

“*Women in Church Ministries: Reform Movements in Ecumenism* offers renewed hope to the enduring question of women’s sacramental equality, too often stifled behind ‘closed doors.’ Through skillful ecumenical analysis, this collection not only affirms women as protagonists of Christianity but demands ecclesiological innovation to realize the fullness of women’s ministries. This collection boldly models the dialogue a living church so desperately needs to free itself from harmful paradigms to more deeply embody our baptismal equality.”

—Kate McElwee
Executive Director, Women’s Ordination Conference

“For decades, women, more than half the global Christian community, have asked repeatedly to participate in, contribute to, and function at all levels of ecclesial membership, consultation, decision-making, leadership, and ministry. Most poignantly these arguments have been grounded in a theology of baptism. The astute, incisive, and accessible essays gathered here extend, deepen, and sharpen that argument. These historians, theologians, scholars, and pastoral ministers insist on ‘true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the Body of Christ’ (LG 32).”

—M. Shawn Copeland
Professor of Systematic Theology *Emerita*, Boston College

“‘What’s behind the door?’ This brilliant and multi-faceted discussion of women in church ministry is a must-read as we continue to walk the path toward visible Christian unity. Anyone interested in the potential of women for church leadership, both lay and ordained, will find in this volume a wide array of stimulating insights and questions. This courageous and scholarly collection of essays will challenge its readers to look beyond the answers of yesteryear to discover new and vital perspectives.”

—Rita Ferrone, author of *Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium*

“*Women in Church Ministries* provides scientific evidence that there is a very old tradition of women’s participation in different church ministries and offices. This is an extremely important book because it gives back the debate on the role of women in the church to theological arguments in an ecumenical and global framework and with a pastoral perspective. It is both possible and urgent to talk about women in church ministries theologically, without resorting to arguments of cultural politics.”

—Massimo Faggioli
Villanova University

“*Women in Church Ministries* systematically dismantles the arguments— theological and otherwise—used to justify the exclusion of women from ordination in the Catholic Church. This is an excellent resource for those committed to the women’s diaconate and for those interested in carving out a larger place for women in the Catholic Church. These pages invite conversation partners as they explore alternative pathways forward for women and provide inspiring examples of women who redefine the boundaries of their role within the church.”

—Sarah Kohles, OSF, author of *In Our Own Words: Religious Life in a Changing World*

Women in Church Ministries

Reform Movements in Ecumenism

Edited by Margit Eckholt, Dorothea Sattler,
Ulrike Link-Wieczorek, and Andrea Strübind



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Osnabrück Theses

A scientific congress under the title “Women in Church Ministries. Reform Movements in Ecumenism” was held in Osnabrück, Germany from December 6 to 9, 2017, as a joint ecumenical cooperation between theological institutions of the Universities of Osnabrück, Oldenburg, and Münster, together with German Roman Catholic and Protestant associations and institutions. After lectures, discussions, and intensive consultations, a majority of over 120 participants to the congress, who came from multilateral ecumenical contexts in Germany and other countries, adopted the following theses:

(1)

The declared goal of the ecumenical movement, the visible unity of the churches, cannot be achieved without an agreement on the presence of women in all ecclesiastical ministries.

(2)

Women in church ministries make a profound difference to the way each religious community is perceived by itself and by others.

(3)

It is necessary to find reasons not for women’s access to offices and ministries of the church, but rather for their exclusion.

(4)

The discussion can and must remain open as to whether God has given an immutable instruction as to how and by whom he/she is to be witnessed through the church’s ministry.

(5)

The distinction between specific offices within the one (sacramental) ministry (episcopate, priesthood, and diaconate) has developed historically

and can be further developed in an ecumenical perspective. All forms of office should be opened for women. It is important to ensure that no gender-specific determination is made.

(6)

Critical inquiries into the church's teaching on the exclusion of women from church offices and ministries are a manifestation of women's readiness to exercise their vocation to serve the proclamation of the Gospel in word and deed.

(7)

The Spirit of Jesus Christ obliges us always to approach the various theological convictions regarding ecclesiastical ministries with argumentative cooperation, appreciation, and readiness to reconciliation.

Self-commitment

(1)

We will ensure that gender equality in the assumption and exercise of ecclesiastical ministries is the touchstone for credibility in the proclamation of the Gospel. This is indispensable for the apostolic mission of the churches. Beyond the question of the ordination of women, other forms of insensitivity toward gender equality in the churches should be recognized and overcome.

(2)

We will continue the theological discussions on the presence of women in all ecclesiastical ministries with the goal of reaching an understanding in the remaining controversies. Depending on the denominational situation, we will not shun critical discussion with the responsible church leaders about all forms of ordained ministry. In ecumenical fellowship, we strive for the ordination of women as deaconesses, presbyters (pastors, priests), and bishops.

(3)

We will continue to make theological contributions to the necessary differentiation between the opening to women of the diaconate and of other ministries within the one (sacramental) *ordo*. As a ministry for men and women, the diaconate strengthens the basic diaconal orientation of the church.

(4)

Within the bounds of our responsibility, we will strive for the increasing participation of women in leadership positions and ministries. We seek a culture of partnership in all churches.

Introduction by the Editors

This publication grew out of the Ecumenical Congress on Women in Church Ministries: Reform Movements in Ecumenism held at the University of Osnabrück December 6–9, 2017, which was organized and hosted by the Roman Catholic theologians Margit Eckholt, Institute of Catholic Theology, University of Osnabrück, and Dorothea Sattler, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Münster, together with the Protestant theologians Ulrike Link-Wieczorek and Andrea Strübind, both of the Institute of Protestant Theology, University of Oldenburg. At this conference, arguments were scientifically examined that, long after the reformation of churches began in the sixteenth century, led to an opening with regard to the participation of women in all church offices and ministries in the twentieth century.

