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Concept and Person of Ordinary and Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist

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CONCEPT AND PERSON OF ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF THE EUCHARIST

Foreword:

This is a short, but an apt study, which deals with ministers of the Eucharist. It presents to readers the historical development of Eucharistic ministers from the ancient times up to the present recalling the newest Church documents on this problematic. The aim of this study is to give an exact and fitting review of the history and of the present regulations for ordinary and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist.

In the common praxis of many parishes of Slovakia, we meet with the reality and practice of the ordinary and the extraordinary ministry of Holy Communion, which means that the Eucharist is given to us either by a cleric or by an authorized layperson.

In the document *Pokyny na riešenie niektorých otázok spolupráce laických veriacich zameranej na kňazskú službu*¹, there is mentioned in article 8 the reality of liturgical service of the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion for the needs of the faithful in the sense of his actualization in the present time. From the very beginning, the complexity of the problematic of the ordinary and the extraordinary ministry of Holy Communion has to be emphasized in order to apply this view correctly in practice. This can be done only, if we look at the problem in the context of liturgical, pastoral and canonical-ecclesiastical aspect.

¹ *Pokyny na riešenie niektorých otázok spolupráce laických veriacich zameranej na kňazskú službu*, Rome 1997; the Slovak translation SSV, Trnava 1998.

Where does the concept of extraordinary minister of the Eucharist² come from? It comes from the Latin concept *minister*³ that expresses minister of some office, who fulfills his duty in the authority of a higher rank⁴. The word minister is used in the present language in three areas⁵: theological, diplomatic and political.

In practice, we distinguish the use of the word *minister* according to terms of:

- 1) an ordination
 - a) *minister consecratus* – the ordained minister
 - b) *minister non consecratus* – the non-ordained minister
- 2) a juridical order
 - a) *minister ordinaries* – the ordinary minister to whom the service belongs by the authority of his office
 - b) *minister extraordinarius* – the extraordinary minister to whom the service belongs due to some need, and based on delegation
- 3) a dogmatic aspect
 - a) *minister primarius* – the primordial minister – Christ
 - b) *minister secundarius* – the secondary minister – man.

In the first two centuries due to persecution and a lack of priests it was common for lay persons to give to one another Holy Communion⁶. Moreover, we can also deduce from Tertullian's⁷ and Origen's⁸ records that it was an universal custom of lay persons to take and keep the Eucharist in their own homes⁹.

From Tertullian we know that Holy Communion was distributed during the divine liturgies under both species – bread and wine. The celebrant distributed

²In Slovak, the term *vysluhovateľ*– is a celebrant who is a cleric. He consecrates and distributes the Eucharist. The term *rozdávateľ*– is an distributor who is a person that has a mandate to distribute Communion without any reference to his clerical state in the Church.

³*minus* – less; *minister, stri, m* – helper, servant, supporter, mediator

⁴Cf. the suffix *-iter* in the comparative meaning.

⁵Cf.: Brtko, R.: *Mimoriadny vysluhovateľ svätého prijímania*, in: Bulletin SSKP, Spišská Kapitula 1999, p. 42.

⁶Cf.: Basilius, M.: *Epistula 93 ad Ceaseriam patriciam*, s. 32, 483°; Cyprianus: *De lapsis*, c. 26, PL 4, p. 486.

⁷Cf.: Tertulianus: *Ad uxorem* 2, 1: PL 1. 1296.

⁸Cf.: Origenes: *In Exodum* 13, 3: PG 12. 391.

⁹Hipolyt confirms it, when he exhorts: "Omnis autem festinet ut non infidelis gustet de Eucharistia aut sorix aut animal aliud, aut nequid cadeat et perat de eo. Corpus enim est Christi edendum credentibus et non contemnendum". Cf.: *Traditio apostolica*, cap. 7.

It is evident that his exhortation could not refer to anybody other than the laymen who after the liturgies packed some particles of the Eucharist into the white cloth and took them home and stored them in a safe place. This custom lasted till the time of St. John Chrysostom in Constantinople during the 5th century. Ibid.: Brtko, R.: *Mimoriadny vysluhovateľ svätého prijímania*, p. 45-46.

