



# **Liturgical Aspect of the Permanent Diaconate\***

*by Josef Hornef*

In its *Constitution on the Church* (II, 29) the Council declared the deacon, in union with the Bishop and his clergy, to have a threefold service to the people of God, a *diaconia* of the liturgy, of the Word of God, and of charitable works: *diaconia liturgiae, verbi, et caritatis*. The deacon's function in the course of the liturgy, and his collaboration in preaching the Word of God (not excluding other aspects) are spelled out in detail by the following words: "It is the duty of the deacon, according as it shall have been assigned to him by competent authority, to administer baptism solemnly, to be custodian and dis-

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penser of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scriptures to the faithful, to administer sacramentals, to officiate at funeral and burial services." The fulfillment of these duties is vital to the Church. As they cannot be secured by the Latin Church under present conditions in many places, the Council decided to restore the diaconate as a distinct office of proper and permanent hierarchical rank (*proprius gradus hierarchiae*).

What are the implications of this project and how will it affect the liturgy? Either by the whole Church, or by individual countries, through Episcopal Conferences or liturgical councils, what steps must be taken to permit the deacon to exercise his liturgical functions? According to the *Constitution* it pertains to the Conference of Bishops to decide if and where the restoration of the diaconate is useful for the salvation of souls, and further to give precisions on its manner of performance. General specifications to assure uniformity upon essentials will be the concern of higher authority in Rome.

### **I. Ordination of the Deacon**

We must be grateful to the Church for having preserved the diaconate ordination, in spite of the almost complete disappearance of this office. It would have been far more difficult to revive without its link to traditional ordination. Granted, we have two kinds of deacons at present: those who will become priests, and those who wish to remain deacons. But both remain the same diaconate. (Notice that the Council ruled on the functions of the diaconate in general, and not only on the permanent diaconate. This would be important if we wished to invest a deacon aspiring for the priesthood with a ministry that is properly diaconal.) There is only one diaconate, having one and the same ordination, which has always been employed by the Church. If, in the course of the ceremony, the Bishop repeatedly speaks of chastity, it can apply as well to married deacons. The only small variation to be made in ordaining a permanent Deacon would probably be the deletion of the words, "*de inferiori gradu potiora mereantur,*" due to the intention of remaining a deacon permanently.

### **II. Will ordination to minor orders be maintained?**

The *Constitution* makes no mention of ordination to minor orders as a step toward the diaconate. Must we conclude that the permanent

deacons will receive them just as those who are preparing for the priesthood? Or, will he be immediately ordained to the diaconate? A middle stage would perhaps be preferable. He could first be ordained lector or acolyte and later, sub-deacon (this order could again become a minor order if the priesthood, as it has been proposed, were to be preceded only by the diaconate).

Precisely because the Council decided (maybe, with too much prudence) that married men could only be ordained deacons after a certain age,<sup>1</sup> their ordination would be preceded by one or the other of the minor orders, so as to prepare them gradually for their office, giving them time to unite themselves more fully to the Church. Would it not be reasonable also to ordain lectors and catechists in the missions, and at home those professors of religion destined for the diaconate; and acolytes, those who would take care of social works? Should the need arise, a sub-deacon might be employed for some diaconal functions.

### III. *Missa cum diacono*

The deacon, as much as the priest, should live in the vitality of the liturgy and especially of the Eucharist. All his activity must radiate from the altar and therefore he must be intimately united to it. Clearly, the deacon is not a priest. Yet he is also chosen from among the laity, and receives sacramental ordination which confers an "indelible character" upon him. Through this character, he resembles Christ, the deacon *par excellence*, the servant of God, "who made himself the servant of all men."

While laymen are invested with the "priesthood of the faithful," a deacon takes his place organically within the hierarchy of the Church and is responsible for tasks particular to his office. In the words of the *Constitution*, the deacon has "proper and permanent hierarchical rank." This is the reason we can say that a deacon is equally responsible for a sacerdotal function, even though the *Constitution* specifies that he is not ordained with the priesthood in mind, but rather for "service" (*ministerium*). Did not the Council specify every function as a service? It is then difficult to say that the character of service is applicable only to a deacon. Yet it can be said that a deacon is the servant *par excellence*. However, as the character of service is common to all three levels, the diaconate moreover includes a sacerdotal aspect. We can at least speak of a *sacerdotio proximus* (consult the prayers of ordination and other patristic expressions).<sup>2</sup>

During the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the deacon serves the priest as an immediate aid. He also serves the Lord. This must affect his spiritual outlook and inspire him with the spirit of priestly service. This should also have bearing upon those efficacious services that radiate from the altar. It would therefore not be sufficient for the deacon to be allowed near the altar in the service of the priest only on major feasts.

