

Church Servers

In the Orthodox Church this title designates persons of the lowest degree of the clergy, who, while not having the grace of the priesthood, are devoted to one or another service in the Church. These are the Sub-deacon, the Reader, and the Singer, and the sacristan.

The Sub-Deacon

Sub-deacons serve with the church servers. Various scholars have various opinions on the establishment of the position of the Sub-deacon. One attributes its establishment to Jesus Christ, another to the Apostles and, finally, a third holds its establishment by the end of the first century. Undoubtedly this position must have ancient roots. A clear mention of it is found in the letters of St. Cyprian and in the Apostolic Constitutions. According to the ancient canons the Sub-deacon prepared the washing of hands of the priestly celebrants, which he already did during his ordination. Also his duty was to lead the catechumens out after the Deacon intones: "all catechumens, depart". He also secured the Royal Doors, so that the unauthorized do not enter the sanctuary. Today Sub-deacons participate only at a hierarchical service to serve the bishop: they vest him, protect and support him, give him the lamps and to hold these lamps. For the most part Sub-deacons at the present time are in the order of the deaconate, but do not possess the order of the deaconate but only as Sub-deacons. They have the right of wearing only the sticharion and the orarion, which they always gird themselves crosswise.

Readers and Singers

By its title Readers are called clergy, on whom the duty is laid and lays the reading of the Holy Scriptures, with the exception of the Gospel, during the divine services. Since ancient times they were the keepers of the sacred books as well. They were also assigned the duty to light the lamps in the sanctuary and to carry forth the lamps during the performance of the divine services in the presence of the celebrating clergy as required (1).

The Singers, or Psalmists, in the ancient Church were the lowest degree of Readers. As is known, in the earliest period of the Church all the people present were permitted to sing during the divine services. Irrespective of the performance of the people the ancient Church established separate singers for performance of singing the divine services. This establishment

goes back to deep antiquity: singers (Psalti) as a special ecclesiastical rank are mentioned in the liturgies of the Apostle James and the Evangelist Mark. During the Fourth Century the decision to have separate Psalti was already pretty much accepted. In the ancient Church singers were required to lead a strictly pious life. Their main function was to lead the singing in the temple and to direct it; for the singers usually begin the singing elevated on the ambo, where those not set apart as clergy had any right to go, according to the canons of the church (Council of Laodicia canon 15; Fourth Ecumenical Council canon 33; Seventh Ecumenical Council canon 14). The assembly of singers was referred to as "the chorus", "the choir" or "singing clerics" In the Eastern Church there were always two choruses: the "right" and the "left".

Note (1): For the first three centuries the position of readers was entrusted by privilege to those Christians who confessed their faith before the pagans. In the ancient Church this position was highly respected, because it is apparent that people of known origin often accepted it. Thus, the Emperor Julian the Apostate in his youth was the reader in the church of Nicomedia. In accordance with the importance of the purpose of the position the ancient Church already applied caution that readers were not only skilful in reading with understanding but also learned, for which special schools were organized.

The Sexton

The sexton designates a warden or a gatekeeper. The name sexton (ponomar) is derived from guardian (Gr. paramonarios, Ru. paramonar). Their duty in the ancient Church was mainly to be continually present at the holy places (Bethlehem - birthplace of the Savior, Golgotha and so forth), both for protecting them, and for the convenience of tourists. They also looked after the accessories of the temple: the utensils, the sacred vestments and other church property, they lit and put out the lamps at the divine services. With the passage of time their duties included reading and singing during the divine services, bringing into the sanctuary altar-breads, wine, water, incense and flint, the preparation and giving the censer and the hot water to the priest-server, the cleaning of the church and the porch, the cleaning of the icons, the walls and the ceiling from dust and cobwebs, and finally, the calling of the believers to the divine services by ringing the bells from the middle of the bell-tower.

The Canonarchs and the Paraecclesiarchs.

The Canonarch and the Paraecclesiarch are still mentioned in the liturgical books. In monastery churches the loud-voiced exclamation usually comes before the singing of the stichera in order to sing what follows. For this purpose certain people are selected, who exclaim both the tone of the chant and the refrains before the stichera, and the same stichera in parts, and the singers sing the stichera with their words also in parts. Such exclamatory stichera are called "canonarchical" and those who exclaim them are called "Canonarchs" (1).