Christ's body and the deacon gave the chalice to the faithful¹⁰. Justin, who wrote his first apology in Rome, left in it for us a quite complex record of ceremonies on the Holy Mass about the mentioned tradition of distribution of the Eucharist. It is important for us to remember that his descriptions of the ceremonies have relation to the Roman rite; however, some of the references can be applied to the Eastern rite as well¹¹.

The first council of Nicea in the year 325 prohibited deacon, in canon number 18¹² from distributing Holy Communion to priests. Pope Gelazius I. (492-496) ordained that the deacons would be allowed to distribute Holy Communion only in the absence of bishop or priest¹³. The council in Cartago (398) made it more specific with its claim that the deacons are allowed to distribute the Eucharist only by authorization from the presbyter¹⁴. From the other documents of the medieval councils, it appears that the custom of giving the Blessed Sacrament to lay persons, in particular to women with piteous aims, was quite common. The council of Reims¹⁵ criticized that practice and also other councils such as Council of Rouen (650), of Aix-la-Chappelle (816) and of Paris (829). The Council of Paris pointed out the fact that women dressed in sacred garments were distributing the Eucharist¹⁶. The council of Trent (1545-1563) emphasized that the traditional way of the distribu-

¹⁰Cf.: Tertulianus: *De corona* 3: PL 2. 79-80.

¹¹With respect to Holy Communion Justin writes: "et eorum, in quibus gratiae actae sunt, distributio fit ex communicatio unicuique praesentium, et absentibus per diaconos mittitur." – Cf.: *Apologia* I, 67: PG 6. 430. So it was a task of the deacons to bring the Eucharist to those who could not participate in the Eucharistic celebration. Acolytes could also carry out this activity, but they could not distribute Communion during the Holy Mass. Cf.: *Martyrologium Usuardi monachi*: PL 124.366; Brtko, R.: *Mimoriadny vysluhovateľ svätého prijímania*, p. 46.

¹²"Provenit ad sanctum magnumque concilium, quod in quibusdam locis et civitatibus presbyteris gratiam sacrae communionis diaconi porrigant. Quod nec regula nec consuetudo permittit, ut ab his qui protestatem non habent offerendi illi qui offerunt Christi corpus accipiant." Cf.: *Concilium Nicaenum I*, can. 18: *De privilegiis presbyterorum, in Concilium Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1991 s. 14; Brtko, R.: *Mimoriadny vysluhovateľ svätého prijímania*, p. 46.

¹³"Diaconi sacri Corporis praerogationem sub conspectu pontificis seu presbyteri ius non habent exercendi, nisi his absentibus". Cf.: Gelazius.: *Ad Episcopos per Lucaniam*, c. 13, D 93.

¹⁴"Praesente presbytero diaconus Eucharistiam Corporis Christi populo, si necessitas cogat, ius sus eroget."

¹⁵"Peruenit ad notitiam nostram, quod quidam presbyteri in tantum parvipendant diuina misteria, ut laico aut feminae sacrum corpus Domini tradant ad deferendum infirmis, et quibus prohibetur, ne sacrarium ingrediantur, nec ad altare appropinquent, illis sancta sanctorum committuntur. Quod quam sit horribile quamque detestabile, omni religiosum animaduertit prudentia. Igitur interdicat per omnia sinodus, ne talis temeraria presumptio ulterius fiat, sed omnimodis presbyter per semetipsum infirmum communicet. Quod si aliter fecerit, gradus suo periculo subiacebit." in: Brtko, R.: *Mimoriadny vysluhovateľ svätého prijímania*, p. 47.

¹⁶Brtko, R.: *Mimoriadny vysluhovateľ svätého prijímania*, p. 47.

tion of the Eucharist is that in which the lay people receive Holy Communion from the priests and the priests receive it from themselves¹⁷.

In the old Codex 1917 the public (*publicus*) and the private (*privatus*) ordinary minister of the Eucharist was distinguished. In this codex only a presbyter and a bishop were the ordinary minister of the Eucharist, the deacon was just the extraordinary minister¹⁸.

