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ON THE PRIESTHOOD

The Sacrament, its Ranks, and Vestments

I. Introduction¹

Christ, as Head of the Church and therefore the One on whom the whole body of the Church depends (Eph. 4:15; Cor. 1:14) and as *"high priest of the good things to come"* (Heb. 9:11), chose a number of men and named them apostles (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 15:16). By the full authority that was committed to Him, He commanded them to go forth and baptize people everywhere and teach them to observe His commandments (Mt. 28:18-20). These men were thus solemnly set apart, invested with a certain authority, and entrusted with the task of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and preaching the kingdom of God (Mt. 10:1-7). They alone were given the power of forgiving sins or withholding forgiveness (Jn. 20:21-23). For the proper fulfillment of His task throughout the ages, these apostles appointed bishops and priests in the same manner, according to the Sacrament instituted by our Lord. Others, in turn, succeeded them, in all the apostolic churches of Christendom.

At Jerusalem, they appointed seven deacons by praying and laying their hands on them (Acts 6:3-6); Saints Paul and Barnabas appointed presbyters and committed them to the Lord (Acts 14:23); St. Paul appointed St. Timothy as bishop at Ephesus, and Titus in Crete.

II. The Great High Priest^{2,3,4}

The Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ is eternal, since He is the Eternal God who is existent before all ages and continues forever. *"And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies: 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.' ... For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever"* (Heb 7: 15-17,28).

The Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ exceeds that of all others because He is the only priest who both offers and is offered. He did not need, as did the Jewish priests, to offer sin offerings for Himself. Thus by virtue of His perfectness, He was able to offer Himself as the only true and acceptable sacrifice for the remission of sins upon the Cross at Golgotha. Without Him, no man can be considered a priest; for the priests of the Old Testament were mere images of the true High Priest come to offer Himself; and the priesthood of the New Testament would not exist without Him, for He is the one who established it.

A beautiful event occurred when Joshua the son of Nun led the Israelites into the Promised Land, portraying the Divinity and Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. When the people of Israel were commanded by God to proceed in conquering the Gentile nations and take their lands, they found the Jordan River in their way. Yet we read Joshua's commandments given to the people according to God's plan: *"And Joshua said, 'By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites: Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan. Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the*

¹ Basilios, Archbishop. "Priesthood" *Coptic Encyclopedia*. New York: Macmillan, 1991. *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia* (edited)

² *Serve the Lord with Gladness* by A Monk of the Eastern Church. Translated by John Breck. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 1990.

³ *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke* by St. Cyril Patriarch of Alexandria. Translated by R. Payne Smith. Studion Publishers Inc. 1983.

⁴ *The Church* by Thomas Halton. Michael Glazier, Inc. Delaware. 1985.

Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap" (Jos 3: 10-13).

When our Lord Jesus Christ went down into the Jordan River to be baptized by St. John, the Forerunner, the same thing occurred -- the water went down and fled as though it feared its Creator, as David the prophet prophesized: *"The sea saw and fled: Jordan was turned back" (Ps. 113:3).*

In comparison with these two events, we realize that the priests, who were carrying the Word of God, went down and broke the course of the river. Therefore, Jesus Christ must be the True Word of God as well as the True Priest of God. He entered into the Holy of Holies with His own Precious Blood, not that of animals, and tore in two the veil of the Sanctuary, which stood as a barrier that prevented the people from entering into the Promised Land -- the Sanctuary -- the Paradise of Delight.

Another beautiful note concerning the Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ relates to the Old Testament priesthood of every firstborn male child. Before the consecration of the Levite tribe as the priests of the tabernacle, God commanded, *"Sanctify to Me every firstborn, first produced, opening every womb among the children of Israel of both man and beast: it is Mine" (Ex 13:2).* This sanctification was in terms of the priesthood honor given to every firstborn male child. That child was to be the priest of his family.

Now, in light of this, coming to the birth of Jesus Christ, the indication of His priesthood is very clear: *"And she gave birth to her firstborn Son" (Lk 2:7).* Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was incarnate to restore to Adam his original honored position. For when God created Adam, He created him and his children after him, to be kings, prophets, and priests of the creation. The human race was intended by God to be in His "image and likeness" (Gen 1:26), hence, Adam and Eve, with their children, were the kings over every created thing since they carried the image of God in themselves. God gave them the authority to *"have dominion over the fish of the seas and flying creatures of heaven, and all the cattle and all the earth, and all the reptiles that creep on the earth" (Gen 1:28).*

Mankind was also intended by God to be the priest of creation. This means that Adam was to be the mediator between the materialistic creation and the Spiritual God, since Adam was composed of the dust of the earth and the breath of God. Adam was to take to God all the praises that are offered by the creation since man was the only rational creature. He was also to take all the supplications and needs from the creation and present them to God since he, being of the same nature, felt the need to receive the same necessities from God. Similarly, Adam takes grace and blessings from God and gives them to the creation according to its needs. In all this, mankind, God's favorite creation, was the link. God was delighted in His creation and granted to the creation all its needs, and meanwhile accepted its praise.

However, when the human race, the kings, prophets, and priests, fell, all creation fell with it: *"Cursed is the ground for your sake" (Gen 3:18).* Mankind fell from the honored position, until our Savior returned it to us.

