



THE
FOUR
MINOR
ORDERS
of the
ARMENIAN
CHURCH

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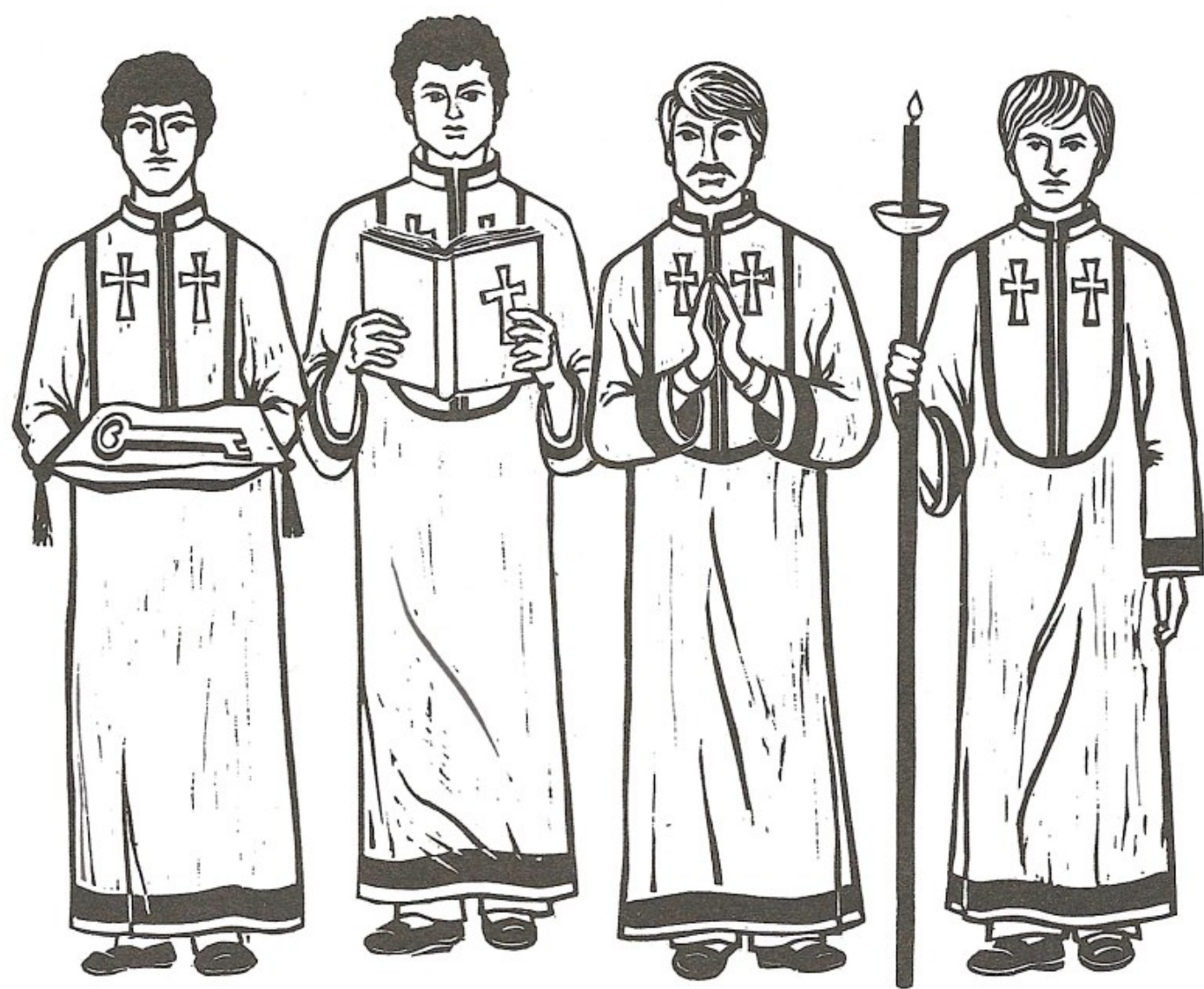
Commentary
Father Garabed Kochakian

