

Dr. Phyllis Zagano

“Women and Diaconal Ministry: The Past”

Response to presentation by Dr. Valerie A. Karras and Dr. Caren Stayer

History isn't the only thing, but it is everything.

I certainly cannot respond to everything that has been said in this wonderful presentation, but I can say a few things.

In terms of the ecumenical nature of the discussion, I will tell you a couple of stories.

A few years ago, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, the Archbishop of Boston was approached by a major donor, a woman of his archdiocese, who said, you know Cardinal O'Malley the diaconate for women is a real thing and we really need to think about it, to talk about it. And he said, well, you know, we can't get ahead of the Orthodox on this.

And then, some years later, another woman, a major donor, actually a major scholar approached His All Holiness, Bartholomew and said, you know, Holiness, we must return to the wonderful tradition in our church of women as deacons. And Bartholomew said, you know, we can't get ahead of the Romans on this.

So, I think it's a good thing that we are all in here together.

Let me just say a few things about the presentation. I have done a lot of work, certainly on the Greek Churches, and one of the problems I find when I discuss this today with Romans is the terminology. And, so, at least in Roman Catholic dialogue we have been able to argue that when it is *diakonos* with the feminine article, it is “woman deacon” or “deacon” and when it is *diakonissa* it is “deaconess”. And then, by that, I will then go further and say today, when I say “deacon” or “woman deacon”, I mean someone who is ordained. The reason for that is we have people, such as Cardinal Kasper and some other people who are influential in Rome, saying well, we can have deaconesses and they can dress up and they can have certain roles in the liturgy, but we don't want to ordain them, because we don't do that. That is where I would come to the further discussion of terminology.

We find in histories--and there are many—Kalsbach yes, is the beginning, following a 17th century collation of documents—but Kalsbach and then Josephine Mayer in 1938, each gather together the various documents, the various findings we have in literature, in liturgy, and in Canon Law. We find three things going on: 1) we find “consecration”, 2) we find “blessing”, and 3) we find “ordination.” I look for ordination. You will find that deaconesses are ordained, and this is where Evangelous Theodorou comes in, and he will very clearly distinguish between what is a blessing and what is an ordination. I will not recite the entire history that you just heard, but it is important to recognize that certainly in

the tradition of the Eastern churches, we will have *presbytera*, we will have deaconesses, and many times these are the wives of clergy. In fact, in some Eastern churches, when a man would become a bishop he would leave his wife and she would become ordained or consecrated or blessed as a deaconess, but they would live apart.

So I just remind you, the term that I use in the Roman discussions is ordination. That is what I look for.

I am just coming from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' meeting in Baltimore—they meet every year--and had some very interesting conversations there. But in talking with the bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches, they said the key is to look into the rituals and look for the epiclesis. If you have an epiclesis, you have an ordination, and they cannot argue you out of that. .

Some of my opponents say--and I characterized, or caricature, what they say—is that in an epiclesis the bishop laid his hands on and has called down the blessing of the Holy Spirit on the woman, and the Holy Spirit says: “I can't do it, it's a girl!” I would not expect this kind of a response of the Triune God, nor would I actually determine retroactively or retrospectively decide that the bishop did not mean to do what he did. I think it is quite unfortunate when we have that evolution.

So, let me tell you where the discussion is today. Very interesting things have been happening this year. Just going back to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops-- Cardinal DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, who is a Patristics scholar, saw me with my name tag around my chest and said “Phyllis-deacons! Phyllis-deacons! Phyllis-deacons!” And then he started talking in Greek to me.

But, before that, I was invited by Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia to his seminary to debate Sister Sara Butler, one of the first women appointed to the International Theological Commission. The International Theological Commission is a part of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the old Holy Office, and for ten years she was on that Commission. (I will talk a little bit more about what they did.) I was invited to Philadelphia to discuss, in front of 150 seminarians, all the deacon candidates, their wives and whoever else who could sneak in, to discuss and have a debate on the ordination of women to the diaconate.

Sister Butler uses basically two arguments against me, and she gets these arguments from Martimort, one of the scholars who was mentioned earlier. He wrote in response to on response to Gryson and in response to the discussion in the 1970s about restoring women to the ordained diaconate in the Catholic Churches. We have to remember that there are 22 Eastern Catholic Churches: there is a Greek Catholic Church, there is a Russian Catholic Church, there is a Ukrainian Catholic Church, there is a Ruthenian Catholic Church, there is a Melkite Catholic Church, there is a Syro-Malabar, Maronite ...there are many Catholic Churches. I know enough not to use the word “uniate,” but the fact is that these churches have accepted the primacy of Rome. We mentioned some of the patriarchies here, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Constantinople and Rome. And you know what happened in 1054 and it's an unfortunate split between us that I think the

Holy Father, Pope Francis is attempting to heal, because Francis knows, as any well-educated Catholic knows, you are our seniors. If I marry a Greek, I get married in his church, not in the Roman Church, and that is Catholic Canon Law, that we bow to the tradition of our older siblings.