The *missa cum (unico) diacono* is a very simple ancient form of celebration. In virtue of decennial faculties granted by Propaganda, Bishops formerly could authorize Masses and other solemn functions with the assistance of a deacon, without a sub-deacon if other clerics in major orders should be wanting.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Holy Week celebrations with the assistance of only one deacon were generally permitted. The *Instructio* that followed the *Constitution on the Liturgy* gives general permission for a sung Mass with the assistance of the one deacon (Chapter 2, n. 48, k). The new *Ritus servandus in celebratione missae* also provides for the introduction of the *missa cum diacono* as a normal thing (nn.95-98). This is an important consideration in anticipating the reappearance of a permanent diaconate. Soon a deacon will be able to say to his pastor as did St. Lawrence, "Never have you celebrated the Holy Sacrifice without your servant."

Through a fortunate coincidence, the postwar efforts to reintroduce the permanent diaconate were parallel to attempts for the restoration of the *missa cum diacono*.<sup>4</sup> However, this form of celebration was retained by many ancient religious Orders, such as the Carthusians and Cistercians among others. The Benedictine abbey at Maria-Laach has revived it.

There remains the question of whether episcopal conferences, at least at the beginning, should be given the task of precisising the details of this celebration before perfecting a definitive form, or whether it would be preferable to decide immediately upon a universal form, at least in the essentials.<sup>5</sup>

Now that the Liturgical Commission permits deacons and sub-deacons to commune under both species at pontifical and solemn Masses, we can speculate on the possibilities of extending this to the *missa cum diacono*, whether sung or only read.

In mission countries, it can be noted that in its present form our Dialogue Mass makes a rather poor impression upon yet unconverted populations whose sacrifices and sacrificial meals are often dressed in

elaborate ceremonies. The *missa cum diacono* would add prestige to the solemnity.<sup>6</sup>

Concerning the deacon's service during a *missa cum diacono*, we have one more comment to make on concelebration. We may wonder to what extent the deacon could not be responsible for specifically diaconal functions. Oriental rites do not allow a priest to carry on the functions proper to a deacon. It would be preferable to follow this principle also, so as to have a clear distinction between the two kinds of tasks.

#### **IV. Sacraments and sacramentals.**

The deacon can confer solemn baptism. Anyone who has seen baptism being given simultaneously to some twenty infants in a hospital can attest to the value of a deacon in preserving the requisite dignity. Especially in missions it would be important for the deacon to be able to baptize immediately the newly-born in the most isolated districts. How frequently might urgent baptism not be omitted?

The deacon can also distribute Communion. The bigger a parish is, the more considerable the number of communicants, the more grateful is the pastor for help. Simply the thought of hundreds or even thousands of faithful approaching the communion rail on holydays, at times like mobs, will afford conviction of the true value of diaconal assistance.

He can also bring Communion to the sick, in the home as well as in the hospital. Any pastor knows how much time this requires. Here again, the deacon can afford considerable relief. He can also bring viaticum to the dying, making an act of contrition with them before its administration. We should not disregard events from the sick person's point of view. In a remote mission outpost, for example, a dying person frequently waits in vain for the priest to bring the Body of the Lord. Yet, even at home, how many people would be grateful for a deacon who could bring them Holy Communion a little more often than the over-burdened priest! Wouldn't this be a way of starting an apostolate of prayer for the Church among the sick?

The Liturgical Commission fixed the norms of the Constitution for Communion under two species. This is granted to newly-weds at their nuptial Mass and to older couples celebrating a silver or golden anniversary, also to adults being baptized (at the Mass following their baptism), and likewise for confirmation. If, according to the hopes of

many, confirmation will be administered at an older age, a deacon's help will be considerable in the distribution of the Precious Blood. Similar services could be rendered among gatherings of large numbers of priests who may be unable to celebrate or concelebrate but would, nevertheless, wish to communicate. Once more we call to mind the words of St. Lawrence, "Would you refuse one who assisted you at the Holy Sacrifice, one to whom you so frequently entrusted the distribution of the Lord's Blood, to become the companion of your own sacrifice?"