In most churches of the Reformation the ordination of women is possible, and the Orthodox Patriarchates of Alexandria and Jerusalem reintroduced the ordination of deaconesses in 2017. In the Catholic Church, the doctrine is held that the church does not have the mandate to ordain women; this doctrine has high magisterial authority and was reaffirmed by Luis Ladaria, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in an article in May 2018.¹ The scientific presentations during the ecumenical

1. Cf. Luis Ladaria, Il carattere definitivo della dottrina di “Ordinatio sacerdotalis.” A proposito di alcuni dubbi, in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, May 29, 2018, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/ladaria-ferrer/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20180529_caratteredefinitivo-ordinatiosacerdotalis_it.html; Joshua J. McElwee, Vatican’s doctrinal prefect reaffirms ban on women priests, calls teaching “definitive,” in: *National Catholic Reporter*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/vaticans-doctrinal-prefect-reaffirms-ban-women-priests-calls-teaching-definitive>.

congress were encouraging and carried by a great spiritual depth; they made clear that there is a very old tradition of women's participation in different church ministries and offices. Deaconesses were ordained in the first millennium with prayer and the laying on of hands. The change in this practice, which led to the exclusion of women from church ministries, needs to be justified. There have always been innovations in the history of the church. In accordance with the equal dignity of woman and man, which is established in the texts of Scripture, one of the central results of the congress is to criticize tradition and call for the adoption of what scientific discourses have found. Belonging to Jesus Christ through baptism overcomes the socially or religiously founded boundaries between Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, man and woman (cf. Gal 3:28).

In autumn 2018, Herder Verlag published the conference proceedings under the title *Frauen in kirchlichen Ämtern: Reformbewegungen in der Ökumene* (Women in Church Offices: Reform Movements in Ecumenism). Central contributions to this publication have been included in this English-language publication. We would like to thank Herder Verlag and its literary editor Dr. Stephan Weber for the opportunity to publish a selection of these contributions in English with Liturgical Press, as well as Mr. Hans Christoffersen for accompanying us in this English book project on behalf of Liturgical Press. Above all, however, we thank Mr. Neville Williamson, Kassel, who translated the majority of the contributions into English. We would also like to thank the Thyssen Foundation for subsidizing the costs of translating the book.

The editors hope that this publication will help to set into motion a debate about ministries and services in the church that has been stagnant for a long time, and that it will become clear that these questions can only be answered together—by men and women—from now on.

At the end of the congress the participants endorsed the modified theses that had been worked out in an ecumenical exchange by the initiators beforehand. These "Osnabrück Theses" are placed in front of this volume and then again at the end of this book with explanatory notes. They are meant to serve the future ecumenical conversation and further discussion about the questions of women in church offices, including in the international context. These questions also need to be incorporated into priestly formation and theological teaching and training. Ecumenical support will be particularly helpful with these questions in the future. It is necessary to continue the joint efforts in these questions, because

without a thematization of the question of women's ordination there will be no way to achieve the visible unity of the churches.

The editors would like to thank Bishop Dr. Franz-Josef Bode, Local Ordinary of the Diocese of Osnabrück and chairman of the Pastoral Commission of the German Bishops' Conference as well as the Sub-Commission for Women in Church and Society, for his openness and support in preparing and hosting the congress, which dealt with a topic that is still explosive in the Catholic Church.

It was and is clear in all this: God's Spirit works in history and opens closed doors; they cannot be kept closed on the church's path into the future. This also applies to the question of women in church offices.

Osnabrück, Münster, Oldenburg, February 28, 2020

Margit Eckholt, Osnabrück

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I

Between Tradition and Innovation

*Broadening the Horizon for the Question
of Women in Church Ministries*

Tradition, Criticism of Tradition, and Innovation

On the Road to Gender Equitable Structures of Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church

Eva-Maria Faber

1. Justice for Women in the Church: A Victim of the Overextension of the Magisterium

“This door is closed.” This remark, made in an interview during a flight,¹ is often used as evidence that Pope Francis is also following the well-known doctrinal position on the ordination of women to the priesthood. But wait: what is the status of such an interview statement? Whoever calls “Stop!” here will have to repeat the same call many more times. As Johanna Rahner recently remarked, the question of women’s ordination is “slowly but surely becoming a classic of post-conciliar dogma hermeneutics.”²

It is a problem that the doctrinal authorities quote their own statements, thereby intensifying the tradition in order to be able to refer back to it.³

1. “E, con riferimento all’ordinazione delle donne, la Chiesa ha parlato e dice: ‘No.’ L’ha detto Giovanni Paolo II, ma con una formulazione definitiva. Quella è chiusa, quella porta”: Conferenza stampa del Santo Padre Francesco durante il volo di ritorno, July 28, 2013, in: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-conferenza-stampa.html (21.12.2017).

2. J. Rahner, Eine Frage der Theologie. Wie definitiv ist das Verbot der Frauenordination?, in: *Herder Korrespondenz* 71 (2017) 48–51, 48.

3. Cf. P. Walter, Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Theologiegeschichte? Eine akademische Abschiedsrede, in: *Freiburger Universitätsblätter* 54 (2015) 53–65, 54.

It is a problem when attempts are made to treat texts of the ordinary magisterium inaccurately as texts of the extraordinary magisterium.⁴

It is also a problem, as one should recall, that the report of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1976 was ignored, which considered that there was no solution to the question of women's access to the presbyterate on the basis of the New Testament alone.⁵ This investigation need never have been commissioned if the doctrine had already been clarified at that time or had been regarded as firmly taught⁶ and "set forth infallibly."⁷ By ignoring this report in the context of the 1976 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's Declaration *Inter Insigniores* on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood, the magisterium neglected its moral duty to "diligently strive to

4. "In the curial interpretation, the corresponding passages in texts of the ordinary Magisterium are intentionally treated as texts of the extraordinary Magisterium": O. Fuchs, "*Ihr aber seid ein priesterliches Volk.*" *Ein pastoraltheologischer Zwischenruf zu Firmung und Ordination* (Ostfildern, 2017) 210. From a formal point of view, canon law expert Jean-Pierre Torrell criticizes the quality of the magisterial procedure, for instance "the impression of a rather summary argumentation," in *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, the claim to a "definite" binding character in spite of the lack of final infallibility, as well as inconsistencies in the response of 1995: "We were accustomed to more clarity and coherence in the earlier documents": J.-P. Torrell, *Die Verbindlichkeit von Ordinatio sacerdotalis. Zur Hermeneutik lehramtlicher Dokumente*, in: G. L. Müller (ed.), *Frauen in der Kirche. Eigensein und Mitverantwortung* (Würzburg, 1999) 357–79, 369, 370, 376.