The Paraecclesiarch, "namely the Candle-lighter", according to the church rules, asks the blessing of the Rector at the beginning of services to ring the bell for the Divine services, lights the candles, hands him the censer, carries the candlesticks at the entrances with a censer and the Gospel and in other cases.

Note (1). In view of the special chapter in the Typikon (Chapter 27) "about the Canonarchs", indicating their special role mainly in monasteries, it follows that it is desirable and even obligatory to sing the stichera with the Canonarch in all monasteries including the female ones. In some parish churches, for example in Moscow, during the antiphonal singing at the All Night Vigil it also is acceptable to sing the stichera with the Canonarch (Church Messenger 1892, 19). As this way of singing the stichera gives a special elegance to the Divine Services, its greater propagation in parish churches is desirable wherever that opportunity exists. By the way, the summoning of those who are studying in parochial schools to participate in the reading and singing at the Divine Services grants a full opportunity to sing the stichera with the Canonarch.

The Psalm-Reader

At the present time in parish churches all the duties of those differentiated church servers that were previously designated "Cantors (diaks)" and "Sextons (ponomars)" are fulfilled by the **Psalm-readers**. Existing before the separation of Sacristans into Psalm-readers and the exercising of his duty as Psalm-reader is suppressed, even the calling of the Psalm-reader is limited for everything attached to the churches belongs to the Sacristans (Supreme declaration of 16 February 1885, Decisions of the Holy Synod). The duties of the Psalm-readers under the supervision of the Priest to whom they are assigned are: a) the performance of the reading and singing from the Kliros, b) the support of the priest during the visitation of

parishioners for spiritual direction, and c) all the secretarial work for the church and the parish (2) (Supreme declaration of 16 April 1869, Zhurnal Presutstviya (Contemporary Journal) on the works of the Orthodox Clergy, item 4).

It is not possible for the Psalm-reader under any view to enter into the role as an independent director of this or that church service (Manual for Village Pastors 1886, 6). Each Psalm-reader should perform his duties on the first demand of the Priest, and all Psalm-readers (if a few of them are at church) should be present during all Divine Services, even those on week-days (3); in general, if there are no special orders of the local Eparch. First of all, the Psalm-readers have no right to refuse to fulfill their church duties on the established days set by the Church for general Divine Services (4) (see Tserkovniya Vedomosti (Church News) 1895, 34; Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1892, 24; 1895, 5). See note 1 on page 680 and page 681.

Notes:

(2) All these duties (unless they do not exist because of special local rules) are distributed among the Psalm-readers equally, supervised by the priest (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1895, 33). The non-uniform distribution of these duties can only be allowed by voluntary agreement among the psalm-readers. In reference to this the church secretariat is considered important observing that due to the decree of the Holy Synod of the 6th of September 1889 No. 3441, the Orel Theological Consistory Circular proclaimed to the diocese that agreeing with the note for article 43 on other blessings, regular Deacons are obligated to follow the secretariat for the church and parish equally with the other members of the church clergy (Tserkovniya Vedomosti (Church News) 1870, 7).

(3) There are no rules about the Psalm-readers taking a rest within the five-member structure of the clergy; but the practice supposes the fulfillment of the weekly church services by the Psalm-readers. This depends on the consent of the gathered clergy (Tserkovniya Vestnik, (Church News), 1897, 5.). In many dioceses with two or more-regular clergy the Psalm-readers have the same turns as the Priests (Tserkovniya Vedomosti, (Church News), 1896, 12-13.). The Psalm-reader-teacher in any case is not free from his performance of the services of need and every day Divine Services performed outside of class time. (Tserkovnyi Vestnik, (Church Messenger), 1892, 24.).