The sacrament of Eucharist is situated between two sacral actions. By using the scholastic terminology, we can understand it in two ways: as *sacramentum in fieri* (the moment of consecration – presbyter, bishop) and as *sacramentum in facto esse* (as the permanent sacrament lasting as long as the species last). From this can be understood the double meaning of the minister of the Eucharist – the first as a minister for making Christ's sacrifice present and the second as a minister for distributing Holy Communion to the faithful.

Eucharistic ministers according to the new law:

- ordinary: deacon, presbyter, bishop = clergy
- extraordinary¹⁹: acolyte – man properly authorized by the decree
- other member of the Christian faithful deputed in accord with canon 230, § 3 (man or woman qualified to distribute the Eucharist).

¹⁷"In sacramentali autem sumptione semper in ecclesia Dei mos fuit, ut laici a sacerdotibus communionem acciperent, sacerdotes autem celebrantes se ipsos communicarent, qui mos tanquam ex traditione apostolica descendens jure ac merito retineri debet." Cf.: Concilium Tridentinum: *Decretum de sanctissimo Eucharistiae sacramento*, sessio XIII., cap. VIII.

¹⁸Ibid. CIC 1917 can. 845.

Before the reform of minor orders, the committee *de Sacramentis* made the following correction of the "old" canon 845 of Codex 1917: "Minister sacrae communionis determinatur: ordinarius minister est sacerdos et diaconus, extraordinarius est alius christifidelis, sive clericus sive etiam laicus, in casibus vero necessitatis pastoralis tantum et servatis loci Ordinarii praescripti." Cf.: *Communicationes* è. 4, 1972, p. 53.

Paul IV. The apostolic letter *Motu proprio Ministeria quaedam* decided that also an acolyte belongs among the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and so he can distribute it always when the ordinary ministers, about whom the can. 845 in Codex 1917 speaks, are absent due to their illness or high age or pastoral duties which prevent them from distributing Communion. Acolytes are also authorized to distribute Communion when there are a great number of recipients of Holy Communion so that the Holy Mass would not last a long time. Cf.: article 6.

¹⁹23 I 1973 Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments in *De sacra communione et de cultu mysterii Eucharistici extra missam* è. 17, 19) made clear that under the term the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion belong: 1) acolyte 2) other member of Christian faithful.

The same congregation published a short ceremony, which should be used when bishop or priest authorizes the faithful to distribute Holy Communion. *Benedicat + te Dominus ad Corpus Christi fratribus tuis nunc ministrandum*. Ibid.: *Notitiae* è. 9, 1973, p. 167.

The term *acolyte*²⁰ comes most probably from the Greek territory and in the terminology of the New Testament this term acquired metaphorical meaning – following Christ. In the historical practice acolyte belongs to the minor orders that Pope Paul VI reformed into so-called ministries. According to Codex 1983 of Canon law, the ministry of acolyte can be conferred only on a layperson of a male sex, in Latin *vir*²¹, *laicus*, and it can be done only through a liturgical celebration²². From the pastoral perspective the ministry of acolyte is the service of the altar that is one of the characteristics of the acolyte.

The deeds in the role of acolyte are:

- a) ordinary: helping the deacon and the celebrant
- b) extraordinary: distributing Holy Communion²³, and exposing the Blessed Sacrament and returning it to the tabernacle without a blessing²⁴.

The other extraordinary Eucharistic minister is a layperson, but not the acolyte, who is chosen by the competent ecclesial hierarchy according to the norm of canon. The acolyte ministry, which permits only to a person of a male sex, this type of extraordinary Eucharistic ministry permits to lay persons of both sexes, man and woman equally, who are granted the faculty of distributing the Eucharist when ordinary ministers are not available.

In order that the extraordinary minister can distribute the Eucharist in the Eucharistic celebration, it is necessary that ordinary ministers are not present there or they are present there, but they somehow not able to exercise their ministry²⁵.

²⁰ Acolyte in the liturgical sense was understood till 31 XII 1972 as one of minor orders that Pope Paul VI reformed through two apostolic letters *Ministeria quaedam* (15 VIII 1972, in AAS 64, 1972, p. 529-534) and *Ad Pascendum* (15 VIII 1972, in AAS 64, 1972, p. 534-540) in the following way:

1. He canceled tonsure and subdiaconate
2. He changed the terminology: "minor orders" were re-named "ministries".
3. The "ministries" are only two – lector and acolyte, however, they also include functions that the subdeacon used to do.
4. Through canceling the name "minor orders", it is not necessary to call deacon, presbyter and episcopate as "major orders".