5. Cf. on this: W. Groß, Bericht der Päpstlichen Bibelkommission, 1976, in: Groß (ed.), *Frauenordination. Stand der Diskussion in der katholischen Kirche* (Munich, 1996) 25–31, 26; 31. Furthermore, there seems to have been a majority vote that the reasons derived from Scripture are not sufficient to exclude the possibility of ordination of women, and conversely that the church has the authority "to entrust women with the ministries of the Eucharist and reconciliation without going against Christ's original intentions" (31).

6. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone, May 22 1994, par. 4: https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html.

7. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Responsum ad Propositum Dubium concerning the Teaching Contained in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, October 28, 1995: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19951028_dubium-ordinatio-sac_en.html.

inquire properly” into revelation and “to give apt expression to its contents” (LG 25).⁸

With these opening remarks I do not intend to reduce the theme of the conference whose lectures are to be found in this book purely to the issue of the presbyteral ordination of women. I want to start by making it crystal clear how much effort some people in the Roman Catholic Church are investing in order to ensure that this door is heavily protected. The door is closed, and no one should even dream of asking whether a key exists, or why there is a door there at all. The barriers that have been set up in front of the door are so wide that it is not even possible to recognize any other doors nearby.

2. Desideratum: Church with Women—on All Levels

So let us forget the door; let us ask about the room behind it. Certainly it is not a good thing to stretch metaphors too far, but it is obviously interesting to find out what is to be found behind this closed door. Looking at it from this angle, the main problem is not that women are excluded from ordination. The main problem is that for them a whole realm within the church has been closed off,⁹ not least the area of high-level consultations, decision-making, and leadership. There are two levels to this problem.

2.1 Deficits in Opportunities for Synodal Participation

One of the crucial statements made by the Second Vatican Council concerns the “true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the

8. The report is echoed in the defensive formulations of the second section of the declaration: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Priesthood *Inter Insigniores*, October 15, 1976, par. 2: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html: “It is true that these facts do not make the matter immediately obvious. This is no surprise, for the questions that the Word of God brings before us go beyond the obvious. In order to reach the ultimate meaning of the mission of Jesus and the ultimate meaning of Scripture, a purely historical exegesis of the texts cannot suffice.”

9. In the following, the term “church” usually refers to the Roman Catholic Church unless the context indicates otherwise.

Body of Christ” (LG 32).¹⁰ This equality precedes all differentiations and is based on the participation of all the baptized in the priestly, prophetic, and royal ministry of Jesus Christ (cf. LG 10:12). The Holy Spirit gives gifts to all believers and makes them “fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church” (LG 12).

However, these charisms cannot be employed sufficiently, because the structures for participation in the Roman Catholic Church are underdeveloped.¹¹ Both men and women are affected by this deficit. The Roman Catholic Church lags behind all other churches in the development of synodal structures.

2.2 *Ministerial Structures Largely Closed to Women*

Notwithstanding such synodal structures, the church needs offices that are “constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance.” According to CIC/1983 can. 145 §1 and can. 228 §1, such offices are not in principle bound to ordination. But women are also underrepresented in offices that are accessible to lay people.¹² At least some local churches have, in the meantime, succeeded in assigning women to offices that, at the same time, enable them to participate in local church advisory and decision-making processes. The contribution by Bishop Franz-Josef Bode has thankfully combined a survey of this situation with a clear appeal to continue in this direction. In the church as a whole, the development is lagging behind, so that it already causes a stir when a woman is appointed to the position of an undersecretary in the Vatican.

Corresponding efforts encounter legal and dogmatic limits at all levels insofar as, according to present understanding, “the full care of souls . . . for whose fulfillment the exercise of the priestly order is required” (CIC/1983 can. 150), the administration of the sacraments and the power

10. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, new rev. ed., Austin Flannery, OP, ed. (Collegeville, 2014) 389.

11. Cf., e.g., S. Demel, Beteiligungsrechte der Laien und Frauen in der katholischen Kirche. Grundlagen und Grenzen im CIC/1983, in: *Jahrbuch für christliche Sozialwissenschaften* 55 (2014) 179–98.

12. Cf. A. Qualbrink, Frauen in kirchlichen Leitungspositionen. Hemmnisse, Herausforderungen und Perspektiven, in: *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 165 (2017) 245–55.

of governance (cf. CIC/1983 can. 129) are largely reserved for ordained persons. Does this mean that these areas are closed to women in principle? But can it be possible that the Roman Catholic Church deprives itself of women's charisms in all these fields? Half of the members of the Roman Catholic Church are marginalized in this way; the consequences must be borne by all its members.¹³

In view of such dimensions, one would normally expect the problem to be dealt with in a prompt and determined fashion. But the gaze is fixed on the locked door of presbyteral ordination for women and on the worry that someone might lay a hand on it. This leads to paralysis and inhibition. The topic of women is dangerous, because someone (a man or a woman) could get near this door. As a result, not everyone in this church is doing everything possible to keep moving on the path to gender equitable structures in the church and the ministry.

On the one hand, dealing with the problem would imply that all possibilities of the present church order are exploited that might allow forms of synodal participation and nonordained women's ministries as well as participation in leadership authority.

On the other hand, dealing with the problem would have to address pressing tasks in connection with tradition, criticism of tradition, and innovation in order to look for doors, and even to take a closer look at the door that is so comprehensively protected. The following considerations focus on these aspects of dealing with the problem.