But in Philadelphia Sister Butler used two basic arguments: 1) directly from the International Theological Commission's 2002 document on the diaconate: that women deacons are different because the rituals used are different. Well, that may or may not be true. The ritual she used is only the one she found, the Apostolic Constitution, which was then copied by two others and she did not go to the Greco-Byzantine 336, nor did she go to the documents from Grottoferrata, where it is clear that it is the same ordination ceremony for a male deacon and for a female deacon. The other way Sister Butler distinguishes is on the roles. She said that women deacons—and she now says “women deacons”—that women deacons did not do the same things as men deacons. She said women deacons ministered only to women. My rejoinder is: who ministers to women now? Such as Dr. Karras pointed out.

There is a Syrian bishop in the fifth century (cited in Josephine Mayer) who uses a very interesting verb when he talks about why you need a woman deacon. He says it is unseemly for a woman to uncliothe herself, obviously in baptism, in confirmation and in extreme unction, for the anointing. But the verb means, also, to disclose herself. It is unseemly for a woman to disclose herself before a man. Now, before a man alone? Is the woman deacon chaperoning her? Or, simply, before a man?

Well, there is a lot of ministry done by women. I say this to bishops and cardinals all the time. When my spiritual director blesses me, it is not your blessing, Cardinal. It is not connected directly to your church because she is not ordained. When a woman is ministering as an employee of your diocese or archdiocese, she is doing that, but she is not connected in the way the clergy are. So, here is your choice: you can either train, ordain, and give faculties to the women who are working for you, or not. Those are your choices. Either you will control the teaching, or you will not. What is your job, bishop, what is your job, archbishop, what is your job, cardinal, but to maintain the deposit of faith and to pass it on to the people? And, how do you do that? You do that by having clergy who are members of your household who will carry the Word forth.

So, we have a lot of scholarship—Dr. Karras mentioned some of it—the book I am more known for is *Holy Saturday: an argument for the restoration of the female diaconate in the Catholic Church* (2000), which was outlined for me in collaboration with John Cardinal O'Connor, for whom I worked at the time and who challenged me. He said if you write a good book I will get it to the Pope. I said, no, you don't know the Pope. But, he knew him. And, at one point, he told me in the 1990s the problem in Rome is (for 20 years that I know of) was they cannot figure out how to ordain a woman deacon without saying it is OK to ordain a woman as priest. I said, well, Cardinal O'Connor, I am not allowed to talk about women priests, why are you bringing that up? He said, that is a very good point; make that chapter four. So, there is a whole chapter in *Holy Saturday* about that.

Let me point out to you *The Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches* (2013), which is the essay by Cipriano Vagaggini that was written in 1972 at the request of Pope Paul VI as the diaconate was being reintroduced as a permanent vocation in the Roman Catholic Church. It was written for the International Theological Commission but never appeared as an ITC document. So, in 1974, Robert F. Taft, S.J. published it as editor of *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*. So, we translated this—Dr. Leonforte and I, with help—and there is also in this a small essay, which is almost better, which is Vagaggini's 1987 intervention before the 1987 synod of bishops and that is a précis of the longer article. The other two are *Women in Ministry* (2012) and *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future* (2011). The Gary Macy essay in the latter gives a lot of your history, because that really is the history.

But, I will tell you, that when the Vatican does the research they are very selective. We found a footnote, which mentioned a couple of people, certainly Vagaggini, but also Corrado Marucci, Delahaye, Yves Congar, so right now what I am doing is preparing translations some of these, and we will be putting them out with the Liturgical Press, as we did with the Vagaggini book. Every Catholic bishop in the United States has received the Vagaggini book, which is why they were running up to me going “Phyllis-deacons!”

I think that the scholarship needs to go on. I gave an online seminar last summer. I had 300 people on five continents discussing this; the history is really your history.

As I was listening, I was thinking: I know later in the day you will discuss, what can we do? What should we do? I met with a priest on Tuesday who was well-placed in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and he said “Op-Eds”...just keep the conversation going. If they are writing against you, write back.

The liturgical year has just ended in Rome, and the very last reading in the office of readings for the day before the beginning of Lent is a reading from Augustine. He talks about how workers on the road sing. I thinking this is we sang this morning. Workers on the road sing. But they sing while they are working. And the final sentence is sing, sing, sing, but keep on working. I ask you to do that and will pray for each other as we do try to argue in our respective churches that we are all made in the image and likeness of Christ, because that is our teaching. That is what we hold.

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