

# **AN APOSTOLIC LETTER IN MOTU PROPRIO FORM BY WHICH THE DISCIPLINE OF FIRST TONSURE, MINOR ORDERS AND SUBDIACONATE IN THE LATIN CHURCH IS REFORMED**

**POPE PAUL VI**

Even in the most ancient times certain ministries were established by the Church for the purpose of suitably giving worship to God and for offering service to the People of God according to their needs. By these ministries, duties of a liturgical and charitable nature, deemed suitable to varying circumstances, were entrusted to the performance of the faithful. The conferring of these functions often took place by a special rite, in which, after God's blessing had been implored, a Christian was established in a special class or rank for the fulfilment of some ecclesiastical function.

Some of these functions, which were more closely connected with the liturgical action, slowly came to be considered as preparatory institutions for the reception of sacred orders, so that the offices of porter, lector, exorcist and acolyte were called minor orders in the Latin Church in relation to the subdiaconate, diaconate and priesthood, which were called major orders; generally, though not everywhere, these minor orders were reserved to those who received them on their way to the priesthood.

Nevertheless, since the minor orders have not always been the same, and many tasks connected with them, as at present, have also been exercised by the laity, it seems fitting to re-examine this practice and to adapt it to contemporary needs, so that what is obsolete in these office may be removed, what is useful retained, what is necessary defined, and at the same time what is required of candidates for Holy Orders may be determined.

While the Second Vatican Council was in preparation, many pastors of the Church requested that the minor orders and subdiaconate should be re-examined. Although the

Council did not decree anything concerning this for the Latin Church, it enunciated certain principles for solving the question. There is no doubt that the norms laid down by the Council regarding the general and orderly renewal of the liturgy<sup>1</sup> also include those areas which concern ministries in the liturgical assembly, so that from the very arrangement of the celebration the Church clearly appears structured in different orders and ministries.<sup>2</sup> Thus the Second Vatican Council decreed that "in liturgical celebrations, whether as a minister or as one of the faithful, each person should perform his role by doing solely and totally what the nature of things and liturgical norms require of him".<sup>3</sup>

With this assertion is closely connected what was written a little before in the same Constitution: "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people' (*1 Pt 2:9*; cf. *2:4-5*) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit. Therefore, through the needed programme of instruction, pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it in all their pastoral work".<sup>4</sup>

In the preservation of certain offices and in their adaptation to contemporary needs, there are those which are especially connected with the ministries of the Word and of the Altar and in the Latin Church are called the offices of lector and acolyte and the subdiaconate. It is fitting to preserve and adapt these in such a way, that from this time on there will be two offices: that of lector and that of acolyte, which will include the functions of the subdiaconate.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 62: ASS 56, p. 117; cf. also 21: loc. cit., pp. 105-106.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Ordo Missae, Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani*, 58, typical edition 1969, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 28: AAS 56, 1964, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 14: loc. cit., p. 104.

Besides the offices common to the Latin Church, there is nothing to prevent episcopal conferences from requesting others of the Apostolic See, if they judge the establishment of such offices in their region to be necessary or very useful because of special reasons. To these belong, for example, the offices of porter, exorcist and catechist,<sup>5</sup> as well as other offices to be conferred upon those who are dedicated to works of charity, where this service has not been given to deacons.

It is in accordance with the reality itself and with the contemporary outlook that the above-mentioned ministries should no longer be called minor orders; their conferring will not be called "ordination", but "installation"; only those however who have received the diaconate will be properly known as clerics. Thus there will better appear the distinction between clergy and laity, between what is proper and reserved to the clergy and what can be entrusted to the laity; thus there will appear more clearly their mutual relationship insofar as "the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood, while they differ in essence and not only in degree, are nevertheless interrelated. Each of them shares in its own special way in the one priesthood of Christ."<sup>6</sup>

Having weighed every aspect of the question well, having sought the opinion of experts, having consulted with the episcopal conferences and taken their views into account, and having taken counsel with our venerable brothers who are members of the Sacred Congregations competent in this matter, by our Apostolic Authority we enact the following norms, derogating —if and insofar as necessary— from provisions of the Code of Canon Law until now in force, and we promulgate them with this Letter.

I. First tonsure is no longer conferred; entrance into the clerical state is joined to the diaconate.

II. What up to now were called minor orders, are henceforth called "ministries".

III. Ministries may be committed to lay Christians; hence they are no longer to be considered as reserved to candidates for the sacramental of Orders.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Ad Gentes*, 15: AAS 58, 1966, p. 965; *ibid.*, 17: *loc. cit.*, pp. 967-968.

<sup>6</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 10: AAS 57, 1965, pp. 14.