As far as matrimony is concerned, it is mutually conferred by the partners. The priest who assists is the designated witness of the Church. In the future the deacon himself could assist in the sacrament of matrimony and bless the couple. This would be of great importance in remote mission outposts where couples would no longer need to await the priests's visit. Even at home the deacon could always assist at marriages contracted outside of Mass, in which case he could preside in a liturgy of the Word. The *Instructio* (no. 72) allows for one priest to celebrate the nuptial Mass while another assists at the reception of the sacrament of matrimony. We could then suppose that the celebrant could leave this to a deacon if, for example, relatives were involved.

Finally the deacon can preside at funerals and administer the sacramentals. A priest in a large city knows how much time is spent at a burial. There are priests who, apart from saying Mass, do nothing else but offer prayers and obsequies, and sprinkle coffins with holy water! I would not wish anything like this upon a deacon. But here again, the deacon could relieve the pastor. We are beginning to realize nowadays that the Word of God reaches people before an open tomb who would rarely hear it otherwise.

## **V. The Deacon and the Proclamation of the Word of God**

They also have a share in proclaiming the Word: whether apart from the liturgy by catechesis (religion classes, child and adult catechesis in church, catechumenal instruction, marriage preparation, etc.), or during the liturgy through homilies and preaching. We will speak here of proclaiming the Word in the course of the liturgy, but first we would like to make a preliminary observation. Many pastors and curates devote their time to religious instruction. They frequently have to devote so many hours as to constitute one half a professorial task. Could not a deacon help in this work?

It frequently happens that a pastor of a large parish binates every Sunday. He could have a deacon preach at one of the two Masses. If this deacon is knowledgeable in liturgy and Holy Writ, having acquired therein a spiritual formation, he will certainly (as long as he can speak) be able to give a homily. (*Constitution*, art. 35, 2).

But apart from strict preaching, a deacon can proclaim the Word during the Service of the Word, according to the wishes of the Council. (*Constitution*, art. 35, 4). A love of Scripture and a conviction of a special presence of the Lord at the proclamation of the Word of God will grow in the course of the celebrations.

The *Instructio* distinguishes two types of Celebrations of the Word:

a) Where there can be no Mass on Sundays and holydays because a priest is not available, a celebration of the Word will be organized under the leadership of a deacon, or a layman appointed by the Ordinary (art. 37).

b) Even where a morning Mass has been celebrated, or will be celebrated in the evening, a celebration of the Word can be organized on the eve of major holydays or on a day of the week during Advent and Lent (art. 38).

The *Instructio* states that the first type of celebration may take on the form of the Mass, alternating readings and prayers. This would apply in dependencies (daughter communities or buildings such as chapels and oratories). But even celebrations of the second type have their importance in parishes and should be modeled on the Mass. They can also be presided over by a deacon. It is however, particularly the Sunday service of the first type in dependencies (diaspora, mission posts) that will be incumbent upon the deacon.

Attention to the importance of Sunday celebrations in dependencies did not begin with the *Constitution on the Liturgy* alone, even though it did give them their value and recommendation. In effect, the *Constitution on the Church* opened new possibilities for the Service of the Word, precisely through the renewal of the diaconate put forth as early as 1953,<sup>7</sup> and since then by a number of notable publications and congressional conferences.<sup>8</sup>

It is not a matter of indifference that a layman or a deacon officiate at a Celebration of the Word. A deacon, not a layman, can officiate at a communion service, which is a genuine Eucharistic celebration centered on the Lord's presence in both Word and Sacrament. Let us consider this idea for a moment to take note of its value.

Consider Latin America. What is going on there? We find parishes of unbelievable expanse with long, tortuous roads. Four times, maybe twice, or only once a year, a priest visits the distant places of worship. Many places have small churches and chapels without priests. A resident deacon would permit reservation of the Blessed Sacrament there, otherwise it would merely be a "prayer hall." A particularly diaconal service could be organized to gather the faithful about the Lord on Sundays.

