not give any right 1) for the deacon to replace the priest in performing any priestly activities, and 2) for the priest to agree and assign the deacon to do any of these priestly duties.

Thus, unfairly, those priests behave reprehensibly and with harm for the Church who assign deacons to perform any kind of church services, in church vestments and in their absence; equally it is unlawful and criminal for the deacons to act also, if he soon becomes independent, without the participation of the priest, even with his consent, performs in the place of the priest this or that Divine Service – general or particular - in the temple or outside of it.

The Deacon should perform (see the Certificate of Ordination) only “the services belonging to the deacon” and moreover “according to the rubrics and the order of the Holy Eastern Church” (1); “in place of the priest, as the Blessed Augustine says, only the priest may serve, and not a deacon”. (See the details in the *Bogoslovskii Vestnik* (Theological Messenger) 1892, 9; *Tserkovniya Vedomosti* (Church News) 1892, 43; 1893, 1; *Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'sk. Pastyrei* (The Manual for Village Pastors) 1888, 6; 1889, 13; 1894, 10-14.).

Notes:

(1) The Deacon, with two priests, is obliged to serve with one and the other, according to the idea of his rank and duties, he is present during the Divine Services, as the helper of the priest (*Tserkovnyi Vestnik* (Church Messenger) 1891, 27). The Deacon must

not be relieved from the duty to serve with the employed priest: the employed priest is in place of the present priest of the church, but for this or that reason does not serve personally (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1892, 42).

(2) The Deacon who is a teacher at a parochial school, is not relieved from his duties to participate in the performance of the Divine Services even on week-days, if the these duties are compatible with his teaching; at the Presanctified Liturgies during the days of the Holy Forty Day Fast and at all the Divine Services of its first week and during Holy Week it is not only necessary for the deacon-teacher to be present, but also his students (see the detailed explanation in Taurus Diocesan Authority in Eparkhial'nyiia Vedomosti (Diocesan News) 1889, 5). – The District supervisor of church-parish schools (and equally the diocesan supervisor and the Diocesan School Council) have no right to autocratically relieve the deacon-teachers from participation in the performance of the Divine Services; this right belongs to local Bishop (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1897, 42). In those dioceses, where it is published, with the agreement of the local Bishop, is a special rule for the precise duties of the deacon-teachers concerning the church and the school, it follows, of course, to enforce these rules. So, in the Novgorod diocese the local diocesan authority has established the following rules concerning the deacon-teachers: the deacon-teachers are relieved from participation in performing the Divine Services on all week-days, from participation at the special request services - at baptisms and the burial service of a child, at the performance of marriages, with the exception, that when on one day there will be many marriages and the help of the deacon will be necessary; it is necessary for the deacons to participate in the services: on all Sundays and Holy Days, on all Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays of Great Lent, on all patronal feast days, on all rural feasts in the church and during the time of prayers in houses, and besides this, according to the local requested circumstance, in the special exclusive cases, when the presence of deacon at the Divine Services or the performance of the request will be recognized as necessary; but in order to prevent damage to the school work, the rector of the church, leading the deacons to participate in the Divine Services and requested services in unexpected inclusive cases, should act with strict discernment and oversight and not give any place for the multiplication of such cases; from this it is suggested that the deacon-teachers in case of the

necessity to participate in the Divine Services on school days, make an effort to visit the school some time before the performance of the Divine Services for the hearing of the given lessons and for the presentation of new lessons (Tserkovniya Vedomosti (Church News) 1897,42). Also other dioceses issued special rules, by which one or another privilege is granted the deacon-teachers (see Simbirskiiia Eparkhial'nyiia. Vedomosti (Simbirsk Diocesan News) 1896, 3). Any general law concerning this does not exist (see Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1893, 19; 1894, 45; Tserkovniya Vedomosti (Church News) 1896, 16). But anyway neither from the rules about parochial schools, nor from the decrees of the Holy Synod is it evident that the deacons, even though they are teachers of designated schools, take part in the performance of the Divine Services only on great feasts and Sundays were named to positions with the exclusive purpose of teaching at the schools. In view of this, there, where there are no deacon-teachers of the special rules issued by the local diocesan authority, the demand by the priests, that the deacon-teachers be relieved from school duties during the time of the Divine Services, should be recognized as quite lawful.

(3) The Kostroma Spiritual Consistory (because in many churches of the diocese there are vacancies of psalm-readers the deacons, who quite often are responsible to the Diocesan Authority, substitute upon requests for permission for them to alternate in the functions of the specific diaconal duties in the church and the parish with the regular deacons) by circular decrees has proclaimed to the clergy of the diocese the following information and direction, that in the situation consisting of vacancies of psalm-readers the deacon should without neglect execute all the duties of the psalm-reader in the church and parish; to begin the divine services in the rank of deacon they must do so with the knowledge and blessing of the rector of the church, instead of at his own discretion and desire, and not to arbitrarily leave the choir reading and singing (Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei (Manual for Village Pastors) 1889, 4). - Concerning whether the deacon in the absence of the psalm-reader in helping the regular deacon serve liturgies (for example the early one), - "Tserkovnim Vestnikom (The Church Messenger)" explained, that the deacon on the vacancy of the psalm-reader, as deacon, is obliged to serve the liturgy at every opportunity, not thinking that he helps someone by this (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1892,43). The assignment of turns of the deacons in their service of the liturgy

should be determined by the rector, and not by any means depend on the will of this or that deacon (see Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1892, 28). - It is self understood that the deacon-psalm-reader at a divine service, if vested, necessarily should carry his orarion also (see Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1894, 39).