IV. Two ministries, adapted to present-day needs, are to be preserved in the whole of the Latin Church, namely those of *lector* and *acolyte*. The functions heretofore committed to the subdeacon are entrusted to the lector and the acolyte; consequently, the major order of subdiaconate no longer exists in the Latin Church. There is nothing, however, to prevent the acolyte being also called a subdeacon in some places, if the episcopal conference judges it opportune.

V. The lector is appointed for a function proper to him, that of reading the Word of God in the liturgical assembly. Accordingly, he is to read the lessons from Sacred Scripture, except for the Gospel, in the Mass and other sacred celebrations; he is to recite the psalm between the readings when there is no psalmist; he is to present the intentions for the prayer of the faithful in the absence of a deacon or cantor; he is to direct the singing and the participation by the faithful; he is to instruct the faithful for the worthy reception of the sacraments. He can also, insofar as necessary, take care of preparing other faithful who by a temporary appointment are to read the Sacred Scripture in liturgical celebrations. That he may more fittingly and perfectly fulfil these functions, let him meditate assiduously on Sacred Scripture.

Let the lector be aware of the office he has undertaken and make every effort and employ suitable means to acquire that increasingly warm and living love<sup>7</sup> and knowledge of the Scriptures that will make him a more perfect disciple of the Lord.

VI. The acolyte is appointed in order to aid the deacon and to minister to the priest. It is therefore his duty to attend to the service of the altar and to assist the deacon and the priest in liturgical celebrations, especially in the celebration of Mass; he is also to distribute Holy Communion as an extraordinary minister when the ministers spoken of in canon 845 of the Code of Canon Law are not available or are prevented by ill health, age or another pastoral ministry from performing this function, or when the number of those approaching the Sacred Table is so great that the celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged.

In the same extraordinary circumstances he can be entrusted with publicly exposing the Blessed Sacrament for adora-

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 24: AAS 56, 1964, p. 107; Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 25: AAS 58, 1966, p. 829.

tion by the faithful and afterwards replacing it, but not with blessing the people. He can also, to the extent needed, take care of instructing other faithful who by temporary appointment assist the priest or deacon in liturgical celebrations by carrying the missal, cross candles, etc., or by performing other such duties. He will perform these functions the more worthily if he participates in the Holy Eucharist with increasingly fervent piety, receives nourishment from it and deepens his knowledge of it.

Destined as he is in a special way for the service of the altar, the acolyte should learn all matters concerning public divine worship and strive to grasp their inner spiritual meaning: in that way he will be able each day to offer himself entirely to God, be an example to all by his seriousness and reverence in the sacred building, and have a sincere love for the Mystical Body of Christ, the People of God, especially the weak and the sick.

VII. In accordance with the venerable tradition of the Church, installation in the ministries of lector and acolyte is reserved to men.

VIII. The following are requirements for admission to the ministries:

a) the presentation of a petition freely made out and signed by the aspirant to the Ordinary (the bishop and, in clerical institutes of perfection, the major superior) who has the right to accept the petition;

b) a suitable age and special qualities to be determined by the episcopal conference;

c) a firm will to give faithful service to God and the Christian people.

IX. The ministries are conferred by the Ordinary (the bishop and, in clerical institutes of perfection, the major superior) according to the liturgical rite "De Institutione Lectoris" and "De Institutione Acolyths" revised by the Apostolic See.

X. Intervals, determined by the Holy See or the episcopal conferences, shall be observed between the conferring of the ministries of lector and acolyte whenever more than one ministry is conferred on the same person.

XI. Candidates for the diaconate and priesthood are to receive the ministries of lector and acolyte, unless they have

already done so, and are to exercise them for a fitting time, in order to be better disposed for the future service of the Word and of the Altar. Dispensation from the reception of these ministries on the part of such candidates is reserved to the Holy See.

XII. The conferring of ministries does not imply the right to sustenance or salary from the Church.

XIII. The rite of installation of a lector and of an acolyte is to be published soon by the competent department of the Roman Curia.

These norms shall come into effect on 1 January 1973.

We order that what we have decreed in this Letter, in *motu proprio* form, be established and ratified, notwithstanding anything to the contrary.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 15 August, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the year 1972, the tenth of our pontificate.

**PAULUS PP. VI**

### **EPISCOPAL ORDINATION ANNIVERSARIES**

Let us pray for our Bishops on the occasion of their ordination anniversaries.

Most Rev. Porfirio Iligan, D.D.  
September 3, 1968

Most Rev. Julio X. Labayen, O.C.D.  
September 8, 1966

Most Rev. Espiga é Infante, O.A.R.  
September 10, 1955

His Eminence Julio R. Cardinal Rosales, D.D.  
September 21, 1946

Most Rev. William Joseph Duschak, S.V.D.  
September 21, 1951

Most Rev. Patrick H. Cronin, S.S.C.  
September 25, 1955