

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Emerging Questions about the Diaconate

Phyllis Zagano

FOREWORD BY
William T. Ditewig



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For Bill Ditewig

FOREWORD

Long before the dramatic ecclesial event known as the Second Vatican Council, the landscape of ministry within the Catholic Church, including ordained and official ministries, was in a state of considerable tension, challenge, and opportunity. The emergence of new nation-states—along with the concomitant restructuring of the political and social orders resulting from the Enlightenment, political and economic revolutions, and massive demographic shifts due to tidal waves of emigration and immigration—followed by fifty years of world wars, worldwide economic collapse, the rise of totalitarian regimes, the Shoah, and the beginning of the nuclear age and cold war: all of these things and more demanded that all Christians, and Catholics in particular, examine who we are and how we relate to the explosively complex world in which we live. In short, how do we continue to serve and preach the Good News of Jesus the Christ effectively in a world more in need of it than ever?

This was the central question facing the 2,640 bishops who assembled under the leadership of Pope John XXIII on October 11, 1962, to begin the Second Vatican Council. The bishops carried with them their own insights, experiences, cultures, and battle scars into the Council aula, and although it took them some time to mature in their own understanding of the task at hand, they realized that what they were

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doing was trying to build on the solid foundation of Tradition a new ecclesial reality, one that would work to transform the world into a place in which such tragedies and cruelty could no longer take place, a world truly transformed in the light of Christ through the presence and action of the Spirit.


The bishops began to speak of a “new way of thinking” (*novus mentis habitus*), and this expression was repeated several times by popes Paul VI and John Paul II. This new way of thinking was to inform the Church’s self-vision and her mission. This new way of thinking was to focus on service, not power. Furthermore, Paul VI, in his closing address to the Council on December 7, 1965, reminded the Fathers: “We stress that the teaching of the Council is channeled in one direction, the service of humankind, of every condition, in every weakness and need. The Church has declared herself a servant of humanity...[and] the idea of service has been central.”¹ And it was this same pope who connected the dots about this ecclesial service when he enacted the Council’s decision to renew a permanent diaconate in the Latin Church, and wrote that this renewed diaconate is a “driving force for the Church’s *diakonia* and a sacrament of the Lord Christ himself, who ‘came not to be served but to serve.’”² John Paul II would echo this insight when he observed that “the service of the deacon is the Church’s service sacramentalized.”³

The nature and role of the renewed diaconate had been in a state of constant examination before the Council began, but it took on particular focus after the Council and Pope Paul VI’s decisions on the matter. Suddenly there was again a major order of ordained ministry that did not find its sacramental end in eventual ordination to the presbyterate, an almost explosive shift of ministerial paradigm, in which




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for more than a millennium all ordinations to minor and major orders pointed inexorably to the presbyterate. Now, not only could a candidate (male) be ordained to the diaconate without proceeding to the presbyterate, but that candidate could also be either celibate or married.



The question of ordaining women was raised by a number of bishops prior to the Council, and in the research done on the diaconate prior to the Council, considerable attention had been given to the question of the possibility and desirability of doing so. Although ultimately this question was not addressed during the Council, the theology of the diaconate itself was addressed, with Cardinal Suenens of Belgium making a number of important points. First, he pointed to history, citing the authority of Scripture, the apostolic Fathers, constant tradition, and the liturgical books of East and West, all of which testify to the diaconate. Second, he spoke of the many charisms given to the Church in addition to the priesthood, charisms that were used to provide direct service to the bishop, especially in the care of the poor and the nurturing of the community. He remarked that even though many of these tasks could be given to laypersons, this did not mean that the diaconate was not needed. According to Suenens, these tasks should be given only to persons (ordained or not) who have the necessary charisms, and the Church herself has a right to the benefit of all the graces given to her by God, and one of those graces is the diaconate. In other words, ordination as a deacon is about the giftedness of the Church, not merely a “transfer of power” to a particular individual.⁴



I have offered this background as a bridge to the invaluable work of Phyllis Zagano. As the Church continues to examine the nature and role of the diaconate, we realize very clearly that the diaconate—as an order—is the most