St. John Chrysostom reflects on our Lord's Great Love when He took our flesh to make it once again the king, prophet, and priest of creation: *"And that which is 'anointed' and 'sealed' gave the Spirit by which He did both these things, making at the same time prophets, priests, and kings, for in olden times these three types were anointed. But now we have not just one but all three of these dignities preeminently. For we are the first to enjoy a Kingdom, and secondly, we are made priests by offering our body for a*

sacrifice (Rom 12:1), and thirdly, we are constituted prophets, for *'what eye has not seen, nor ear heard'* (1 Cor 2:9) has been revealed to us."

The Lord Jesus Christ lived the same life that we lead; the only difference is that where we sin, He is victorious. *"Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a Merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people"* (Heb 2:17). Also, *"For we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy, and find Grace to help in time of need"* (Heb 4:15,16). Giving us His Body and Blood to be united with Him, He brought our flesh to an even higher state than the original.

The Holy Church tries to elevate mankind to that honored position once again of king, prophet, and priest for this was the original plan of God. In the Midnight Praises, the faithful chant the hymns indicating these spiritual roles for mankind by speaking to the creation to offer God the praise and glory due to Him. In the Book of Revelation we read: *"And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth'"* (Rev 5:9,10).

III. The Sacrament of the Priesthood and Its Hierarchy⁵

The threefold structure of the priesthood is analogous to, and reflects that of, the angelic host, each also having its own three subdivisions. The latter consists of:

- (1) The Cherubim (Ex. 10:18), the Seraphim (Is. 6:2), and the Thrones (Col. 1:16);
- (2) Dominions, Principalities, and Authorities (Col. 1:16); and
- (3) Powers (I Pt. 3:22), Archangels, and Angels (Rom. 8:38; 1 Thess. 4:16).

The ecclesiastical hierarchy includes:

- (1) Pope or patriarch, metropolitan, and bishop;
- (2) Khorī-episkopos, proto-presbyter (hegumen), and presbyter; and
- (3) Archdeacon, Deacon, Subdeacon, Reader, and Chanter.

Perhaps the first and earliest of the Early Church Fathers to dwell upon this analogy was Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215):

“In the Church the degrees of bishops, presbyters, and deacons happen to be imitations, in my opinion, of the angelic glory and of that arrangement which, the Scriptures say, awaits those who have followed in the footsteps of the Apostles, and who have lived in perfect righteousness according to the Gospel.”

Thus the Church hierarchy is composed of three degrees. None of the three stages can be seized solely by one’s personal desire; the Church gives them, and the blessing of God, through the ordination of a bishop, performs the appointment to them.

All three degrees of the priesthood are indispensable to the Church. Even though a small community may have as representatives of the hierarchy only one or two of the degrees (a priest, a priest and a deacon, two priests, etc.), still, in the Church as a whole, it is essential that there be the fullness of the hierarchy. St. Ignatius expresses in his epistles the testimony of the ancient Church concerning this. He writes:

“It is essential, as indeed you are acting, to do nothing without the bishop. Likewise obey the presbytery as apostles of Jesus Christ — our hope, in Whom may God grant that we live. And everyone should cooperate in every way with the deacons that serve the ministers of the Mysteries of Jesus Christ, for they are not ministers of food and drink, but servants of the Church of God. All of you should revere the deacons, as a commandment of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father, and the presbyters as the assembly of God, as the choir of the Apostles. Without them there is no Church”⁶

Priesthood is a triangle with three sides: the deacon, the priest, and the bishop. It is one of the seven Sacraments.

A. The Deacon

Seven Deacons were chosen by the community of Jerusalem and ordained by the Apostles, as we read in Acts Chapter 6. Their first assignment was to help the Apostles in a practical, yet secondary service: they were entrusted to “serve tables” — to give out food, and be concerned for the widows. These seven men were later called deacons, with St. Stephen as their head, or Archdeacon.

⁵ Taken from Seminary notes of Liturgical Studies II, Lesson 5 given by Fr. Felimon Mikhail

⁶ Ignatius the God-bearer, Epistle to the Trallians, part 2; To the Smyrneans, part 8

From the Pastoral Epistles it is apparent that the deacons were appointed by bishops (1 Tim. 3:8-13). Deacons were chosen men who were *"of good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom"* (Acts 6:3). They took part in preaching, as did St. Stephen, who sealed his preaching of Christ with his blood. In the Epistle to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul sends greetings to *"the bishops and deacons"* (1:1), as bearers of the grace-given hierarchical ministry, helpers of the bishops.

St. Justin Martyr writes: "Those called deacons among us give to each of those present communion of the bread upon which has been performed the Thanksgiving (Eucharist) and of the wine and the water, and they carry them out to those who are absent." This means that they distributed and carried out to the believers not only food in general, but also the Eucharistic gifts. Their ministry itself, therefore, was bound up in the ancient Church, as it is now, with the Divine services and the giving of grace.

The word Deacon is of Syriac origin. In Greek and Coptic it means servant or follower. Since it is the first (lowest) rank of priesthood, the deacon follows the bishop or the priest and helps with church affairs. The function of the deacon in the New Testament is similar to that of the Levite in the Old Testament.