Illustration
Carol Loshigian

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THE FOUR MINOR ORDERS OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

Before a young man enters the major holy orders in the Armenian Church he must have received the four minor ranks. One who receives these four minor ranks is known as a *Tbir* (clerk or chorister). Through the minor orders, the *Tbir* is conferred special privileges which are the foundation of his service to the church as a participant during the worship services. There are four distinct functions of a *Tbir*. The four orders or minor ranks are:

1. Doorkeeper (*Trnaban*)
2. Reader (*Untertsogh*)
3. Exorcist (*Yertm'netsootsich*) and
4. Candle Bearer (*Mohmagrogh* or *Chahagir*)

In receiving these ranks one becomes an Acolyte (*Arpanyag*).

Prior to receiving them, one must be examined by the bishop and prepared for the responsibilities of reading the Psalms and keeping the Holy Church clean. The candidate is blessed by the bishop who will then cut his hair in the form of a cross. This act of tonsuring, cutting of the hair, and the presentation of the book of Psalms is explained by the prayer which is read:

Take heed and endeavor with all your heart, that, that which you sing with your mouth and believe in your heart, and that which you believe in your heart you practice in your works, and with the cutting off of your hair may you be cut off from all the desires of the world, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then the bishop presents the broom saying:

Be ye henceforth authorized to sweep the house of the Lord and to cleanse His temple, and may the Lord cleanse you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

One is then ready to enter into service to God and His church, and assume the first of the four minor ranks which is Doorkeeper (*Trnaban*).

1. THE DOORKEEPER (*TRNABAN*)

The first order is conferred by the bishop at the door of the church. Those who shall receive the keys to the church kneel before the bishop. He presents them the keys of the church saying:

Let the remembrance that you have to answer to God for this office, and for everything that is locked up by these keys which I now give to you, influence all your actions. Be watchful and always pray when you open and close the door of the church.

As the choir now sings the hymn *Zoghormootiunus Patz Mez Der*, (Open to us, O Lord, the door of thy compassion), the procession of the bishop and the doorkeepers moves to the center of the church where the second order is granted, that of Reader (*Untertsogh*).

2. THE READER (*UNTERTSOGH*)

The deacon or sponsoring priest presents the candidates to the bishop who gives them the books of the Epistles and ritual prayers saying:

Take these books and be relaters of God's word, instructing yourselves in them. And if you fulfill your duties with pure mind and heart, you shall have your portion among the companies of the Saints and of those who have loved God. And, brethren, you have become Readers in the House of the Lord. This dignity implies duty which you are bound to fulfill. . .

Following the presentation of the Book of St. Paul's Epistles, the bishop gives them the Book of Rituals (*Mashdotz*) in which are written the prayers of exorcism read at baptism. The candidates receiving this book hear the bishop explain his duty as Exorcist and the procession moves to the center of the church.

3. THE EXORCIST (YERTM'NETSOOTSICH)

The bishop offers the prayer whereby he officially sanctions them to pray over those possessed and those made infirm by the power of evil. He says:

Give strength to these Thy servant(s) (N.) to perform the office of exorcist for which we now lay our hands upon them. . .causing them by means of grace which Thou doth abundantly bestow, to be truly givers of health, praying as the spiritual physicians of the Holy Church. . .

Now take this (book) and store up the words written there in your mind. I now give you the authority to place your hands upon those possessed with evil in their hearts and bodies, praying for them and also those who are about to be baptized that they renounce all evil . . .

From this point at the middle of the church, they all proceed with the bishop to the chancel where the fourth and final minor order is bestowed, the order of Candle Bearer (*Chahagir*).

4. THE CANDLE BEARER (CHAHAGIR)

The deacon or sponsoring priest presents the candidates to the bishop asking that they may "*light the candles and bear spiritual light in their own souls*". . .

