

## **Church's teaching on ordination of women**

### ***Didascalia Apostolorum* 3rd century ch. XVI**

[iii. 12] Wherefore, O bishop, appoint thee workers of righteousness as helpers who may cooperate with thee unto salvation. Those that please thee out of all the people thou shalt choose and appoint as deacons: a man for the performance of the most things that are required, but a woman for the ministry of women. For there are houses whither thou canst not send a deacon to the women, on account of the heathen, but mayest send a deaconess. Also, because in many other matters the office of a woman deacon is required. In the first place, when women go down into the water, those who go down into the water ought to be anointed by a deaconess with the oil of anointing; and where there is no woman at hand, and especially no deaconess, he who baptises must of necessity anoint her who is being baptised. As of old the priests and kings were anointed in Israel, do thou in like manner, with the imposition of hand, anoint the head of those who receive baptism, whether of men or of women; and afterwards -- whether thou thyself baptise, or thou command the deacons or presbyters to baptise -- let a woman deacon, as we have already said, anoint the women. But let a man pronounce over them the invocation of the divine Names in the water. And when she who is being baptised has come up from the water, let the deaconess receive her, and teach and instruct her how the seal of baptism ought to be (kept) unbroken in purity and holiness. For this cause we say that the ministry of a woman deacon is especially needful and important.

And thou also hast need of the ministry of a deaconess for many things; for a deaconess is required to go into the houses of the heathen where there are believing women, and to visit those who are sick, and to minister to them in that of which they have need, and to bathe those who have begun to recover from sickness.

But let a woman rather be devoted to the ministry of women, and a male deacon to the ministry of men.

### **Constotutiones Apostolorum 380AD**

#### Chapter XV

For which reason, Bishop, do thou ordain thy fellow-workers, the labourers for life and for righteousness, such Deacons as are pleasing to God, such as thou proves to be worth among all the people, and such as shall be ready for the necessities of their ministration.

Ordain also a Deaconess, who is faithful and holy, for the ministrations to the women. For sometimes thou canst not send a Deacon, who is a man, to the women in certain houses, on account of the unbelievers. Thou shalt therefore send a woman, a Deaconess, on account of the imaginations of the bad.

And we stand in need of a woman, a Deaconess, for many occasions; and first in the baptism of women, the Deacon shall anoint their forehead with the holy oil, and after him the Deaconess shall anoint them.

#### Chapter XVI

The deaconess does not bless, and she does not fulfil any of the things that priests and deacons do, but she looks after the doors and attends the priests during the baptism of women, for the sake of decency.

### **Chalcedon 451**

Canon

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A woman shall not receive the laying on of hands as a deaconess under forty years of age, and then only after searching examination. And if, after she has had hands laid on her and has continued for a time to minister, she shall despise the grace of God and give herself in marriage, she shall be anathematised and the man united to her.

### **The bishop pronounced the following prayer for the ordination of a deaconess**

‘ Eternal God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, creator of man and woman, who filled Myriam, Deborah, Anne and Hulda with your spirit; who did not deem it unworthy for your Son, the Only-Begotten, to be born of a woman; who in the tent of witness and in the temple did institute women as guardians of your sacred doors, look now upon your servant before you, proposed for the diaconate: grant her the Holy Spirit and purify her of all defilement of flesh and spirit so that she may acquit herself worthily of the office which has been entrusted to her, for your glory and to the praise of your Christ, through whom be glory and adoration to you, in the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen

### **Council of Dovin 527**

*Feminis non licet ministeria diaconissae praestare nisi ministerium baptismi.*

It is not permitted for women to perform the ministry of a deaconess unless the ministry of baptism.

### **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

1546 Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church "a kingdom, priests for his God and Father." The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. the faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are "consecrated to be . . . a holy priesthood.

1547 The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate, "each in its own proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ." While being "ordered one to another," they differ essentially. In what sense? While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace - a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit - ,the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. the ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up

and leads his Church. For this reason it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy Orders.

1548 In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts in persona Christi Capitis.

1549 Through the ordained ministry, especially that of bishops and priests, the presence of Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of the community of believers. In the beautiful expression of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the bishop is typos tou Patros: he is like the living image of God the Father.

### **John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 1994**

1. Priestly ordination, which hands on the office entrusted by Christ to his Apostles of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful, has in the Catholic Church from the beginning always been reserved to men alone. This tradition has also been faithfully maintained by the Oriental Churches.