St. Stephen was the first among the seven deacons ordained by the apostles (Acts 6). In his first epistle to Timothy, St. Paul mentioned the conditions to be met for ordaining the deacon directly after he met those conditions of the bishop. In his epistle to the Philippians, he mentions the deacons together with the bishops. This shows that this rank continued in Early Christianity, because of its importance to the Church.

1. The Full Deacon

a. Special Qualities

Since the full deacon is a rank of the priesthood and is a model for the congregation, he should be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom: *"Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business"* (Acts 6:3). It was said about Stephen that he was full of faith and power and did great wonders and signs among the people (Acts 6:8).

St. Paul referred to these special qualities in his first Epistle to St. Timothy: *"Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double tongued, not given to wine, not greedy for money... Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well"* (I Tim. 3:8; 12,13).

The Church canons define the minimum age for each rank: Bishop – approximately 50, Priest – 30 (our Lord Jesus Christ began His ministry at the age of 30) , Full deacon – approximately 25.

St. Clement mentions special qualities for deacons: A deacon cannot marry after he is ordained. If a deacon is married, it should be proven that he is a husband of one wife (and not involved in any inappropriate relationships) and that he manages his household well. Deacons should be humble, sober-minded, of good behavior, not given to wine, not violent nor greedy for money, not easily aroused to anger. They should be ready to share in comforting those who are in need.

b. The Duties of a Deacon

Inside Church:

- In the early centuries of Christianity, the deacon was allowed to teach the people and preach in the Church with special permission from the bishop. He had a special duty towards teaching the catechumens.

- A deacon is appointed as a servant with the priest and he has the right to approach the altar and be dressed as St. Stephen. He may carry the chalice that contains the sanctified Precious Blood of Christ and use the spoon (*myster*) to administer the Holy Blood to the congregation during Holy Communion.
- The Full Deacon is also allowed to read the Holy Gospel during the Divine Liturgy, if the priest does not do so. He may also light the candles in the East and stand facing the priest across the altar in order to: instruct the people, and guard the Holies (especially during the age of persecution).
- The presence of the deacon in the Holy Liturgy is very important. The priest should not bless the Holy Bread (the Holy Body) without the presence of a deacon, who calls for the prayers. The priest addresses the deacon with full respect and listens to him for the benefit of the congregation

Outside Church:

- The deacon should visit the sick, prisoners, widows, orphans, and the needy.
- As mentioned in the church traditions, the deacon is a servant of God and he serves the priests and the bishop. He should also introduce the bishop and the priests to the people in need so that the clergy could pray for them.
- Deacons should also inform the bishop about any person who carries a grudge towards his brother in order to reconcile their differences.
- He should introduce the needy people to the well-off members of the congregation.

c. The Ordination of the Deacon

The deacon is ordained by the laying of the hands of the bishop because it is a priestly rank: "As to the deacon, lay hands on him and pray in the presence of all the priests and deacons" (St. Clement). A deacon should be nominated by the priest who declares and testifies that the candidate is fit for such a service (Acts 6).

The ordination of the deacon is performed after the prayer of Reconciliation in the Divine Liturgy. The candidate kneels before the bishop, facing the altar. After praying the Thanksgiving prayer and offering incense, the Archdeacon calls upon the congregation, saying, "May the blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ that completes our weaknesses and the blessing of our Father and the Holy Spirit be upon (Name of the candidate) who entered your altar with all fear and respect and be elevated from the rank of Subdeacon to Deacon in Your holy church. Let us all pray so that he may receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit by saying, 'Lord have mercy'."

Then the bishop completes the prayers, while laying his right hand on the deacon's head. He announces the Ordination to the people, calling the candidate by his new name, and ordaining him in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He also signs him with the cross three times over his head.

The Bishop then faces the East, thanking the Lord again. After this, the Bishop blesses the vestments of the newly-ordained, which are then placed upon him. The Deacon then bows before the altar and the Bishop, then enters the Altar. A set of commandments is read to the deacon to define his duties and emphasize his obedience to the higher priestly ranks.

2. The Archdeacon

Since deacons are of many orders, it is necessary to have someone who can direct, advise and solve their possible conflicts; this person is called the archdeacon. He is ordained by the patriarch or the bishop and is appointed the head of the deacons. A deacon is allowed to sit to the left of the bishop and

he has to be knowledgeable of the Holy Scriptures, in order to be able to direct those who are of lower rank. He may also give advice to the patriarch or the bishop regarding the nominees for priestly rank.

3. The Sub-ranks of the Order of the Deaconate

In preparation for the full rank of deacon, the early Church devised three lesser ranks: the Chanter, the Reader and the Subdeacon. When these deacons are consecrated, the Bishop does not lay his hands on either of them, because they are not among the ranks of priesthood.

a. Chanter (*Psaltos*)

This is not a priestly rank, but a prayer of blessing by which the volunteer gets the blessing of reciting the hymns in the church. This blessing is given to young children encouraging them to participate in the church services. This also indicates that it is necessary to get the blessing of the bishop in order to participate in the church service. Appointing the *psaltos* is performed at the time of ordaining the deacons and it does not require laying of the hands or cutting the hair, but there are brief prayers for blessing.

b. Reader (*Aghnostos*)

This word means the “Reader” in Greek. His duty is to read and interpret the Holy Scriptures. He may stand in a raised place in the Church and recite the suitable hymns. He is not allowed to serve in the altar and should be able to both understand and explain what he is asked to read aloud.