3. Sounding Out Scripture and Tradition

A church that is seriously interested in being a church with women would have to take the highest conceivable care to investigate the testimonies of apostolic and ecclesiastical tradition regarding the church ministries and roles that were occupied by women. In this way one would be able to find points of reference for the urgently needed development of church structures today.

13. P. Hünemann explains that through the exclusion of social groups from responsible leadership functions "the entire group is denied recognition as equal, morally responsible partners": "The church also needs . . . women in church offices," in: M. Heimbach-Steins, G. Kruip, S. Wendel, eds., *Kirche 2011. Ein notwendiger Aufbruch. Argumente zum Memorandum* (Freiburg i.Br., 2011) 189–97, 191, with reference to analyses by A. Honneth.

Many theologians have undertaken this task, but their research was not really taken up by the church. It must suffice here to name a few examples.

The aforementioned report by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1976 might today possibly have turned out to be even more explicit, since the female apostle (formerly male “Junias”) may once again be called Junia, and the deaconess Phoebe as well as other women named by Paul in his greetings have achieved further exegetical recognition.¹⁴

For a long time, official ecclesial and theological discussions have been devoted to the question of how to understand the sources on the deaconesses of the early church. I take this opportunity to express my regret that, more than twenty years ago, I myself wrote an article on historical assessments that can no longer be maintained.¹⁵ In the early church and long after, there were deaconesses whose ministry took place in what was then understood as an “Order” (see, for example, the studies of Ute Eisen,¹⁶ Gary Macy,¹⁷ Dorothea Reininger,¹⁸ and Cipriano Vagaggini, as well as Phyllis Zagano¹⁹).

14. Cf. E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Zu ihrem Gedächtnis. Eine feministisch-theologische Rekonstruktion der christlichen Ursprünge* (Mainz/Munich, 1988); M. Gielen, Die Wahrnehmung gemeindlicher Leitungsfunktionen durch Frauen im Spiegel der Paulusbriefe, in: Th. Schmeller, M. Ebner, R. Hoppe, eds., *Neutestamentliche Ämtermodelle im Kontext* (Freiburg i.Br., 2010) 129–65; E. Schüssler Fiorenza, Frauen als Diakone in paulinischen Gemeinden, in: D.W. Winkler, ed., *Diakonat der Frau. Befunde aus biblischer, patristischer, ostkirchlicher, liturgischer und systematisch-theologischer Perspektive* (Vienna, 2012) 11–40; H. Scherer, Die Mühe der Frauen. “Charismatische Gemeindeleitung” in Röm 6,6.12, in: *Biblische Zeitschrift* 60 (2016) 264–76.

15. Cf. E.-M. Faber, Art. Diakon. II. Historisch-theologisch, in: LThK3, vol. 3 (1995) 179–81.

16. U. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen im frühen Christentum. Epigraphische und literarische Studien* (Göttingen, 1996).

17. See G. Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination. Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York, 2008); Macy, Die Bedeutung der Ordination im ersten Jahrtausend des Christentums, in: *Theologische Quartalschrift* 192 (2012) 329–41, 336–40.

18. D. Reininger, *Diakonat der Frau in der einen Kirche. Diskussionen, Entscheidungen und pastoral-praktische Erfahrungen in der christlichen Ökumene und ihr Beitrag zur römisch-katholischen Diskussion* (Ostfildern, 1999).

19. C. Vagaggini, *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches* (Collegeville, 2013); Ph. Zagano, Gerechtigkeit für das Leben der Pfarrgemeinde: Frauen wieder zur Diakonatsweihe zulassen, in: *Concilium* 53 (2017) 232–39.

A church that is willing to take a step in the direction of offices for women would find adequate criteria in the tradition resolutely followed by other churches.

An ecumenical attitude that regards the perspectives and spiritual practices of other churches as an enrichment of one's own church²⁰ should also pay attention to the ecumenical relevance of the living tradition of other churches that ordain women. It is unfortunate that usually the Roman Catholic Church only mentions the ordination of women practiced in other churches as an additional obstacle, without acknowledging the unresolved issues of better, equal participation of women in its own area. This contravenes the injunction formulated in the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism that the primary duty should be "to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed and done in the Catholic household itself" (UR 4). The lively experiences and traditions of other churches are helpful for this.

These brief indications may suffice to show that tradition as such does not pose a problem for allowing women to participate in responsible structures of the church, namely, as ordained ministers. To refer to the historical existence of tradition while at the same time rejecting the significance of historical evidence, as does the *Inter Insigniores* statement,²¹ is contradictory. What is lacking is a bold approach to those traditions that now call for reception.

What is also missing is a bold criticism of tradition.

4. Criticism of Tradition

Dealing with tradition creates problems not only if its abundance is not received, but also if one is not prepared to get to grips with the deficits of tradition.

20. "Nor should we forget that anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to our own edification" (UR 4); in Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, new rev. ed., Austin Flannery, OP, ed. (Collegeville, 2014) 459. The fact that just at this point in the document, as is customary in council texts, only the "brethren" are mentioned can be taken as an indication of the learning process that lies before us.

21. Cf. note 8 above.

The tradition of the church includes highly problematic anthropological statements about women.²² They range from philosophically inspired statements on women's deficient humanity to culturally shared beliefs regarding women's inabilities (such as their unsuitability for public office) and specifically theological reservations on their creation in the image of God (which have been maintained until recently²³).

The conglomerate of such discriminatory statements forms a broad stream of tradition.

It is not only shocking that such a tradition exists. It is also shocking to see that hardly anyone complains about the contempt for women expressed in such theological statements. Their significance is all too quickly played down.