Receiving the candidates the bishop prays saying:

. . . bless now these thy servants (N.) that they might light the candles in the Holy Church and present the wine, that is to be the Blood of Thy Son and bring the bread that is to become the Body of Our Lord.

. . . bless these Thy servants who are confirmed in the office of Acolytes. . .

At this time the bishop places in their hands a burning candle in a candlestick whereby he gives them the *"authority to light the candles in the Holy Church."* Next he gives them an empty cruet authorizing them to *"... pour the wine in the chalice which is to become the Blood of Christ."*

Here the ordination into the four minor orders in the Armenian Church is concluded. The symbolism of proceeding through the various stations leading to the Holy Altar teaches the *Tbir* that his life will now be one never-ending journey walking in the way of the Lord and bringing others along the same road toward God's Heavenly Kingdom.



ORDINATION OF PSALMISTS AND CLEANERS OF THE CHURCH

The Deacon brings the aspirants before the bishop, who makes the sign of the Cross upon them, and the ceremony begins.

DEACON:

Let us again make our supplications unto the Lord for peace.

PEOPLE:

Lord have mercy upon us.

DEACON:

With one accord let us make our supplications unto the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lover of man, for these His servants (N. N.) who have of their own accord come to be shaven of their hair; that He may bestow the Holy Spirit upon them, and that their eyes being opened they may be filled with all spiritual wisdom; so that they may pass through all earthly things, and attain the light of heavenly happiness.

Almighty Lord our God save and have mercy upon them.

BISHOP:

O our Lord, look down upon us who worship before Thee, and preserve these Thy servants (N. N.) and all those who have received this rank, and through Thy help confirm them in the same; so that they may serve in Thy Holy Church with all purity, and attain to the future reward. Through the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory, power and honour, now and for ever. Amen.

Peace † be to all.

Let us bow down before the Lord.

O Lord who alone art Holy and infinite; regard not our sins, but let Thy wrath pass away from these Thy servants (N. N.). Remove far from them all taint of sin, and cause to descend upon them Thy gifts, and keep them from all evil. For from the free life they walked hitherto, they have passed under Thy yoke and received Thy gifts.

Now as we give them the likeness of Thy crown, likewise do Thou also cause them to progress in all goodness so that they may be worthy to receive Thy crown in Thy heavenly home. And cause the Spirit of Wisdom to shine forth in their spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom belong glory, power and honour, now and ever. Amen.

The CHOIR recites psalm XVI.

ANTIPHON:

The Lord himself is the portion of mine inheritance.

Glory be to the Father, etc.

PSALM XXIV.

ANTIPHON:

The earth is the Lord's, etc.

Then the bishop cuts off the hair from the head of every one in the shape of a cross and says:

Take heed and endeavour with all your heart, that, that which you sing with your mouth you believe in your heart, and that which you believe in your heart you practice in your works; and with the cutting off of your hair may you be cut off from all the desires of the world, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The CHOIR sings the following hymn:

HYMN

Thou who by means of St. Gregory, has called us from far to the marriage feast of Thy Only Begotten, that we might drink of the Cup of Wisdom; through his prayers, O Lord, have mercy upon us.

Thou who through the intolerable sufferings of thy chosen (St. Gregory), didst turn those wanderers to the knowledge of the truth; through his prayers, O Lord, have mercy upon us.

Thou who through his confinement in that deep cave didst crush the head of the Dragon, and by his descent into the depths of the pit hast raised us to heaven; through his prayers, O Lord, have mercy upon us.

The CHOIR says psalm CXXXIV.

ANTIPHON:

One day in the Courts, is better, etc.

At the end, Glory be to the Father, etc.

The bishop then presents to them the broom, which they all touch, and says:

Be ye henceforth authorized to sweep the house of the Lord and to cleanse His temple. And may the Lord cleanse you from your besetting sins; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The CHOIR sings the following hymn:

HYMN

O Thou, Light of Light, who art begotten and comest forth; Thou who cometh in search of wandering sheep, even of our fallen nature, which by the Cross Thou didst lift upon Thy shoulders; cleanse us from all sin.