The consecration (not ordination since there is no laying on of hands) is performed after the Prayer of Reconciliation of the Divine Liturgy. The nominee for this rank stands in his ordinary clothes and bows his head. The bishop stands before the altar and asks if the nominee is worthy of the rank. When the people who nominated him answer that he is worthy, the bishop uses a pair of scissors to make five crosses: one in the middle of the head and from the four sides. Then he says the prayers of Thanksgiving, offers incense and starts the special prayers for consecration.

Cutting the hair is a symbol for ridding oneself of the old man, and the scissors are a symbol of the weapon used to do so, which is the Word of God and prayer. The hair in the front of the head is cut to remove wicked fantasies. The back of the head for the worldly concerns and anxiety. The sides are for getting rid of the worldly involvement. Cutting the hair in the sign of the cross means that the deacon receives the blessings and gifts because he is worthy of the gifts of the cross.

c. Sub-deacon (*Epidiacon*)

This word in Greek means the assistant or the helper of the deacon. His duty is to carry the candles, prepare the censor, and guard the doors and entrances of the church. He is to prevent animals, non-believers, or those not allowed by the Patriarch/Bishop into the Church. He is also to keep order and discipline inside the Church.

The consecration prayer is performed during the Divine Liturgy, after the Prayer of Reconciliation, as with the consecration of the Reader. The Rite of Consecration of the Sub-deacon is according to the special prayers in the Book of Ordinations. The main difference between this consecration of the Sub-deacon and that of the Deacon and Reader is that there is neither cutting of the hair nor the laying of hands.

4. Deaconess

The church allows women to be deaconesses and the church laws define their duties. "A deaconess should not bless or perform any duties of the priesthood, but they keep the doors and serve in the baptism room for the ladies." Also, "A deaconess should be a respectable member of the congregation and she should act under the guidance of the deacon. A deaconess should not go directly to the bishop with requests without the presence of a deacon. Her duties also are to discipline the women in church

and to be kind and merciful to them.”⁷ Deaconesses do not have priestly rank and they cannot be priests. There existed deaconesses until the fifth century as mentioned in the epistles of the Patriarch Severus of Antioch.

B. The Priest

Presbyters (literally “elders”) served from the Apostolic age until today, and are in the second degree of the hierarchy of the Holy Priesthood. The Apostles Paul and Barnabas went through Lystra, Antioch and Iconium, ordaining presbyters in each Church (Acts 14:23). For the resolution of the question about circumcision, an envoy was sent to the Apostles and presbyters at Jerusalem (Acts 15:2). At the Council of the Apostles, the presbyters occupied a place together with the Apostles, and were distinguished from each other: “Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.” (Acts 15:6).

Further, the Apostle James instructs: *“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders [presbyters] of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord”* (James 5:14). From the instruction of St. James we see two important facts: Presbyters perform the Church’s sacred mysteries and rites; and in the early Church there could be several presbyters in each community, whereas only one bishop was appointed for a city and the surrounding region.

Priests fall into three ranks: Presbyter, Hegumen, and Khorī-Episkopos.

1. Presbyter is a Greek word, which in English means “senior”. His duty is to administer the Holy Sacraments, pray the prayers of the departed, preach to the congregation, and rebuke those who violate the church teachings.

2. Hegumen is a Greek word, which in English means "Director." He is called upon the Bishop for various duties, and also in the great feasts in his absence. Just as the archdeacon supervises the deacons, the Hegumen supervises the priests. A priest should be the husband of one wife, and if she dies he should not remarry. Priests resemble the angels in Heaven; they are the 24 elders who were dressed in white and have crowns of gold on their heads (Rev 4:4). They carry *“golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints”* (Rev 5:8). Therefore, if priests are attracted to the worldly life, they lose their heavenly rank.

3. Khorī-episkopos is the rank for the bishop of villages and farms. He is the representative of the metropolitan bishop. In the past, he had the authority to ordain deacons and priests with written permission from the bishop. Today there are a few with this rank and they are replaced by the Hegumens, who have the authority to appoint only the Psaltos.

C. The Bishop

The bishops comprise the highest rank of the hierarchy. In general, everywhere in life there is the principle of headship, and the highest degree of the hierarchy, which rules over presbyters and deacons, is dictated by the very logic of life itself. The same thing is clear from ancient church literature; St. Ignatius writes: “Where the Bishop is, there should the people also be, just as also where Jesus Christ is, there is the universal Church.”⁸ Also, Tertullian wrote, “Without bishops there is no Church.”⁹

⁷ Apostolic Laws by St. Clement 59

⁸ Epistle to the Smyrneans, part 8

⁹ Tertullian, “Against Marcian,” part 4, ch. 5.

The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy, *“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership”* (1 Tim. 4:14). And in another place the Apostle writes to him, *“Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands”* (2 Tim. 1:6). To Timothy and Titus, Bishops of Ephesus and Crete (respectively), was given the right to ordain priests: *“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders [priests] in every city as I commanded you”* (Titus 1:5). Likewise these bishops were given the right to reward the priests: *“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine”* (1 Tim. 5:17). Likewise, they have the right to examine accusations against presbyters: *“Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses”* (1 Tim. 5:19).