²¹ It is an interesting fact that the Latin word *vir – man* is used in CIC 83 only twice and it is in the canon about the ministry of acolyte received by men and in canon 1024 about the candidates for the Sacrament of Holy orders. Cf.: Brtko, R.: *Mimoriadny vysluhovateľ svätého prijímania*, p. 51.

²² Ibid.: p. 49-52.

²³ Cf.: CIC 83 can. 910, §1.

²⁴ Cf.: CIC 83 can. 943.

²⁵ Cf.: Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments: *Immensae caritatis de communione sacramentali quibusdam in adiunctis faciliore reddenda*, 29 I 1973, in AAS 65, 1973, p. 264.

Papal council for credible interpretation of Codex of Canon law, 1. 6. 1998, in AAS 80, 1998, p. 1373.

Likewise one can exercise the role of extraordinary minister only if there is sufficient need for the ministry and that is when there are a great number of communicants who want to receive Holy Communion²⁶. Moreover, the delegated laypersons have to acquire adequate knowledge about the Eucharistic doctrine, and learn how to keep the discipline and veneration to the Sacrament that belongs to it²⁷.

Extraordinary ministers are supposed to be brought into the ministry by means of liturgical ceremony. In choosing *the right person* for fulfilling this service, the following order must be taken into consideration: lector, seminarian, religious brother and sister, catechist, faithful. This order can be changed according to judgments of a local ordinary²⁸. In oratories of religious communities the service of distribution of Communion can be given to the father superior and to the mother superior.

According to the book *Pokyny na riešenie niektorých otázok spolupráce laických veriacich zameranej na kňazskú službu*, it is necessary to avoid wrong habits and to remove present such as:²⁹

- the extraordinary minister receives Communion from his own hands as if he were a concelebrant

- in the renewal of priestly vows on Holy Thursday the practice of bestowing the authority of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion

- the habit of commonly using extraordinary ministers of Communion, while there is a lack of understanding what “a great number of faithful in the Church”.

These stated facts can help us to understand better the concept and the meaning of extraordinary minister of the Eucharist and his proper activity in a present renewed liturgy.

²⁶ Ibid.: Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments: *Immensae caritatis de communoine sacramentali quibusdam in adiunctis faciliore reddenda*, 29. 1. 1973, in AAS 65, 1973, p. 264.

Inaestimabile donum, in AAS 72, 1980, 3. 4. 1980, p. 336. *Pokyny na riešenie niektorých otázok spolupráce laických veriacich zameranej na kňazskú službu*, Rím 1997; Trnava 1998, p. 36-37.

²⁷ *Pokyny na riešenie niektorých otázok spolupráce laických veriacich zameranej na kňazskú službu*, Rím 1997; Trnava 1998, p. 37.

²⁸ Brtko, R.: *Mimoriadny vysluhovateľ svätého prijímania*, p. 49.

²⁹ *Pokyny na riešenie niektorých otázok spolupráce laických veriacich zameranej na kňazskú službu*, Rím 1997, p. 37.

Streszczenie

Pojęcie i osoba zwyczajnego i nadzwyczajnego szafarza Eucharystii

To studium trafnie wyróżnia tych, którzy sprawują posługę udzielania Komunii Świętej. Krótko przedstawiony jest historyczny rozwój posługi eucharystycznej i ustalenia dokumentów Kościoła odnośnie do statusu zwyczajnego i nadzwyczajnego szafarza Eucharystii. Autor czyni rozróżnienia:

- ze względu na święcenia kapłańskie: szafarz ze święceniami lub bez święceń;
- w porządku prawnym: zwyczajny szafarz, którego służba należy do autorytetu lokalnego kościoła, albo szafarz nadzwyczajny, którego posługa uzależniona jest od potrzeb i sprawowana jest na podstawie delegacji;
- w aspekcie dogmatycznym: pierwszym i najważniejszym szafarzem jest Chrystus, a drugim dopiero człowiek.