Pope John Paul II's Universal Prayer of March 12, 2000 did indeed contain a confession of sins against the dignity of women and the unity of the human race.²⁴ In his letter to women in 1995, this pope had already stated that it was time "to assign responsibility where it is due."²⁵ It is often the case, however, that the inner-church problem is touched up. The *Inter Insigniores* Declaration of 1976 mentions social discrimination against women and then states: "In the life of the Church herself, as history shows us, women have played a decisive role and accomplished tasks of outstanding value." But women did that in society as well. It would be necessary to compare the virulent discrimination in both cases.

The document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of 2004 on the collaboration of men and women in the church and in the

22. Cf. the groundbreaking work by I. Raming, *Der Ausschluss der Frau vom priesterlichen Amt. Gottgewollte Tradition oder Diskriminierung? Eine rechtshistorisch-dogmatische Untersuchung der Grundlagen von can. 968 §1 des Codex Iuris Canonici* (Cologne, 1973; new edition 2002 entitled *Priesteramt der Frau. Geschenk Gottes für eine erneuerte Kirche*); G. Macy, *History*, 111–27.

23. Cf. E.-M. Faber, Zur Lehre von der Gottebenbildlichkeit der Frau bei Matthias Joseph Scheeben, in: B. Jeggle-Merz, A. Kaupp, U. Nothelle-Wildfeuer, eds., *Frauen bewegen Theologie. Die Präsenz von Frauen in der theologischen Wissenschaft am Beispiel der Theologischen Fakultät der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität* (Freiburg i.Br./Leipzig, 2007) 117–39.

24. See http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/documents/ns_lit_doc_20000312_prayer-day-pardon_en.html.

25. Pope John Paul II, Letter to Women, June 29, 1995, par. 3: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html.

world shows a similar imbalance. It uses the term “structures of sin” with reference to relations between the sexes in order to identify a situation that is “potentially conflictual.” Such structures of sin were “inscribed in culture.”²⁶ In culture, and not in the church?²⁷

Apart from this strange combination of admitting to the problem and denying their own involvement, official church voices underestimate the historical impact of misogynist views. For the two most important reference points of tradition—patristics and scholasticism—*Inter Insigniores* admits that there one finds “the undeniable influence of prejudices unfavourable to woman” (for the church fathers), as well as arguments that “modern thought would have difficulty in admitting, or would even rightly reject” (for scholasticism). Nevertheless, this tradition is considered “firm” in terms of its rejection of women’s ordination.

Criticizing tradition and owning up to deficits in anthropology and creation theology does not lead to consequences when critics of tradition question ecclesiology. It is not just amazing that there is no willingness to examine the validity of the reasons for the exclusion of women from ordination. Criticism of tradition also shows no regret in face of the many centuries of church history in which women were excluded from formal and undiminished participation in consultation and decision-making processes on the basis of questionable beliefs concerning the subordination of women and their inability to hold public office. Tradition is in urgent need of criticism, and the consequential processes of reversal are overdue.

The aim of such processes cannot be achieved simply on the basis of the abundance of tradition and the criticism of tradition. This cannot work without innovation.

26. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Collaboration between Men and Women in the Church and in the World, May 31, 2004, par. 8: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html.

27. See also the statement in Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, August 15, 1988, par. 27: https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html: “The witness and the achievements of Christian women have had a significant impact on the life of the Church as well as of society. Even in the face of serious social discrimination [!], holy women have acted ‘freely,’ strengthened by their union with Christ.”

5. Innovation

5.1 *The Relationship between Tradition and Innovation*

The relationship between tradition and innovation has aroused lively interest in recent years. Publications before 2013 slaved away at the flood of relevant statements by Pope Benedict XVI on the relationship between continuity, reform, and discontinuity. After 2013, publications sought to explore the scope for the dynamics of reform that had been set in motion again by Pope Francis. In terms of tradition theory, it can hardly be denied that a living tradition depends on innovation if it is not to wither or stagnate. Historically, it should be noted that many things that may appear to be discontinuities in the present are in continuity with old traditions and may have to remedy earlier discontinuities. To put it in a nutshell: anyone who nowadays considers the introduction of a women's diaconate as an inadmissible discontinuity would be obliged to provide explanations for other discontinuities. In that case, why did the women disappear from ecclesial greeting lists, why were deaconesses ousted, why were the abbesses deprived of jurisdictional powers?

But in fact, alongside innovations that merely correct discontinuities, genuine innovation is required: the Church's response to new insights, new needs, to the signs of the times.²⁸

The much quoted sentence from Galatians is a thorn: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).²⁹ Paul here takes a firm stance on the necessary and apparently unquestionable consequences of faith in Jesus Christ. However, none of the consequences named here was smoothly implemented in the history of the church. The early frictions between Jews and Greeks are already unpleasantly described in the New Testament. The consequent effects cost the lives of countless Jews. It was not until the twentieth century that the Christians of Gentile origin and the churches were prepared to relate to Jews in a respectful and friendly way.

28. Cf. M. Eckholt, *Ohne die Frauen ist keine Kirche zu machen. Der Aufbruch des Konzils und die Zeichen der Zeit* (Ostfildern, 2012).

29. See, e.g., J. Kügler, Gal 3,26–28 und die vielen Geschlechter der Glaubenden. Impuls für eine christliche Geschlechtsrollenpastoral jenseits von "Sex and Gender," in: M. E. Aigner, J. Pock, eds., *Geschlecht quer gedacht. Widerstandspotenziale und Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten in kirchlicher Praxis* (Münster, 2009) 53–70.

Women in Church Ministries

Perspectives of a Theology of Ecclesiastical Offices after Vatican II and the Authority of Ordination Sacerdotalis

Margit Eckholt

1. “The door is closed, but not locked”—an Aporetic or Kafkaesque Situation with a View to the Debate on the Ordination of Women?