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malleable and adaptable to the needs of the Church and the world. The diaconate is related to, but distinct from, the presbyterate, and this fact needs to be explored more systematically. For more than a millennium, the diaconate was viewed as a partial and transitory participation in the priesthood; now we realize that the diaconate stands on its own and does not identify itself only in reference to the priesthood. This frees our reflection from the priesthood itself and opens up additional channels of dialogue and research. Challenged by the Council to a “new way of thinking” and constantly, as *Gaudium et Spes* says, to “read the signs of the times in light of the Gospel,” the Church must reflect critically on her own giftedness in addressing these signs of the times in new and creative ways. The gifts of women as full partners in the life of the Church need to be nurtured and appreciated. Dr. Zagano’s work documents, inspires, and challenges our understanding of ministry itself. If we are called to be a Servant Church (as proclaimed by Paul VI), then we must follow Cardinal Suenens’ example and ask ourselves, Who is already ministering in a diaconal way in the Church? Suenens would say that we should ordain those people who are already performing diaconal service in the Church, and no one could deny that women throughout our history have been the servant-leaders of the Church. Dr. Zagano picks up on these themes and offers us a framework from which to re-vision the ecclesial role of women.

In these seminal articles assembled together for the first time, Dr. Zagano reviews the parameters of this new vision: What are the lessons we can draw from history, from ecumenical dialogues, from theology and the liturgy? Anyone interested in the future of ministry in the Church emerging in the twenty-first century needs to wrestle with these issues. Just as the bishops of the Second Vatican



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Council brought their own experiences of tragedy, war, and devastation into the aula for debate and discussion to craft a new way of responding to the world, so too must we now bring to the table our own challenges, including, for example, ethnic cleansing, the reality of clerical abuse, the loss of credibility in ecclesial leadership, the opportunities of technology and globalization, and so many more. Through the landmark work of scholars such as Phyllis Zagano, we can perhaps craft new wineskins to carry the new wine of salvation to future generations. The question before us is the same as that which faced the bishops at Vatican II: How do we continue to serve and preach the Good News of Jesus the Christ effectively in a world more in need of it than ever?

William T. Ditewig
Diocese of Monterey, California





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To whom am I indebted? As I turn this question over and over, a parade of friends, acquaintances, relatives, and librarians (always, the librarians) crosses before me in my mind. To thank them all is not possible, but in justice I can attempt to name most of those who helped with the creation of this book as it moved from invited lectures and talks, to refereed academic articles, to the present manuscript prepared during my term as visiting professor of theology and religion at Saint Leo University, Florida.

Chapter 1, “Women and the Church: Unfinished Business of Vatican II,” began as a combination of lectures presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America in Saint Louis, to which I was invited by William Clark, SJ, and at Saint Mary’s College, South Bend, Indiana, at the invitation of Kathleen Dolphin, PBVM. It was later published by *Horizons* (Villanova University), the Journal of the College Theology Society, through the good offices of its editor, Anthony J. Godzeiba, and of Irene C. Noble, the editorial assistant of the journal.

Chapter 2, “Catholic Women’s Ordination: The Ecumenical Implications of Women Deacons in the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Orthodox Church of Greece, and Union of Utrecht Old Catholic Churches,” originally appeared in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (Temple University), through the

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offices of Nancy E. Krody, managing editor, and was later presented as corrected at the National Workshop on Christian Unity/Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers meeting, in Tampa, Florida.

Chapter 3, “The Question of Governance and Ministry for Women,” grew from talks given at Regis University, Denver, Colorado, at the invitation of Thomas Leininger, and at the annual meeting of Voice of the Faithful of Long Island in 2006, before it appeared in *Theological Studies* (Marquette University), with the careful editing of David G. Schultenover, SJ.

The papers as originally published have been edited and modified to conform with Paulist Press’s house style.