(4) Psalm-readers have no right to refuse to be the keepers of the keys of the church, and if not the keys, then in any case after receiving the

blessing of the priest their duty is to the bells, even though they were not brought forth for them (Tserkovnyi Vestnik 1895, 20). In some dioceses, for example, in the Kostromsky and Nizhegorod Dioceses, there is a certain order, in which the Psalm-reader when it is his turn must unlock and lock the church in the presence of the church Ponomar (Watchman) and he, the Psalm-reader, then must send the keys to the Priest whose turn it is (Rukovodstvo dlia Sel'sk. Pastyrei Kiev (Manual for Village Pastors), 1889, 35; Nizhegorod Eparchial Vestnik 1892, 52).

The duty of the preparation of vestments before the Divine Services and to help the Priest with the vestments lies with the Psalm-readers (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1895, 44); the excuse of reading and singing is not valid, and any way should not begin before the vesting of the Priest (Tserkovniya Vedomosti (Church News) 1896, 17).

It is necessary for Deacons to abide by Canon 20 of the Council of Laodicea that "he ranks over Sub-deacons and all altar servers", following which makes it impossible to reconcile the unwillingness of Psalm-readers to carry bundles of church accessories, including the Deacon's vestments for cross processions and other church services of need, for to serve is an honor and not a service or duty (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1895, 34)

According to the Supreme declaration of 16 April 1869 in the Zhurnal Presutstviya (Contemporary Journal) on the duties of Orthodox clergy, Psalm-readers are not assigned the duties to maintain the church in cleanliness and neatness (for example: to sweep away dust even in the sanctuary, to air out the church vestments and so on), to light the lampadas and prepare the censer, to ring the bell for the Divine Services (both for the gatherings and during the time of winter snow storms); and everything that belongs to the duties, under sole or joint supervision of the Priest and the Church Wardens, of the church Ponomars (see Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger) 1894, 7; 1895, 5; 1896, 50). In view of this in one of the journals of the Cherson Theological Consistory concerning the duties of the psalm-readers, the ever-memorable Most Reverend Nicanorus (Nicanor) resolves this as follows: "Any work in the church that is not beneath the duties of the Psalm-readers, and are such that I myself do, being in the rank of Archimandrite, and even of Bishop belongs to the Psalm-reader. Nevertheless to require the Psalm-readers to do the inferior work of the church: like ringing the bells in the bell-tower, sweeping the floors, lighting the fire and so forth is without foundation. The performance of such departures from church duties should be by special persons, supplied by the Church Warden with the consent of the clergy, such as the Ponomar

(watchman) and other volunteers, or inferior persons to do this work of the church for the sake of the Lord ". (Rukovodstvo dlia seljskikh Pastyrei (Manual for Village Pastors), 1889, 47). For this reason there are special canons in some dioceses. For example, the Orel Diocesan Authorities (in view of this that some of the Psalm-readers recognizing their duty only to read and to sing in church evaded other duties, did not consider themselves obligated to the Priest for the church keys and for the blessing to ring the bells for the Divine Services, and even on their own time to be at Divine Services, and the Priests, after the arriving in church, were compelled to wait for the Parish Psalm-readers), pointed out to the Psalm-readers the letter of the document, to which they were tonsured "to keep the beauty of the temple of the Lord and to respect the Priest". The circular decree explained to the clergy that Psalm-readers are obligated: a) to carry from the temple the items needed for the support of the Priest to perform the service of needs, and all the necessities belonging to these Divine Service needs (certainly, excepting those things which only ordained church servers may touch); b) to watch for the cleanliness of the temple, and also to administer the church bells for the Divine Service and to observe their proper fulfillment; c) to respect the parish Priest and to render him obedience to all his orders, which come from him for the work of the church and the parish (Tserkovniya Vedomosti (Church News), 1888, 4). In those dioceses where a venerable tradition of rules exists, they are obligatory for the clergy. And if there are dioceses where there are no such rules, the Priests of these dioceses have no right to require the Psalm-readers to do any inferior duties, but in accordance with this the Psalm-readers, with the training they have received, are required to not shirk from any kind of duty, that "according to the church any work is not humiliating" and that many Psalm-readers voluntarily carry out the majority of the inferior duties of the church "for the sake of the Lord".

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp., (Kharkov, 1900), pp.685-8.
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