1.1 Ecumenical Perspectives: The Debate on Offices for Women in Christian Churches Has Gained Momentum

The documents released in the run-up to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation (1517–2017), entitled “From Conflict to Communion” (2013), on an international level and “Healing of Memories—Giving Witness to Christ” (2016) in the German context, pointed out the importance of commemoration on an ecumenical and international scale. Concurrently, they acknowledged that “despite all our ecumenical rapprochement, to this day we have not yet found common answers to fundamental questions concerning our understandings of Church and ministry.”¹ One way to look at ministry from the Roman Catholic perspective is to focus

1. *Healing of Memories—Witnessing to Jesus Christ. A Joint Statement on the Year 2017*, September 17, 2016, ed. the Protestant Church in Germany and the Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference, Joint Texts No. 24 (Hanover/Bonn, 2016) 60; see also *From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (2nd ed., Leipzig/Paderborn, 2013).

on the episcopate, emphasize the threefold *ordo* as well as the apostolic succession based on the theology of ecclesiastical offices, and underline the “the sacramental identity of a priest and the relationship of the sacramental priesthood to the priesthood of Christ.”² Although the Second Vatican Council made the ecumenically relevant idea of “joint priesthood” fruitful for “people of God” ecclesiology, the results of Vatican II on ministry continue to be associated with a hierarchy between the common priesthood of all believers and the ministerial priesthood, as well as with the idea of a cultic-sacerdotal understanding of priesthood. On the other hand, the documents of Vatican II could pave the way for new ecclesiological perspectives and a new direction for the theology of ecclesiastical offices.³

In recent years, the Ecumenical Working Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians (ÖAK) in Germany as well as ecumenical academic working groups have closely looked into the wording of the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism, which maintains that the churches of the Reformation “have not preserved the proper reality of the eucharistic mystery in its fullness, especially because of the absence of the sacrament of Orders” (UR 22).⁴ The working groups made it clear that the *defectus ordinis* does not mean absence but a shortcoming, and that, with a view to the principle of *Christus supplet* and the work of the Spirit of God, “the Church should look at the concept of the ‘defectus ordinis’ as a more or less realized *communio* and focus more on the pneumatological dimension in order to see whether the apostolic conti-

2. *From Conflict to Communion* 190, 77.

3. See also Hilberath, O. Hofius, E. Jüngel, M. Theobald, Tübinger Thesen zum Amt in der Kirche, in: *Ökumene vor neuen Zeiten. Für Theodor Schneider*, ed. K. Raiser and D. Sattler (Freiburg/Basel/Vienna, 2000) 261–91, especially B. J. Hilberath, IV. Das Amt in der Kirche nach (römisch-)katholischem Verständnis, 281–91, here 291. The difficulty of implementing the basic ideas of the Council becomes apparent in the document of the International Theological Commission, *Mysterium des Gottesvolkes* (Einsiedeln, 1985) No. 7.2.: “In order for Church life, for the Body of Christ to flourish, the common priesthood of all believers and ministerial priesthood or the hierarchical ministry must go hand in hand and relate to each other, but in a way that in terms of the ultimate purpose of Christian life and its fulfillment, the common priesthood is favored, while in terms of the visible organizational system of the Church and sacramental validity, ministry takes priority.”

4. See Hilberath, *Das Amt in der Kirche*, 290.

nunity can only be guaranteed by the historical succession of bishops or by other essential signs of the *communio* as well.”⁵

As recent exegetical and dogmatic-historical works show, it is indeed possible to continue the debate over the understanding of ministry and church based on the Bible. In a contribution for the Ecumenical Working Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians dealing with the debate over church ministry and the apostolic succession, Otto Hermann Pesch underlines that “the development, consolidation and current change in the structure of offices undergone during the period starting after New Testament times and lasting until today with different situations in the churches, are the result of history.”⁶ This offers an essential foundation for the topic of women in church ministries as it needs to be discussed today. The office structures in the church have always been based on new “interpretations and applications”⁷ of the biblical foundation, and therefore churches are free “to organize and reorganize offices and services according to today’s requirements and, which always applies, according to the demanded unity in the apostolic faith, while preserving the New Testament’s foundation and thus the churches’ duty to serve the teachings of the apostolic Gospel and the apostolic faith.”⁸

The Ecumenical Working Group did not consider the perspective of women’s ordination.⁹ If theological debates on offices really take the

5. See P. Walter, “Sacramenti Ordinis defectus” (UR 22,3). Die Aussage des II. Vaticanums im Licht des ökumenischen Dialogs. Zum Ergebnis der Studie von Pierluigi Cipriani, in: *Das kirchliche Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge III. Verständigungen und Differenzen. Für den Ökumenischen Arbeitskreis evangelischer und katholischer Theologen*, ed. Dorothea Sattler and Gunther Wenz (Freiburg i.Br., 2008) 86–101, 99f.

6. O. H. Pesch, Auf dem Weg zu einer “Gemeinsamen Erklärung zum kirchlichen Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge.” Ein Plädoyer, in: *Das kirchliche Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge III*, 155–66, here 160.

7. Pesch, Auf dem Weg, 160: “That means: This office structure, or possibly just one of its existing forms, is not only based on the logical and consistent realization of the biblical example, but above all on constantly changing interpretations and applications of the Bible as a way of finding answers to constantly changing social, political and clerical challenges.”

8. Pesch, Auf dem Weg, 161.

9. Ecumenical Working Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians, concluding report, 167–267, here 180, No. 16: It is argued that the topic “could not have been adequately dealt with within the scope of this project.”

historical development of official structures and the necessary reinterpretation and reapplication of the biblical foundation seriously, this perspective cannot be ignored by academic research. Certainly, the theological and ecumenical challenges regarding the understanding of church and office become more complex with the question of women in church office. But at the same time, the ecumenical perspective of the debate on the understanding of ministry within the Roman Catholic tradition can deliver a new dynamism and enhance the prospects for reforms as implied by Vatican II, particularly from the ecumenical point of view and considering the new worldview of the council. In the churches of the Reformation, the Anglican Church, and the Old Catholic Church, the ordination of women has been possible since the mid-twentieth century, even if it only resulted from the “need” of the parishes during the war and the postwar period and had to be fought for. The Orthodox Patriarchates of Alexandria and Jerusalem reintroduced the ordination of deaconesses in 2017, and in the Armenian Apostolic cathedral in Tehran, the twenty-four-year-old anesthetist Ani-Kristi Manvelian was ordained deaconess on September 25, 2017.¹⁰

Moreover, the ordination of three subdeaconesses by archbishop Wanda (diocese of Erbil/Iraq) in a migrant community of Chaldean Christians in Stuttgart-Bottanang on September 10, 2012 showed that the candidates are ordained by the laying on of hands, which underlines the apostolic succession and thus the representation of Christ in this office.¹¹ This is of central importance for the current debate on the female diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church.