Thus the Apostles, those precisely who were called to the highest ministry in the Church by the Lord Himself—placed *bishops* as their immediate successors, and *presbyters* as their own helpers and as helpers of the bishops, as the “hands” of the bishops, placing the further matter of the ordination of presbyters with the Bishops.

The Bishop may bless and ordain bishops, hegumens, priests and deacons. He also has the authority to consecrate churches, altars, and the vessels of the altar.

Metropolitan and Patriarch

The metropolitan and the patriarch are considered within the rank of a bishop. The word metropolitan is derived from the word “metropolis” which means the 'main city.'

The word "Abba" is of Aramaic origin, and it means father. It became applied as a term of honor, after being used to refer to rabbis in the early first century.

The word Patriarch means the head father. As the bishop, he has the right to bless and ordain metropolitans, bishops, hegumens, priests and deacons. Two bishops at least should be present when the Patriarch ordains a metropolitan. A Patriarch is to be elected at first and then ordained by groups of metropolitans, bishops, priests, and people.

IV. VESTMENTS OF THE CLERGY

As we have read in the Old Testament about how God gave very specific, detailed instructions, our minds ask for the reason. In actuality, God wants the minds of His people to turn and understand beyond the physical, materialistic aspect, concentrating on the spiritual. God is granting Grace to His priests without which no one can dare to approach the ministry of the Lord.

The individual is required to prepare himself spiritually, not just externally; he is to struggle to purify himself and put on the Righteousness of God's Power to help him. It was not enough that the priest be dressed with Divine garments in order to enter into the Holy of Holies, but more importantly, he must realize the need for holiness; some have died, never coming out alive from the inner Sanctuary because they had greatly sinned against God.

In the New Testament, the Holy catholic Apostolic Churches, past and present, as part of their Holy Orthodox Tradition, have dedicated special vesture for clergymen to wear at times of Divine services. The Church insists that the ministers must wear special holy vestments before beginning the service and must also remove them immediately at the end of the service. This is in accordance to the Divine Commandments given in the Old Testament concerning the ministry of the Holy of Holies: *"None shall go in thither except the priests, and they shall not go forth of the Holy Place into the outer court, that they that draw nigh to Me may be continually holy, and may not touch their garments in which they minister, with defilement, for they are holy; and they shall put on other garments whenever they come in contact with the people"* (Ezek 42:14). Once more, the same Commandment is mentioned in clearer terms: *"And it shall come to pass when they enter the gates of the inner courts, that they shall put on linen robes...And when they go out into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their robes, in which they minister; and they shall lay them up in the chambers of the Sanctuary, and shall put on other robes, and they shall not sanctify the people with their robes"* (Ezek 44:17-19).

The following explanation describes the Orthodox belief behind this canon. The clergyman may be a weak individual, who falls under sins as everyone. Though he may come to stand before God, he is still in a state of weakness and even corruption of sin. However, at coming to the service he does not forget that the Lord Himself dresses him in pure, divine vesture to cover his weak nature in order that he may stand before God and minister the needs of the congregation. The dressing of the white vestments signifies purity, and hence should comfort the believers, assuring them of the element of Heavenly Power to minister, rather than the clergymen's personal power. In other words, vestments serve to hide and submerge the personality of the priest so that worshippers, seeing Christ through the vestments, may know that it is He Who teaches and sanctifies through the priest. St. Paul writes: *"God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His Good pleasure"* (Phil 2:13).

The prophet Zachariah saw in his vision the marvelous grace that God bestows on the minister who is about to serve in the Sanctuary of the Most High God: *"Now Joshua [the priest of the Lord] was clothed in filthy raiment, and stood before the angel. And the Lord answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, 'Take away the filthy raiment from him', and He said to him, 'Behold, I have taken away thine iniquities; and clothe ye him with a long robe, and place a pure miter [or, turban] upon his head'. So they placed a pure miter upon his head, and clothed him with garments: and the angel of the Lord stood by"* (Zach 3:3-5).

Abba Mark, the Egyptian Monk, similarly described what God revealed to him as he saw the priest preparing himself to stand before the Holy Table: "I saw the angel of the Lord descend from heaven and

place his hand on the priest's head and he became a pillar of fire. I was filled with wonder at this sight, and I heard a voice saying to me, 'Man, why are you astonished at this? In truth, if an earthly king does not allow his nobles to stand in his presence in soiled garments, but only arrayed in glory, how much more will the Divine Power purify the servants of the Holy Mysteries who stand before the Heavenly Glory?'"

The essence of the Sacrament of Holy Orders lies in these beliefs: regardless of the person serving, whether a holy or weak person is serving, all the prayers and Sacraments are unaffected and have the Divine life-giving effects. This is so through the work of the Holy Spirit, not any personal power of the individual. Therefore the vestments remind the minister that this Power is given to him only for the time of service and not effective in his personal life; his sins in his personal life still remain to be taken care of. The important thing is that his personal life has no bearing on his liturgical ministry and will not delay any service. If he desires that God may grant him a holy daily life, and he struggles like everyone else, God, in His mercy, will gladly bestow His kind aid.