O Thou Saint of Saints, purity of all creatures: who hast purified Thy dwelling place by cleansing the world from sin; in which finding Thy image fallen and degraded, Thou didst restore it; renew us also who are grown old in sin.

With the prodigal son we cry to Thee, O Merciful Father: we have sinned against heaven and before Thee; O Thou the expiator of sins, come lovingly to us, embrace and kiss us, and cleanse us from our sins.

O Holy Mother of God, thou who art the source of that life which springs from Eden, by means of whom the thirst of this earth has been quenched by the wisdom of the Spirit; pray that He may grant us floods of tears, to wash away our sins.

While the CHOIR sings this hymn, the BISHOP clothes the aspirants in the coat of a Clerk, and they are placed under the command of the Protodeacon.



• THE FIRST ORDER •

ORDINATION of the DOORKEEPER

The BISHOP and the clergy being arrayed in the ecclesiastical vestments, according to their rank, all proceed to the church; and the bishop seating himself on his throne, the aspirants kneel down before him, when the ceremony begins.

DEACON:

Let us again make our supplications unto the Lord for peace.

PEOPLE:

Lord have mercy upon us.

DEACON:

Let us with all our heart pray to our Father the Lord Almighty for these His servants (N. N.), who are called to the office of Doorkeeper. In order that He who has granted them to be vested in the dress of a clerk, and to be under the command of the Protodeacon, may also grant them strength to persevere rightly in their order by day and by night, in the morning, in the evening and at noonday; and ever bear in remembrance the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who came and reigns for ever and ever. May He save and have mercy upon them.

BISHOP:

Thou Lord God, Holy Father, all-powerful, keep these Thy servants (N. N.) with all Thy Saints, steadfast in the performance of the duties, with which they were entrusted, in this holy Church; and grant that in the end they may, in Thy heavenly kingdom receive the reward of faithfulness in their office. And to Thee belongeth glory, power, and honour, now and for ever. Amen.

The BISHOP then places the key of the church in their hands and says:

Let the remembrance that you have to answer to God for this office, and for everything that is locked up by these keys which I now give to you, pervade and influence all your actions. Be watchful and always pray when you open or close the doors of the church.

And then he says to the Deacon:

Instruct them in the duties they have to perform in the home of God.

And the Deacon conducts the newly ordained Doorkeepers to the principal door of the church, and instructs them how to unfasten and how to fasten the lock of the door. Meanwhile the Choir sings the following hymn.

HYMN

Open, O Lord, to us the door of Thy compassion, and make us worthy of Thy bright dwelling with Thy Saints.

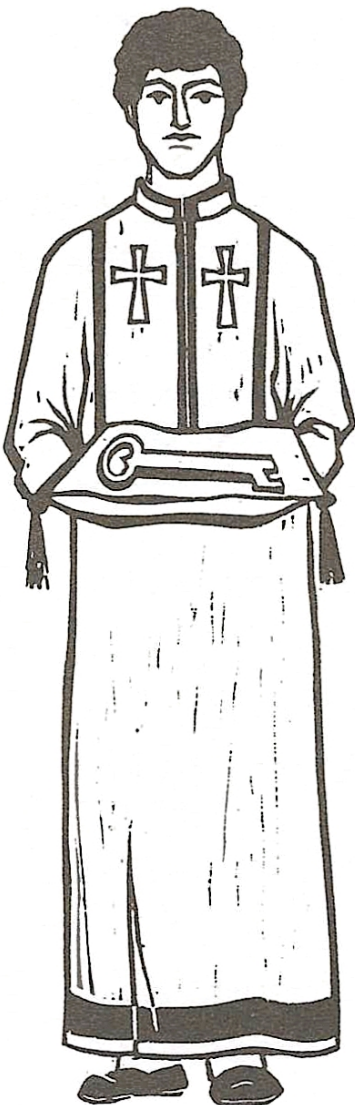
Receive us also, Saviour, in Thy prepared mansions for Thy Saints, unto the adoption in the book of life.