In August 2016, Pope Francis convened a commission whose task is to examine the biblical, historical, and especially patristic reasons concerning the ordination of women deacons. Today’s discussions, whether they are in favor of the introduction of such an office or against

10. <http://ostkirchen.info/teheran-weihe-einer-diakonin-fuer-die-armenisch-apostolische-kirche/>.

11. See P. Hünemann, Zum Streit über den Diakonat der Frau im gegenwärtigen Dialogprozess – Argumente und Argumentationen, in: *Theologische Quartalschrift* 192 (2012) 342–78, esp. 376–78 (Ausblick: Die Tradition der Ostkirche—angekommen im Westen). Regarding the Orthodox theological discussion on the office, see the contribution of Thomai Chouvarda and Natallia Vasilevich in M. Eckholt, U. Link-Wieczorek, D. Sattler, A. Strübind, ed., *Frauen in kirchlichen Ämtern. Reformbewegungen in der Ökumene* (Freiburg i.Br., 2018).

it, clearly show that history-based argumentation alone is not sustainable, particularly given the wider historical manifestations of the office and the evolution of the ecclesiological foundations, and that the introduction of a female diaconate in the Catholic Church thus implies further theological considerations on offices and the sacraments as well as an open debate on current pastoral challenges. Neither can the topic be discussed without raising the question of establishing a presbyterate or episcopate for women. In a lecture before the spring plenary assembly of the German Bishops' Conference in Trier, Cardinal Walter Kasper proposed to appoint women parish deaconesses, a nonsacramental office. However, this would not do justice to the diaconal management tasks that women have de facto been fulfilling for many years, including in German churches. The consequence would be a hierarchy between the diaconate exercised by men and by women that would undermine the principle of gender equality repeatedly referred to in the German bishops' statements of the past years.¹² However, a decision in favor of a sacramental ministry, namely, the sacred order of the diaconate, runs contrary to the Code of Canon law, in which can. 1024 states that holy orders is reserved for baptized men. Referring back to *Inter Insigniores* of October 15, 1976, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed this position in his Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* issued on May 22, 1994 as a binding magisterial statement, thus declaring the debate over priestly ordination for women concluded: "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" (OS 4).

12. See the lecture of Cardinal Kasper on the occasion of the study day "Das Zusammenwirken von Frauen und Männern im Dienst und Leben der Kirche" at the spring plenary assembly of the German Bishops' Conference on February 20, 2013 in Trier, http://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2012/2013-035-Studientag-FVV-Trier_Vortrag-K-Kasper.pdf; for gender equality, see the German Bishops' statement published in 1981: *Zu Fragen der Stellung der Frau in Kirche und Gesellschaft*, ed. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference (Bonn, 1981).

1.2 *The Debate over the Authority of Magisterial Statements on Women's Ordination*

In the context of systematic theology and canon law, it has been discussed whether *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* is binding or not, and the authority of this document as well as can. 1024 of the Code of Canon Law will be reexamined along with the fundamental questions of sacramental theology, offices, and the theological controversy regarding the *ordo*, which equally concerns the theology of the permanent diaconate¹³ that is based on the results of Vatican II. The possibility of establishing a female diaconate will be part of this discussion. In this respect, another issue will have to be addressed, that is, the question of a renewed vision of the authority of the papal office, which cannot be answered by relying on the literal sense of the pope's words, which are always subject to error, but by courageously giving room to the work of God's Spirit, thus paving the way for new paths. This is exactly what it takes to make a fundamental decision about women's ordination and recognize women as witnesses to the message of the resurrection, standing in apostolic succession, sent for the proclamation of the Gospel.

In an analysis of the binding nature of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, the Dominican priest Jean-Pierre Torrell pointed out that "the possibility of future progress was not completely excluded"¹⁴ and that "the credibility of tomorrow's magisterium was at stake." Peter Hünemann maintains in his text analysis that an apostolic letter does not have absolute authority: "In formal terms, the Pope does not deliver an infallible, dogmatic definition. This is what the genus *litterarium*, the carefully delimited choice of words depicting the character of the Papal authority and the act of the declaration itself, indicates. The Pope, however, considers this teaching as a matter of faith authentically taught by tradition and the College of Bishops, thus creating an obligatory character that is definite."¹⁵ Accord-

13. Concerning the debate on the Permanent Diaconate, see P. Hünemann, Anmerkungen zum Motu proprio "Omnium in mentem," in: *Theologische Quartalschrift* 190 (2010) 116–29; R. Hartmann, F. Reger, S. Sander, eds., *Ortsbestimmungen: Der Diakonat als kirchlicher Dienst* (Frankfurt a.M., 2009).

14. J.-P. Torrell, Die Verbindlichkeit von "Ordinatio sacerdotalis." Zur Hermeneutik lehramtlicher Dokumente, in: G. L. Müller, ed., *Frauen in der Kirche. Eigensein und Mitverantwortung* (Würzburg, 1999) 357–79, here 375.