Consider the missions, with tens of thousands of catechists, most of whom are retarded from an intellectual point of view and socially degraded. However, there are about sixty schools for catechists, and catechist villages are already in existence. In these villages the catechist's wife could be trained for household chores, the care of children, etc. How many catechists could become good deacons after a complementary formation! It is not surprising that so many missionary and Latin American bishops have clamored for a permanent diaconate.

Nor should we overlook the fact that at home, Sunday services headed by a deacon would become a blessing for remote communities of the diaspora without bus or rail transportation to the parish.

Specifying the organization of diaconal services in oratories, the *Instructio* further states: "As a general rule, the epistle and gospel from the day's Mass will be read in the local vernacular preceded by, or in the setting of, songs drawn mainly from the psalms. If the leader is a deacon, he will give the homily. Otherwise a homily indicated by the Bishop or pastor will be read. The whole service would conclude with a prayer of the faithful (*oratio fidelium*) and the Sunday prayer or collect" (art. 37).

For quite some time now, there has been a question as to how closely this Sunday service of the Word could, or should, follow the ritual of the Mass. It is now quite clear that the form of the Word service should be close, without necessarily being identical, to the Mass. If, when a deacon presides, the Eucharistic meal is also included (the *Instructio* makes no mention of it), then it would be very much closer to the Mass, even though the preparation of the sacrifice and its offering would be missing. From time to time, the deacon will have to go to the parish for the holy species, or if he lives there he will bring them with him on Sunday. The words of Father Hofinger may be applied perfectly to this form of Sunday service in remote oratories, "Both from the religious and the social point of view it would be important that Sunday services in remote places resemble the Mass as much as



possible so as to strengthen the distant Christian's awareness of belonging to the whole Church."<sup>9</sup> As long as there is no danger of confusing this service with the Mass "it can, insofar as it accords with its objective, have the same structures and forms." There should be no fear of such expressions as "an *ersatz* Mass." True, the word *ersatz* was given a painful connotation during and after the war, but it does not always mean something of inferior quality. Even Monsignor Aufderbeck, while rejecting the terminology, affirms that the Mass is in no way the only means of Sunday sanctification, even though it is the most important. The Celebration of the Word is also capable of sanctifying souls and therefore has its importance. This is all the more assuredly true if the Eucharistic meal is included, thereby setting two tables—that of the Word, and that of the Sacrament.

Besides, is the danger of confusing the two celebrations such a threat? The faithful are aware that the one presiding is only a deacon and that only a priest can offer Mass. They can see with their own eyes that there is no preparation for the sacrifice and no consecration. They will see the deacon going to the parish for the sacred species. The deacon could also use a formula such as, "There being no priest here, we cannot celebrate Mass. Yet we desire to associate ourselves also with that being celebrated by our pastor and which the universal Church presents to the Eternal Father in all the churches of the world." Even the most simple believer could thus make the distinction.

The participants must be made aware of their communion with the parish, with the whole Church, and with the saints in heaven.

In order to be complete, the following details on a diaconal service in an oratory should also be set forth:

—The *Instructio* makes no mention of the confession of faith, without however dismissing it totally. As this represents the response of the faithful to the Word of God heard during the celebration of the Word, it should not be left out as some formulas of celebration proposed.

—Why should not the *Kyrie eleison* and the *Gloria in excelsis* also be recited by the community alternating with the deacon. Seeing that these prayers are already said in the vernacular at Mass and are therefore more meaningful to the people, they should not be denied on Sunday to the believers in distinct places of worship. Other hymns might even be recited or sung instead of the *Gloria*. The *oratio fidelium* could be that of Good Friday, part of the litany of the saints, or even the diaconal prayer in the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

—As the Preface is part of the Canon of the Mass, the Church will restrict it to the priest-celebrant, but another prayer of thanksgiving could be used instead.

—The Lord's Prayer could immediately follow the celebration of the Eucharistic meal which would begin with the *Agnus Dei*. Should the service not begin with an act of contrition the *Confiteor* could be incorporated. Whatever the prayers during the deacon's distribution of Communion, some prayer of thanksgiving will also be necessary. In the early Church, the deacon summoned the people to this prayer.<sup>10</sup>

—The deacon should be permitted to give the closing blessing.

—On weekdays the deacon could simplify the celebration somewhat.

—In the absence of the Blessed Sacrament, the only alternative would be a celebration of the Word. In such circumstances the deacon could recite prayers of spiritual communion.