When the question of the ordination of women arose in the Anglican Communion, Pope Paul VI, out of fidelity to his office of safeguarding the Apostolic Tradition, and also with a view to removing a new obstacle placed in the way of Christian unity, reminded Anglicans of the position of the Catholic Church: "She holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood, for very fundamental reasons. These reasons include: the example recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among men; the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his Church."

2. The Declaration recalls and explains the fundamental reasons for this teaching, reasons expounded by Paul VI, and concludes that the Church "does not consider herself authorised to admit women to priestly ordination." (3) To these fundamental reasons the document adds other theological reasons which illustrate the appropriateness of the divine provision, and it also shows clearly that Christ's way of acting did not proceed from sociological or cultural motives peculiar to his time. As Paul VI later explained: "The real reason is that, in giving the Church her fundamental constitution, her theological anthropology-thereafter always followed by the Church's Tradition- Christ established things in this way."

In the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, I myself wrote in this regard: "In calling only men as his Apostles, Christ acted in a completely free and sovereign manner. In doing so, he exercised the same freedom with which, in all his behaviour, he emphasised the dignity and the vocation of women, without conforming to the prevailing customs and to the traditions sanctioned by the legislation of the time."

The Apostles did the same when they chose fellow workers who would succeed them in their ministry. Also included in this choice were those who, throughout the time of the Church, would carry on the Apostles' mission of representing Christ the Lord and Redeemer.

3. Furthermore, the fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, received neither the mission proper to the Apostles nor the ministerial priesthood clearly shows that the non-admission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather,

it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe.

4. Although the teaching that priestly ordination is to be reserved to men alone has been preserved by the constant and universal Tradition of the Church and firmly taught by the Magisterium in its more recent documents, at the present time in some places it is nonetheless considered still open to debate, or the Church's judgment that women are not to be admitted to ordination is considered to have a merely disciplinary force.

Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.

### **Francis, *Amazonia Querida*, 2020**

100. This summons us to broaden our vision, lest we restrict our understanding of the Church to her functional structures. Such a reductionism would lead us to believe that women would be granted a greater status and participation in the Church only if they were admitted to Holy Orders. But that approach would in fact narrow our vision; it would lead us to clericalise women, diminish the great value of what they have already accomplished, and subtly make their indispensable contribution less effective.

101. Jesus Christ appears as the Spouse of the community that celebrates the Eucharist through the figure of a man who presides as a sign of the one Priest. This dialogue between the Spouse and his Bride, which arises in adoration and sanctifies the community, should not trap us in partial conceptions of power in the Church. The Lord chose to reveal his power and his love through two human faces: the face of his divine Son made man and the face of a creature, a woman, Mary. Women make their contribution to the Church in a way that is properly theirs, by making present the tender strength of Mary, the Mother. As a result, we do not limit ourselves to a functional approach, but enter instead into the inmost structure of the Church. In this way, we will fundamentally realise why, without women, the Church breaks down, and how many communities in the Amazon would have collapsed, had women not been there to sustain them, keep them together and care for them. This shows the kind of power that is typically theirs.

102. We must keep encouraging those simple and straightforward gifts that enabled women in the Amazon region to play so active a role in society, even though communities now face many new and unprecedented threats. The present situation requires us to encourage the emergence of other forms of service and charisms that are proper to women and responsive to the specific needs of the peoples of the Amazon region at this moment in history.

103. In a synodal Church, those women who in fact have a central part to play in Amazonian communities should have access to positions, including ecclesial services, that do not entail Holy Orders and that can better signify the role that is theirs. Here it should be noted that these services entail stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop. This would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organisation, the most important decisions and the direction of communities, while continuing to do so in a way that reflects their womanhood”.

**Codex of the Canon Law - canon added by Pope Francis 1.06.2021**

Can. 1379 § 3. Both a person who attempts to confer a sacred order on a woman, and the woman who attempts to receive the sacred order, incur a latae sententiae excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See; a cleric, moreover, may be punished by dismissal from the clerical state”.

**Pope Francis October 2023 *Response to Dubium*.**

[A lack of possibility of Oder ordination of women] is not a dogmatic definition, yet it must be adhered to by all. No one can publicly contradict it, yet it can be subject to study, as is the case with the validity of ordinations in the Anglican Communion.