When Thou sittest in judgment, awful judge, have mercy upon Thy creatures, through the intercession and prayers of the holy Martyrs.

The CHOIR recites psalm CXVIII.

ANTIPHON:

O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is, etc.



• THE SECOND ORDER •

THE READER

During the Divine Liturgy, just before the Prophecy, the BISHOP and sacred MINISTERS descend into the center of the church, and the DEACON presents the clerks to the BISHOP and says:

Let us again make our supplications unto the Lord for peace.

PEOPLE:

Lord have mercy upon us.

DEACON:

Let us pray unto God the Father of all, for these his servants (N. N.) who are called unto the office of Reader. That he will instruct them and manifest to them his laws, and strengthen them by his gifts to reveal them by reading to all those who come into the Church. And that may he grant them to fulfill with acts that which they read, for the glory of His holy name.

Almighty Lord our God, save and have mercy upon us.

BISHOP:

Thou Lord and Sovereign, who hast power for ever upon the earth. Pour down Thy strength upon these thy servants (N. N.) who have been called to the office of Reader. Grant them to be always watchful in the fulfillment of Thy Laws, to meditate constantly on the love of Thy commandments, and to live watchfully in the office which is conferred upon them; to preach Thy word in the Holy Church, and fulfill it with holy deeds and a pure heart; to advise Thy people and to guide Thy Holy Church to hear Thy commandments. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with Thee Father, and to Thy Holy Spirit belongeth glory, power, and honour, now and for ever. Amen

The BISHOP then delivers into their hands the Book of the Epistles, saying:

Take these Books and be relaters of God's word instructing yourselves in them. And if you fulfill your duties with pure mind and heart, you shall have your portion among the companies of the Saints and of those who have loved God. And, brethren, you have become Readers in the House of the Lord. This dignity implies duties which you are bound to fulfill. And may God, who is liberal, grant to you the gifts of his mercy; through our Lord Jesus Christ his Son, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

The CHOIR sings the following hymn:

HYMN

Thou Lord who upon Thy holy apostles didst shower down from heaven Thy full clemency; through their prayers have mercy upon us.

Thou who by their means didst spread the gifts of Thy Holy Spirit throughout all the world; through their prayers have mercy upon us.

Thou who through them didst illuminate Thy Church with the font of baptism; through their prayers have mercy upon us.



• THE THIRD ORDER •

THE EXORCIST

The PROTODEACON presents the clerks to the Bishop and says:

Let us again make our supplications unto the Lord for peace; Lord save and have mercy upon us.

PEOPLE:

Lord have mercy upon us.

DEACON:

Beloved brethren, let us with all our hearts offer our supplications unto God, the Lover of man, even to the Father almighty, that He may give wisdom unto these his servants (N. N.) for the office of Exorcist. That through the Holy Spirit they may be able to drive away evil spirits from the bodies and souls of men; and by means of exorcism cause them to renounce evil. Through the grace of his Only Begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, may He save and have mercy upon them.

BISHOP:

Thou Lord All-Holy Father and Great God, give strength to these Thy servants (N. N.) to perform the office of exorcists, for which we now lay our hands upon them. So that they may have power by word of mouth to expel all impure and unclean spirits, insisting by force on their leaving and expelling them from the bodies and souls of men. Cause them by means of the grace which Thou dost abundantly bestow, to be verily givers of health, and to be the physicians of Thy holy Church. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom with Thee Father and to the Holy Spirit, be honour, power and glory now and ever. Amen.