Therefore, it should be finally emphasized that vestments of the Divine services should be distinguished from regular clothing. The Tenth Law of St. Clement of Alexandria reads: "The presbyter's vestments should be different from the layman's." The minister attending to the service is thus distinguished from the congregation as well as himself.

A. Meanings of the Colors

The glory and majesty is evident in the holy vestments that are made of white, golden yellow, and crimson colors. "The richest materials, too, were employed, such as silk, velvet, and cloth of gold; and these are embroidered with beautiful [patterns] - sometimes having costly jewels inwoven, -- or even covered entirely with flowers and other designs in the finest needlework. No pains or cost were thought too great to adorn the apparel used at the service of our altars."

Gold, which is found in almost all the individual garment pieces, represents royalty and majesty. Red or crimson is symbolic of joy and the Blood of our Savior in which we have the New Covenant of the remission of our sins. The purple or dark blue, rather than the black, color of the vestments are used only during funeral services, and the Holy Passion Week.

The white color has a very important role in the representation of purity. No clergyman is ever permitted to celebrate any Divine service without wearing his white tunic. As was already stated that the clergyman does not perform the service by his personal power, but by a Divine gift by which he is in a pure state to administer the Sacraments.

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church chose the white color for the following reasons also:

- God is seen to be covering Himself *"with light as with a garment"* (Ps 104:2). Also in the Book of Daniel, Daniel saw the *"Ancient of Days [sitting] and His raiment was white as snow"* (Dan 7:9), and *"Behold a Man clothed in linen, and His loins were girt with gold of Ophaz: and His body was as Tharsis, and His face was as the appearance of lightening"* (Dan 10:5,6).
- At the Lord's transfiguration before His disciples: He *"was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light"* (Mt 17:2).
- The garments of the angels are always white whenever they appear, as is told in the account of the Resurrection when the women carrying the spices visited the tomb: *"And she saw two*

angels in white sitting, one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain" (Jn 20:12).

- In the Book of Revelation, St. John saw, round about the throne of God, twenty- four presbyters sitting *"clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold"* (Rev 4:4).
- Also our Lord promised that *"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels"* (Rev 3:5).
- White signifies purity, cleanliness, innocence, sanctification of heart, and the virtues that God's servants should have. *"And the armies which were in Heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean"* (Rev 19:14), where the *"fine linen is the righteousness of saints"* (Rev 19:2)
- Also, the white is a reminder from the Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church to her servants to pursue Christian virtues, being clean and pure as their garments, even in their daily lives (Col 3:12-14) , *"Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires"* (Rom 13:12-14).
- Finally, when each clergyman puts on his white tunic he *"puts off the former life, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and is renewed...[putting] on the new man, which God created in righteousness and true holiness"* (Eph 4:22,23).

The Staff is used by the patriarch and bishop at times other than that of the service. It refers to the shepherd's staff that was received from the great Shepherd of shepherds, that urges him to take extreme care of his flock, so that it is not eaten by the enemy. It also indicates authority, *"the Lord shall send the rod of your strength out of Zion"* (Ps. 110:2).

Note: the bishop does not carry the staff in the presence of the patriarch, and not in a parish or diocese other than his own, unless the bishop of the diocese approves this.

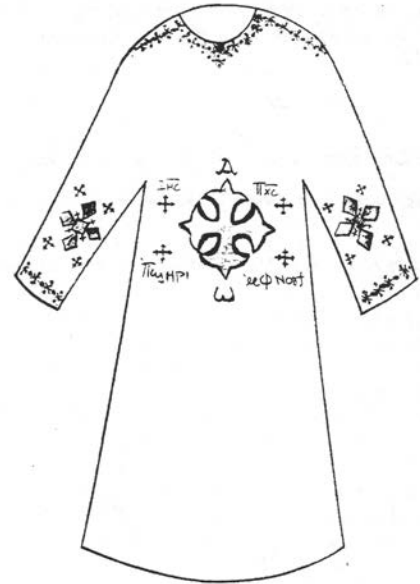
During the Divine Services, the staff is replaced by a beautifully ornamented stick, called a crosier, with one or two serpents made of precious metal. It refers firstly to wisdom...*"be wise as serpents"* (Matt. 10:16) and secondly, to the Cross, in which we get the healing from the sting of the old serpent, similar to the bronze serpent that was raised in the wilderness (Num 21:4-9; John 3:14).



B. The Tunic (Tonia)

The patriarch, the bishops, and priests and deacons are required to wear white tunics during the services of their liturgical duties. The tunic is the first vestment worn. The tunic is found among the sacred garments of the Old Testament priesthood and has the same mystical meaning.

The tunic refers to the luminous garment of Glory with which God is clothed (Rev 1:13). Putting on the tunic reminds the server of the necessity of "putting on" virtues and purity, and serving the liturgical duties in holiness and order, since he is transfigured with Christ in His Sanctuary. When the soldiers came to crucify our Lord Jesus Christ they did not tear His tunic into pieces, therefore, in spiritual symbolism, the clergyman must put on Christ in whole, meaning that the entire self must be involved with Heavenly matters for no man can be divided in his service to two masters.



