

Q: I see that there are albs now being offered that have a cross with the deacon stole on it embroidered on the front of the alb. Is it OK to wear such an alb when vesting?

A: When one looks through the religious catalogues or visits the religious goods stores, it is clear that there are many different styles of vestments offered. Personal tastes vary on what appeals to the person vesting. Every now and then a new style is offered for purchase. When a deacon is vested in alb, stole and dalmatic, it is not likely that the symbol that you mention would be seen anyway because the dalmatic would cover it.

However, often the deacon is vested only in an alb and stole. In that case, the embroidered cross with the deacon stole on it would be visible on the alb, generally next to the stole as it crosses the chest. Aside from personal tastes on the issue, it is worth considering whether it is necessary or even desirable to have such a symbol added on the alb. It is a symbol on a symbol.

The deacon is himself the symbol when he is vested in alb and stole. To place another symbol on the alb that mimics the symbol of the deacon himself in his stole is redundant and can weaken the primary symbolism of the deacon's alb and stole rather than enhancing it. This can be complicated even further by the fact that many stoles have symbols embroidered on them so the symbol on the alb and any symbols on the stole can be competing with each other visually. Simplicity in the case of the alb may be the better option so that any markings on the stole and the symbol of the deacon wearing his stole stand out as the focal points.