The BISHOP now presents to them the Book of the Ritual in which is transcribed the exorcisms used at holy baptism, and each of them having touched it in turn, he says:

Take this and store up the words written there in your minds. I now give you the authority to place your hands upon the possessed, and cause those about to be baptised to renounce the Evil One. So that they may thankfully offer praise to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever. Amen.

The CHOIR now sings the following hymn:

HYMN

Holy Trinity ever glorified in the glory of thy greatness, make worthy of the glory of Thy heavenly inheritance, those who have been regenerated through the holy Font.

Thou in whom the blood of martyrs rejoiceth; through their prayers, make worthy of the glory of Thy heavenly inheritance, those who were regenerated through the holy Font.

We praise Thee in Thy holiness. Through the prayers of the holy Mother of God, make worthy of the glory of Thy heavenly inheritance those who have been regenerated at the holy Font.

Through the sign of thy Cross, drive far away from us, O Lord, the adversary and the Evil One and do not deliver Thine inheritance unto corruption.



• THE FOURTH ORDER •

THE CANDLE BEARER

The Protodeacon presents the clerks to the Bishop and says:

Let us again make our supplications unto the Lord for peace. Save Lord and have mercy upon us.

PEOPLE:

Lord have mercy upon us.

DEACON:

Beloved brethren, let us make our supplications unto the All-powerful Father, that He may bestow upon these his servants (N. N.), through the laying on of hands, the gift of the fourth order, to light the candles and so to bear spiritual light in their souls, through the help of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Save, O Lord, and have mercy upon them.

BISHOP:

Holy Lord, Almighty Father and Everlasting God, who didst send down upon the earth Thy Only-Begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Who sent as messengers his disciples and did call them the light of the world, who have spread light throughout all the earth and have driven away evil spirits, even the destroyer of men. Thou, Who was pleased that Thy Son should enter into glory through the Cross and Passion. Thou Who didst will that His Blood should flow from His side, by means of which man might be saved. Thou O Lord, who didst ordain all these, bless now these Thy servants (N. N.) for the office of Acolytes, that they may light the candles in the Holy Church, and present the wine, that is to be the Blood of Thy Son, in the Chalice, and bring the bread, that is to become the Body of our Lord, to the holy altar.

O Lord God, enlighten the minds and souls of these Acolytes, with the rays of Thy Holy Spirit, that they may serve faithfully in Thy Holy Church. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom, with Thee O Father and to the Holy Spirit belongeth glory, power and honour, now and forever. Amen.

Peace † be to all.

Let us bow down before the Lord.

O Almighty God, Source of light and Giver of all good things. Thou who through Christ Thy Son didst enlighten the world, and by means of the mystery of His passion didst redeem it; bless these Thy servants (N. N.) who by the laying on of hands are confirmed in the office of Acolytes. We pray Thee of Thy bounty, ever preserve their souls and minds in Thy holy fear, and illuminate them with the light of Thy wisdom. That by means of Thy assistance they may remain ever steadfast in this office, and may attain to the life that passeth not away. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with Thee O Father and to the Holy Spirit belongeth glory, power and honour, now and forever.

The BISHOP then takes a candlestick with a candle in it and all place their hands on it while he says:

Take this candlestick and candle, and with it receive authority to light the candles and the lamps in the Holy Church.

In the same way he delivers into their hands an empty flagon, and says:

Take this flagon, in order to pour the wine in the chalice for the Blood of Christ. In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The CHOIR then sings this hymn:

HYMN

Thou through the light of Thy Divinity, O Christ, hast enlightened the holy Church; ever keep her steadfast.

Today Holy Jerusalem, with all the faithful, celebrates the feast of the dedication of the Holy Church; ever keep her steadfast.

By the faith the gates of the new Zion have been opened, to welcome Thee the immortal bridegroom into the Nuptial chamber; and she there distributes Thy Body and thy Blood; ever keep her steadfast.

The Bishop now continues the Liturgy to the end.

Only clerks of the four preceding orders are permitted to marry.

Services translated by The Reverend James Issaverdenz, Venice