Throughout the years of research and preparation of these papers and, now, book, I have depended upon the generosity of many colleagues across the nation, whose enthusiastic response to my ideas about the restoration of the female diaconate in the Catholic Church has both cheered me and helped light my path. To each and every person who assisted me as I checked and rechecked footnotes and facts, I send notice of my large debt of gratitude. As the circle of colleagues spreads farther from Hofstra University and my home Diocese of Rockville Centre, I fear I risk forgetting or omitting one or another. But, to the librarians and library staff of Hofstra University; to Sheila Browne, RSM, director, Office of Worship, and Msgr. Donald Beckmann, director, Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the Diocese of Rockville Centre; to Fr. Krikor Maksoudian, the Armenian Church, Diocese of America; to Rev. John E. Fanning, JCD; to Terrence W. Tilley, Fordham University; to Maureen Tilley, Fordham University; to Miriam Therese Winter, MMS, Hartford Seminary; to Ron Roberson, CSP, assistant director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

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Finally, with heartfelt thanks, both for his invitation to come to Saint Leo for a semester, and for his encouragement and assistance in my work on the diaconate, I am delighted to have the opportunity to dedicate a book—this book—to Deacon William T. Ditewig, and to wish him fair winds and following seas in all his endeavors.

*April 29, 2010
Saint Leo University, Florida*





CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN AND THE CHURCH

Unfinished Business of Vatican II

The bright hope that shone in the Catholic Church as the Second Vatican Council came to a close now wears almost a fifty-year tarnish, as the facts of the unfinished business relating to women are increasingly recognized. There was hope, genuine hope, that women would become equal partners in the lives and ministries of the ordained, even that they would be restored to the dignity of office and order, as the ebullience of the late 1960s spilled into Saint Peter's Square. The closing words of Vatican II regarding women seemed promising:

The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling.¹

In those waning days of 1965, hope lit the future. What would it bring? Would women become the legitimate wives of priests in the Latin Church? Would women be ordained

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to the diaconate, and to the priesthood? Would women have real input in the formation of doctrine?

The excitement has faded, and women are still on the outside looking in wherever the power and authority of governance and jurisdiction are involved. The neuralgic issues of sex and gender as they have been considered by the Catholic Church over the past fifty years seem no closer to any hierarchically approved solution, but Catholic women have made their own determinations about each. Women's voices continue to be raised, both organizationally and individually. Catholic organizations as diverse as Voice of the Faithful (VOTF), the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), and Call to Action (CTA) press women-related questions to the fore.² Individually, women belong to the growing cadre of Catholic lay ministers and theologians, and by some estimates there are over 24,000 women lay ministers in the United States alone.³

The presence and force of women in theology and ministry press forward three interrelated questions about women and the Church: (1) married clergy, especially a married presbyterate; (2) women's ordination, especially women deacons; and (3) lay participation in the power and authority of governance and jurisdiction. Each flows from the unfulfilled hopes of Vatican II, stanching as they are by the determined resistance of Catholic hierarchy to either share power or to enlarge the classes of persons who hold the power and authority of governance and jurisdiction.

Two of these questions—married clergy (priests and deacons) and lay involvement in governance and jurisdiction—reflect upon each other. Both married clergy and a greater role for the laity—that is, a sharing in power and authority—might provide the leaven for the Catholic hierarchy to better understand the ways in which women's

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responses to the needs and desires of the whole Church could be expanded within the current structures.

MARRIED CLERGY

The largest cadre of married clergy in the Church comprises the married men among the more than 30,000 deacons worldwide.⁴ The next largest cadre comprises married Eastern Catholic priests.⁵ The smallest cadre by far comprises married Roman Catholic priests in union with Rome, nearly all converts from other Christian denominations or churches.

While the Second Vatican Council did not directly discuss the restoration of the tradition of ordaining married men to priesthood in the West, a married priesthood was a topic of several interventions during the Twenty-first Synod of Catholic Bishops on the Eucharist in 2005.⁶ Today, hundreds of resigned priests remain out of official ministry, while hundreds of other qualified men do not choose presbyteral life in the Latin Church, specifically because of the legal requirement of celibacy. Many organizations, including the Corps of Reserved Priests United for Service (CORPUS), Celibacy is the Issue Ministries (CITI), and Rent-a-Priest,⁷ form loci for discussion and extra-ecclesial ministry by the approximately 25,000 resigned priests in the United States. The International Federation of Married Catholic Priests does much the same for the approximately 120,000 resigned priests worldwide. Married Priests Now! is headed by former Zambian Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo (b. 1930), who married a Korean acupuncturist in a Unification Church ceremony led by Sun Myung Moon in 2001. Milingo briefly reconciled with the Vatican, but then slipped out of Rome in

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June 2006 with former Washington, DC, priest George Augustus Stallings, Jr., patriarch and founder of the African American Catholic Congregation. Milingo has ordained several married men as priests, and ordained four men as bishops in the United States in September 2006.