Tunic

The tunic should be long, reaching from the neck down to the ankles in symbolism of God's Grace that covers the sins of the server. Crosses are embroidered on the front and back as well as the sleeves to indicate the strength bestowed from God to the server to fulfill the ministry. Stripes around the periphery of the sleeves and around the neck are in-woven to symbolize the ropes by which our Savior was bound.

The tunic should not be open down in the front so that there is no indication of tearing, for when the Jewish high priest was trying our Lord, he rent his robe from the top (Mk 14:63) in disobedience to God's commands: *"Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die"* (Lev 10:6); *"And the priest that is chief among his brethren, the oil having been poured upon the head of the anointed one, and he having been consecrated to put on the garments, shall not take the turban off his head, and shall not rend his garments"* (Lev 21:10). Hence, the Jewish priesthood is a broken one, but not the Christian, because we are followers of the True High Priest, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ (Heb 7:15-30).

C. Stole

The stole is worn by the patriarch, bishops, priests, and deacons in different forms, as follows:

1. The Deacons' stole, the ***padrashil***, translates to "that which is worn on the shoulder." It is a sign of service and obedience. It is a strip of colored embroidered cloth. The Deacon and the Archdeacon wear in on the left shoulder, lowered under the right elbow, with both ends hanging, one from the front side and the other from the back side (see image to the right). St. John Chrysostom likened deacons to angels as they are dressed in the beautiful vestments, with the stoles on their left shoulders.



Minor Orders, specifically the sub-deacon, reader, and chanter, wear it in the form of a cross on the back, in reference to "*bearing the Cross of the Lord*" (Matt 15:24). On the front side, it is wrapped like a belt or girdle, to indicate self discipline and control, in preparation for the service (see photo above).

2. The Presbyterial Stole (***sedrah***). The Sedrah is similar to the breast plate worn by Aaron, according to God's command (Exodus 28). It is basically the deacons' stole that is wrapped around the neck instead of on one side of the shoulder, with both ends hanging on the front side. These both ends were later connected from underneath the neck till the bottom, forming one strip in the front with a visible connection (see image to the right).



Presbyterial Stole:
Sedrah

3. Episcopal Stole. On the stole of the Bishop, Metropolitan, and Patriarch, there are embroidered pictures of the twelve apostles, similar to Aaron's breastplate which bore the names of the twelve sons of Israel (Exodus 28:13), since the Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles (Ephesians 2:2), and as their names are written on the foundation of new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24).

- This also reminds the Presbyter that he carries his congregation like Christ, by means of preaching and teaching, keeping them in his head and remembering them in his prayers (Philippians 1:3, 4, 7).

- When the Presbyter wears it, he remembers the robe that was around Christ's neck, when He was arrested and tried.

D. Cope (Bornos)

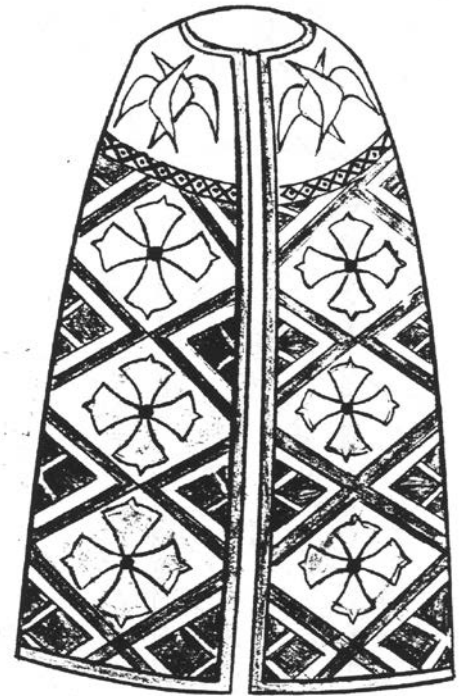
The cope is worn by the patriarch, the bishops, and the priests. It is given to them at their ordination. The cope is a round, sleeveless, loose robe worn over the shoulders. It is made of fine material (white thread, crimson velvet, and/or golden thread), and is embroidered with elegant artwork, especially crosses.

The cope is worn over all other vestments, and is described symbolically as "the garment of celestial glory." Historically, the bornos was the robe of the righteous kings, prophets, and apostles. A resemblance of the cope is found among the vestments of the Old Testament Jewish priesthood in the ephod.

The patriarch Germanus speaks of the cope as emblematic of the scarlet or purple robe with which our Lord was arrayed before His Crucifixion.

The cope refers to God's care that surrounds the servant, protecting him. It also refers to the virtue of uprightness as David the king says: *"Your priests shall be clothed with righteousness, and Your righteous shall rejoice"* (Ps 131:9). Isaiah the prophet says: *"Let my soul rejoice in the Lord; for He has clothed me with the robe of Salvation, and the garment of joy: He has put a miter on me as on a bridegroom, and adorned me with ornaments as a bride"* (Is 61:10).

Putting on the cope at the beginning of the Divine service, the minister remembers the responsibility of carrying the lost sheep joyfully on his shoulders (Luke 15:4,5), but at the start of the Liturgy of the Faithful, he removes it in honor of the Chief Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ.