We will make no mention here of the manner in which a layman could preside at the celebration of the Word, which still retains its value even in this case. A catechist will frequently be called upon to preside.

The Society of Deacons (*Diakonatskreis*) in Cologne advocates the reintroduction of the Divine Office into the celebration of the Word. Formerly, this was the prayer of the whole Church especially at morning and evening prayers. There is an ecumenical touch to this suggestion as it conforms to an outline contained in the Anglican *Prayer Book*, and it seems worthy of consideration, particularly for the second type of celebration of the Word (when Mass is celebrated). According to the *Instructio*, the celebration of the Word is a repetition of the first part of the Mass that was, or is going to be, celebrated.

Undoubtedly, the celebration of the Word is, and must be, organized differently in various localities. This explains why the *Instructio* leaves its regulation up to the local bishop. It would also be helpful if there were conformity within the territory of a given Episcopal Conference.

Among our separated brethren at home where the diaconate is a caritative office, it is hard to say to what degree the idea of combining his functions with that of the liturgy has arisen (considering that all diaconal activity should take its source from the altar). No church exists in isolation these days and for this reason we can be sure that the liturgical activity of Catholic deacons will inspire our separated brethren in turn to give their deacons a place in the liturgy.<sup>11</sup> We will have made another step toward unity.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Monsignor Frotz, auxiliary bishop of Cologne, says in the pastoral periodical of Cologne, Aix-la-Chapelle and Essen (Dec. 1964) that experience shows that it is not necessary to be thirty in order to have this maturity. This is contestable when others are deemed mature for the priesthood at twenty-five!

<sup>2</sup> On this subject, A. Kerkvoorde, O.S.B., states in *Diaconia in Christo*, p. 596, "The diaconate cannot be opposed to the priesthood in general, as it is part of the *ministerium*." A. Roth recalls in his study, *Priester-Diakon* (Munchener Theolog. Zeitschr., 1964 no. 4), "There are three degrees to the priesthood dating back to Apostolic times: the diaconate, the priesthood, and the episcopate." Further, J. Hornef, *Der Standort des Diakons*, in "Die Anregung," 1963, no. 16. We may pretend that only one who can celebrate Mass is a priest. This leaves only the priest and the bishop to the priesthood, excluding the deacon. But if we speak of the priesthood of the baptized, we may certainly use the term in a broader sense in speaking of an ordained deacon. One who celebrates Mass would then be more strictly and eminently a priest.

<sup>3</sup> On these new decennial faculties, see *Neue Zeitschr. f. Missions-Wissenschaft*, t. XVI, 1960.

<sup>4</sup> R. Hombach, O.S.B., *Geschichte und Wiederbelebung der M.c.D.*, in *Erneuerung der Liturgie*, Liturgy u. Monchtum 14 (1954) 62-78; French translation in *Quest. Lit. Par.* 38 (1957) 98-109.

<sup>5</sup> See a formulary in the *Manuale Caeremoniarum . . . juxta ritum ordinis Cisterciensis . . . strictioris observantiae*.

<sup>6</sup> Mgr. van Bekkum (Indonesia), at the Liturgical Pastoral Congress of Assisi (Lit. Jahrb. 4, 1956; *La Maison-Dieu*, cah. 47-48, 1956).

<sup>7</sup> W. Schamoni, *Familienväter als geweihte Diakone*, p. 30 ff. (3rd. ed., Paderborn, F. Schöningh, 1961; see *Quest. lit. par.*, 1955, p. 51, no. 155).

<sup>8</sup> Such are the works of Fathers J. Hofinger and J. Kellner (Manilla), of Mgr. Kramer (Luanfu), of Mgr. D'Souza (India): works presented at the 1959 "Mission and Liturgy" Conference at Nijmegen; consult *Q.L.P.*, 1960, p. 46; also the works of Mgr. W. Duschak (Calapan), Mgr. Kemerer (Posadas), M. H. Kramer (Director of the German Diaconal Society), M. G. Custodis (Cologne), and M. J. Hornef.

<sup>9</sup> And to the parish (author's note).

<sup>10</sup> J. A. Jungmann, *Missarum Solemnia* (German edition), t. II, p. 510.

<sup>11</sup> See the report *Das Amt des Diakons* from the Ecumenical Council of Churches (Geneva, 1965).