Other organizations, such as FutureChurch⁸ in the United States and Catholic Women's Ordination in the United Kingdom, mount campaigns and provide information in support of a married priesthood, women deacons, and women priests, much as www.womenpriests.org does on an international level.

Despite Rome's acceptance of convert married clergy (mostly former Episcopalians in the United States), an increasing restiveness among Eastern Catholics (whose bishops in North America had Western custom imposed upon them in 1929, but who are quietly ignoring that agreement),⁹ and wider calls from Roman Catholic presbyterates (and some bishops) to allow a married priesthood, there is little official response or movement to meet their requests. The 2005 Synod on the Eucharist deflected and countered multiple calls both inside and outside the Synod for genuine discussion on the matter, although some pointed statements argued on behalf of the ordination of married men as priests.

In addition to the approximately three hundred resigned married priests listed with CITI Ministries who perform marriage ceremonies under civil authority, there are multiple "Catholic" communions in the United States whose ministers also baptize, celebrate Eucharist, and make themselves known in more or less public ways as Catholic priests.¹⁰ The fact that these bodies claim increasing validity through a number of ways, not the least of which is public acceptance of their various ministries and ministerial actions, presents a problem of authority for Catholic hier-

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archs, who have depended on the implicit obedience of even laicized priests, whose rescripts of laicization include their exclusion from any public ministry in the Church.

Some rescripts granting “reduction to the lay state” retain the requirement of celibacy. Laicized bishops in particular are not permitted to marry. (Former priests are permitted, even required, to provide absolution in emergency situations.) A number of functioning former Catholic priests are in a canonical quagmire. Without explicit permission to marry they cannot validly contract a Catholic marriage. Yet they are married. They do not have faculties from a Catholic bishop, but the sacraments they perform are valid. As with CITI Ministries, some meet civil state and local requirements as marriage ministers, and/or gain legitimacy by affiliation with one of the many Catholic communions that trace their apostolic lineage through Union of Utrecht Catholic bishops.

The details of what Rome considers necessary for a Church to be in communion with the Catholic Church (essentially, acceptance of papal authority and a valid provenance of orders) escape many people. From these requirements flow the restrictions on alternative clergy. Increasingly, however, ordinary Catholics do not accept the multiple restrictions on priesthood, and this is reflected in their willingness to ignore canon law in the name of ministry.¹¹ Catholics are willing to accept married priests, even if the provenance of their orders or the legitimacy of their status can be challenged by the diocesan bishop, and many actually do not care whether or not the traditional restrictions apply. So the impetus toward a wider married priesthood, begun with the conversion of married ministers from other traditions and enhanced by the restoration of Eastern Catholic traditions in the United States, melds into a situation whereby it appears that individual Catholics are uncon-

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cerned whether Church authority—in the person of the diocesan bishop—has anything to do or say about the ministry at hand. This is not in the least a leap of logic. It reflects both a growing ignorance of Catholics for whom Catholicism is a cultural base, but not an organized system of belief, and a disregard for the authority of an often-discredited and disrespected episcopacy.¹²

LAY INVOLVEMENT

The official resistance to a wider married priesthood in the Catholic Church underscores the Church's official stance relative to the status of women, all of whom are lay members of the Church. Women's input to doctrine and policy is severely limited by several factors, not the least of which is refusal to allow them into the clerical state. The more serious problem, however, remains to be an apparent psychosexual dysfunction on the part of too many Catholic clergy (especially those in positions of authority) on the matter of women. The automatic negative response to the writings of some women theologians, even and especially those whose writings are clearly within dogmatic and doctrinal limits, bespeaks a serious—and contagious—condition in the Church, which might or might not begin to be cured by more numerous and more visible married priests.¹³

But clericalism extends to and is extended by all laymen and laywomen who have allowed it to co-opt them and their thought. There are laypersons serving in advisory capacities at every level of Church governance, and there are even laypersons who hold office (albeit with limited powers) in diocesan structures. Whether as volunteers or as lay employees, insofar as laymen and laywomen “know their