(4) The Deacon is forbidden and has no the right to vest and deliver sermons: the prohibition of these things also is that it is a forbidden action in the service and teaching (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1890, 11).

(5) In 1892, March 9, No. 140, from Metropolitan Leonty of Moscow the following proposition arrived in the local Consistory: "information reached me, that in some parishes within the city of Moscow during Great Lent one of the deacons served the Hours without the priest. Finding such custom completely opposed to church rules, I propose that the Consistories confirm to the clergy, that the deacon does not have the right to perform any divine service without the priest, and those guilty of the infringement of this rule will be subjected to strict accountability". (Moskovskiiia Eparkhial'nyiia Vedomosti (Moscow Diocesan News) 1892, 9).

(6) The Moscow Council of 1667 even considers the performance as deacons, without the utmost need, of sprinkling with holy water out of his competence: "the priest blesses the water, he is worthy also to sprinkle it, and not the deacon; the deacon only holds the vessel of holy water, for he is the servant" (Materiali dlia istorii raskola (Materials for the History of the Schism), 288). According to the explanation in the "The Church Messenger", the deacon by himself taking the cross from the altar and taking it for kissing in preparing for holy communion represents a change in the standard practice as excessive and undesirable, and in the specified case it is necessary to bring the cross out from the sanctuary to the priest (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1888, 28).

(7) The Deacon, when he soon participates in whatever Divine Service as a deacon, by all means should be in church vestments - in a sticharion with the orarion (and not in any case without the sticharion, and only an orarion, as it is sometimes practiced, - see Penzenskiiia Eparkhial'nyiia Vedomosti (The Penza Diocesan News 890, 18); the deacon receives the right to vest every time from the blessing of the priest, which is why he asks the blessing from him with the words: "Bless, Master, the holy sticharion and orarion"; the deacon has no the right by himself to vest in sacred

vestments, without the blessing of the priest, even and with the consent of the priest, (Rukovodstvo dlia seljskikh Pastyrei (The Manual for Village Pastors) 1894, 14).

(8) At the sole celebration by the deacon of this or that service, and even with the participation of the psalm-reader, the omission specified in the order of services of either actions or the prayers or their completion without a priest, the deacon distorts the very service, for which are specified in the known liturgical books a certain rank and order of performance, with the necessary concurrence with this by the actions of the church servers according to their rank; the distortion of the church services in any case cannot be allowed. Therefore the deacon can neither begin without the blessing of the priest, nor intone the exclamations of the priest, nor open the royal doors during a service, nor make an entrance, nor do a censing, nor do the dismissal (because all these actions are done only by the priest himself, or sometimes with others and the deacon, but not otherwise, as after the preliminary blessing of the priest, in which the deacon in any case has no right to preach neither by himself, nor with other people, neither by liturgical actions, nor by church matters), whereas all this accompanies or enters into the liturgical structure of the order of this or that church service. Therefore the deacon, as a hierarchical person with only known rights and duties, has no right in church vestments, without the participation of the priest to perform any private divine services or prayer services, although it is faster for the completion of it the blessing of the priest is required and the known rank or order of service is specified. On the other hand, a private service of need done by the deacon (a brief Litya for the departed, the panakhida) will be imagined from the person of the deacon, or according to the tradition and temple custom, but, anyway, by the higher ecclesiastical authority (Hierarchical or Holy Synodal) as not by the rank itself and not in agreement with the established divine service rank, because this service will inevitably be needed, in view of the above mentioned reduction and change in the structure of the liturgical actions accompanying it. In another situation, if a priest is in the church, and by himself beginning this or that divine service and up to the end participating in it through its completion out of the order of its divine service, that belongs to the person of the priest, even though he, according to the need or circumstances, did not immediately accept the participation in the direction of all the order of this or that service, moreover the part of the divine service or private service of

need. We understand in this case the Moliebens, the Panakhidas, the Lityas for the Departed, usually served on the ambo or in the middle of the temple sometimes by one present deacon, if only the priest was in the temple (for example, according to the need in the sanctuary, instead of in the middle of the temple) and has sent what belongs to the rank of the priesthood - began the divine service by the usual blessing, intoned the exclamations and finished the service with the blessing of the dismissal. It is supposed in ecclesiastical practice. (See the details in the Rukovodstvo dlia Seljskikh Pastyrei (Manual for Village Pastors) 1894, 14).

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp., (Kharkov, 1900) pp.682-5.
Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © 3/27/2001. Rev. 7/26/2001. All rights reserved.*