

# JUST CATHOLIC

The Future is Now

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# PHYLLIS ZAGANO





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## **ENDORSEMENTS FOR JUST CATHOLIC**

Paul was sure the Thessalonians were loved and chosen by God because the Good News was brought to them 'not only as words, but as power and as the Holy Spirit and as utter conviction' (1 Thess 1:5). Phyllis Zagano gives us eight years of her columns which are not only words. Her passion for justice is powerful and universal; in a word it is Catholic. Her measured calls for discernment and synodality evoke the Holy Spirit. Her grounded and informed attention to injustice at the borders of life and at national borders reflects her lived experience as a woman on the borders of a clericalised church. Her utter conviction in *Just Catholic* is infectious. She leads by example. Loved and chosen by God, she shows us the way to a more Catholic future especially for those women "whose dignity is disregarded, whose intelligence is disbelieved, and whose very humanity is discounted".

Fr Frank Brennan SJ, Rector,
 Newman College, University of Melbourne

Just Catholic is about Gospel justice, a must-read for every faith-filled Catholic who yearns for ecclesial reform. With characteristic courage, Phyllis Zagano addresses the innumerable and confronting issues that many in the Church fear to raise. In multiple ways, she spreads the news that "Christ is real and lives in each of us".

Veronica Lawson RSM PhD
 Author of The Blessing of Mercy:

 Bible Perspectives and Ecological Challenges

If you are still unconvinced about the case for ordaining women deacons and giving women "a place at the table" where Church decisions are made, then you should read this book.

– Justin Taylor, SM Emeritus Professor. École Biblique. Jerusalem In this aptly-named collection *Just Catholic: The Future is Now*, Dr Phyllis Zagano pulls no punches, yet charitably and intelligently argues for a more "just" church. Interweaving positive concepts and ideas while speaking truth to power about the areas where we fall short, Zagano has expertly assembled her columns written over an 8-year period of change. Replete with clever anecdotes, accurate historical tidbits, and a respectful discourse on difficult issues, this book was hard to put down.

Beth Doherty
 Author of All the Beautiful Things: Finding Truth, Beauty and Goodness
 in a Fractured Church, ATF Press, 2020

For decades, Phyllis Zagano has been making "good trouble", asking unsettling questions of the Church, societal trends, politics, and culture. Whether it be clericalism or the justice of nutrition, her analyses are incisive and elucidating. This collection of essays covers an astounding range of topics with sharp insight and sound judgment. Highly recommended.

- Dr Neil Ormerod, Professor, Sydney College of Divinity

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# **PREFACE**

hen I did graduate studies in feminist theology in the mid-1980s, some people were deeply suspicious. So much so, I was warned by a woman theologian not to choose a thesis topic that was critical of feminist theologians. Things have changed. I took the advice at the time and wrote "Beloved daughters': 100 years of Papal teaching about women." When telling a feminist friend of mine about my research she said, "Well that'll be a slim volume of bad news." It was slim enough but it wasn't all bad, just most of it.

In 1970, Paul VI wrote: "Wherever a group of people are not free, no one is free." Feminist issues, therefore, are not women's issues, in the same way that black issues are not only for black people, or the ecological threat is only for greenies. Gender, race, sexuality, the environment, and more besides, are human issues about justice and liberation for all of us in the Church and in broader society.

That's why *Just Catholic: The Future is Now* is an important and engaging volume that women and men should read.

Prophets, biblical or otherwise, speak the truth to power, proclaim a just order marked by peace and security, and call for the care of the poor and the defense of the outcast. They advocate for the institutionally marginalized people of their time.

Phyllis is a modern-day prophet, and, like prophets of old, she tells us uncomfortable truths that we may not prefer to hear, but that we need to confront nonetheless.

Internationally acclaimed for her work on the diaconate and her advocacy for restoring women into that Order, these essays, spanning 2013-2021, attend to the misogyny in religion in all guises, while also ranging more broadly over topics including

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violence, politics in the USA, clericalism, immigration, bullying, social media, synods, film, liturgy, ministry, poverty and life issues. *Just Catholic* charts the seamless garment in our best Catholic moral philosophy.

If all this sounds a bit heavy, it's not. Phyllis, a very skilful writer, deploys the brevity only an accomplished communicator and scholar can deploy and her prose is fresh and telling. Just when you would assume you might know where she might land on an issue, there are surprises aplenty ahead.

I could not put this book down, not only because of the importance of Phyllis's insights and the persuasion of her arguments, but also out of reverence for her commitment to a vision for a faith that does justice, and a hope that sees her remain a Catholic when others have walked away. She loves and challenges the Church, the USA, and our world, as only a committed insider can.

Prophets and martyrs are often linked. The first people honoured as saints by the earliest Christians were the martyrs. The word "martyr" comes from the word "witness". In fact, All Saints' Day has its roots in the early Church's Martyrs' Day, as attested to by a hymn written in 359 by St Ephrem. The name was changed to All Saints' Day in the seventh century.

Over the millennia, both prophets and martyrs have been persecuted, sidelined, and silenced because they threatened the political, social, and religious leaders of their time and place. These essays show a prophet at work: passionate, dogged, and not going anywhere because of what's at stake – liberty of spirit, thirst for justice, and witness to truth.

Here is a taste of what is to come, which will only be richer when read in context:

"You have to wonder, are women involved in a toxic relationship with the Church?"

### **PREFACE**

"... the small pinpricks of (exclusive) language collect until the entire conversation dies, and people who may listen no longer hear what is said."

"There is a long continuum from humiliation to rape. One may not lead to the other, but they are connected."

"Courage. Maybe that's what the Church needs."

"The added benefit to restoring married priests and women deacons, of course, would be to demonstrate belief that women do not defile the sacred and that women can indeed image Christ. But even that may not be enough."

"Catholicism survives where it adapts to and is adopted by the local culture. Local languages and customs are the key. Respect for women must be unlocked."

"We can only hope for today. Tomorrow may be too late."

"The schism to worry about is the one where all the women leave the Church."

You can tell that Phyllis Zagano is not the typical prophet, and that's why I find her voice, and this collection of essays, inspirational, urgent, and rightly unsettling.

- Richard Leonard SJ author of Where the Hell is God? (Paulist) and The Law of Love: Modern Words for Ancient Wisdom (Paulist) June 19, 2021, Melbourne



In *Just Catholic: The Future is Now*, Phyllis Zagano, the world's expert on women in the diaconate, speaks to the heart of the Church about the ways of the Gospel in today's world. Her prophetic insights to new-old questions bring a fresh perspective for all Christians to consider and act on.

"Over the millennia, both prophets and martyrs have been persecuted, sidelined, and silenced because they threatened the political, social, and religious leaders of their time and place. These essays show a prophet at work: passionate, dogged, and not going anywhere because of what's at stake: liberty of spirit, thirst for justice, and witness to truth....You can tell that Phyllis Zagano is not the typical prophet, and that's why I find her voice, and this collection of essays, inspirational, urgent, and rightly unsettling."

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