Cope

D. Head Coverings

1. Crown/Miter

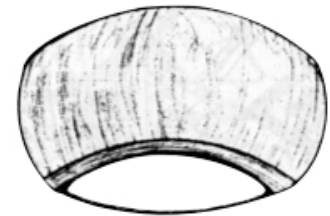
The crown is the royal headdress of the patriarch and the bishops during the Liturgy. Upon his enthronement and installation in his diocese, the bishop is crowned.

The crown is made of crimson velvet, arrayed with precious stones and beautiful decorations. On top stands a jeweled Cross. Each of the vertical division of the crown encloses a medallion with sacred figures, and set round with precious stones.



Crown

The crown is similar to the turban used by Aaron on which the gold signet was mounted with the inscription *"Holiness to the Lord"* (Ex 28:31). The crown is worn following the example of the Heavenly twenty-four presbyters who had crowns of gold on their heads (Rev 4:4). David the prophet and king says: *"For You meet him with blessings of goodness; You have set a crown of pure gold upon his head...His glory is great in Your Salvation; honor and majesty You have placed upon him"* (Ps 21:3,5).



Bishop's Cap

The crown has reference to the crown of thorns that was put on our Lord's head (Jn 19:5) through which humanity has gained the crown of glory and Salvation: *"Who redeems your life from corruption; Who crowns you with mercy and compassion"* (Ps 102:4, Liturgy of St. Gregory).

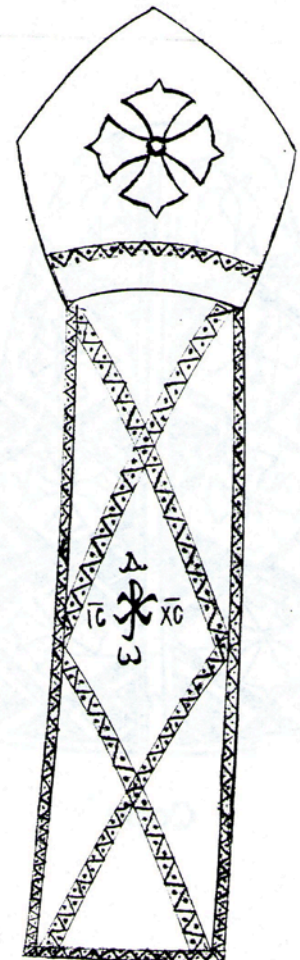
The authority, grace, and majesty, which were given by our Lord to the priesthood, are manifested in the crown. Out of respect for the King of kings, the patriarch or the bishop removes the crown while reading the Gospel and during the Liturgy of the Faithful.

2. Bishop's Cap (aama). Outside of liturgical services, the patriarch, bishop, and priest wear a black cap, matching their black tunic.

3. The Amice (Taylassan) is the Priest's head covering during the Divine Liturgy. It is a wide rectangular piece of cloth on which crosses are drawn, one on the front side and the other on the back. In the past, it was folded around the head like a turban, then lowered from the backside. Today, however, the shape has changed to a round shape that resembles a crown.

The amice reminds us of the turban that was worn by the High Priest in the past (Ex 28:4), and refers to, *"the robe of righteousness with which God has covered us and filled our hearts with joy."* (Psalm 45:13,14; Isaiah 61:10).

Wearing it on the head reminds us of spiritual alertness and the concentration of the mind during the service (1 Thessalonians 5:8, Ephesians 6:16).



**Presbyterial Amice:
Taylasan**

V. Priest Etiquette

Some may seem simply culturally, Egyptian, but actually, these are based deeply in Church Tradition. Some of these actually fit American culture as well. In such a fast-paced world we have forgotten the value of each person.

- 1) Greeting priest: When you see a priest, you should go and take the blessing.
 - a. With your right hand kiss the Cross in his hand, and then his hand.
 - b. You may also place your head on his hand afterwards as well.
 - c. If the priest enters the room you are in, you should stand out of respect.
- 2) Leaving the priest: should ask for permission, "Absolve me, my Father", or "Excuse me, Abouna." This was proper even for parents in America. Until recently, children used to ask, "May I be excused?" before leaving the dinner table or before ending a conversation with parents. When leaving clergy, you will also benefit tremendously from asking for a special blessing or prayer before. So that his Reverence is not mistaken that you are asking for a general prayer, you may bow your head after requesting this blessing.
- 3) Wait for the priest (if present) to bless food before eating and drinking. Congregations in general should not begin eating before the priest has blessed the agape meal. If you come late to a table with clergy present, it is proper to ask the priest to bless your plate, even if he has blessed the table. Then begin your personal prayer, "Our Father."
- 4) Clothing in church and before the priest should be appropriate and respectful.
- 5) When possible, it is not proper to give your back to a priest (or any other person for that matter)
- 6) Using proper titles. Instead of using "you" in addressing clergy, we use "Your Reverence" for the priest, "Your Grace" for the bishop, "Your Holiness" for the pope. "Guys" should not be used to address a gathering of clergy. To avoid using the awkward phrase, "abounas," you can say "your Reverences" or "my Fathers."
- 7) We welcome the Bishop and/or Pope by chanting hymns. Typically we sing Ekezaroot (Blessed is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...) then ask through the intercessions of the Pope, Bishop (of Diocese), and any Bishops or Metropolitans present. In welcoming the Pope, Eflogimenos may also be chanted.