15. P. Hünemann, Schwerwiegende Bedenken. Eine Analyse des Apostolischen Schreibens "Ordinatio sacerdotalis," in: W. Groß, ed., *Frauenordination. Stand der Diskussion in der katholischen Kirche* (Munich, 1996) 120–27, here 123.

ing to *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, the issue of women's ordination therefore cannot be discussed arbitrarily ("disputabilis").¹⁶ As a consequence, faithful Catholics are facing an "aporetic" situation, as Peter Hünemann puts it, not because of the impossibility of establishing women's ordination right away or the diverging views within the universal church when it comes to female ministry or else the difficult dialogue with the oriental churches, but specifically because of the "authority of the office."¹⁷ This aporia increasingly reveals itself in the words of Pope Francis when he comments on the statement of John Paul II.

On his return flight from the ecumenical encounter in Lund on November 1, 2016,¹⁸ Pope Francis said in an interview that the door was closed for the issue of women's ordination. This strict referral to the authority of one of his predecessors is striking, particularly in view of the new "pastoral" way in which he assumes the magisterium and his references to synodal structures, the necessity of comprehensive and participatory consultations in controversial ecclesiastic and pastoral matters as laid out in the two-stage process, including the Synod on the Family (2015), and the subsequently published Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (2016). Pope Francis is aware of the competent theological work done by women. When he served as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he supported the Argentine women theologians' network Teologanda, he sees the necessity of promoting women, in *Evangelii Gaudium* he pointed out the need to qualify women also for management tasks in the church,¹⁹ and in his speeches he encourages

16. Hünemann, *Schwerwiegende Bedenken*, 122.

17. Hünemann, *Schwerwiegende Bedenken*, 126.

18. <http://www.katholisch.de/aktuelles/aktuelle-artikel/papst-erteilt-frauenpriestertum-erneut-absage>: "Pope Francis once again rejects priestly ordination for women in the Catholic Church. The last word on the matter of female ordination was spoken quite clearly by his predecessor John Paul II, Francis said on Tuesday on the return flight from his two-day trip to Sweden. 'And this remains valid.' Francis was referring to the Papal Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* from 1994, in which John Paul II (1978–2005) ruled out women's ordination in the Catholic Church. The Pope from Poland argued that Jesus had appointed only men as apostles and put forward ecclesiastical tradition."

19. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, November 24, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html: "But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. . . . and in the various

especially women religious to empower themselves and shake off their subservient attitude.²⁰ Considering the way Pope Francis attends to the pastoral magisterium, and in view of the reform processes he initiated, one might ask if he could, in a certain way, rise above his predecessors' statements on women's ordination and open up new perspectives for the concept of authority in the Catholic Church. Francis clearly perceives the papal office in a new communicative way, consistently calling for *metanoia*, the conversion to the Gospel, and also learning from others, in awareness of the guilt the church has burdened itself with over the centuries. As far as the participation of women is concerned, the church, or rather the magisterium, can only find answers by taking a close look at the women and learning from them. The shift away from "self-referentiality" Pope Francis calls for in his speeches and sermons particularly concerns the self-referentiality of a church led exclusively by men, a church that clings to the idea that only men can act "in persona Christi."

1.3 *Kafkaesque Situation?*

With Francis maintaining the ideas of one of his predecessors on women's ordination, the situation of the pontificate of Francis seems to be more than aporetic; one might even call it "Kafkaesque": The man before the law²¹ is waiting by a closed door; as the years go by he recognizes an

other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures" (EG 103). See also <https://es.aleteia.org/2018/01/05/necesitamos-mujeres-lideres-ensena-el-papa-francisco> (15.2.2018). See also Pope Francis, *Keine Kirche ohne Frauen*, introduced and ed. Gudrun Sailer (Stuttgart, 2016).

20. See Vatican Radio, news of the day, October 12, 2013: Francis: "Women are called to service, not servitude": The role of women in the church may not be limited to menial services. This is what Pope Francis told all men and women participating in a congress celebrating the 25th anniversary of the papal document *Mulieris dignitatem*. Deviating from the script for his speech, the Pope acknowledged: "I suffer—speaking truthfully!—when I see in the Church or in some ecclesial organizations that the role of service that we all have, and that we must have—but that the role of service of the woman slips into a role of 'servidumbre' [Spanish: servitude] . . . when I see women that do things out of 'servitude' and not out of service. . . . And that it is not understood well what a woman ought to do. Can she be valued more?" Quoted from: <http://www.radiovaticana.va/proxy/tedesco/tedarchi/2013/Oktober13/ted12.10.13.htm>.

21. F. Kafka, Im Dom, in: *Der Proceß*, ed. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M., 2002) 270–304.

increasingly shining light behind the door, and at the end of his life, the gatekeeper will tell him that this was his door and that he could have walked through. Kafka's text has been interpreted in many different ways, and therefore it is irrelevant whether the pope himself or we, the women, wait by the door. The important thing is the light behind it shining brighter and brighter. With a view to the magisterial statements, the door to women's ordination is certainly closed, but it is not locked, and there is a light shining behind that door, inspired by a rich history, by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is exactly what the Second Vatican Council commemorated when it named evangelization as the primary mission of the church, and all its actions should be based on it (see LG 1). Fifty years after the council, Pope Francis stands for an *aggiornamento* of the council's reform movement in the spirit of the Gospel, supporting a lively commemoration of the spiritual and universal shifts initiated by the council.²²

When rereading the Vatican II documents, we must also commemorate the women who accompanied the council process, were appointed auditors in consultation processes (especially on the decree on the Apostolate of Lay People and the Pastoral Constitution) and contributed to the reception of the council on various levels: in the parishes, giving pastoral care to women, with their theological work, and as consultants to the bishops.²³ Women's ordination was one of the suggested themes for Vatican II, and at the council, open-minded bishops asked whether women should be granted equal access to ministries.²⁴ After the council, academic studies, mainly in the fields of canon law and biblical theology, saw the light and started a debate on women's ordination. *Inter Insigniores*, published in 1976, can certainly be considered as a direct response to the acceptance of women to ministry in member churches of the Anglican

22. See M. Eckholt, Der Papa-pastor. Lateinamerikanische Prägungen eines fünfjährigen Pontifikats, in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 236 (2018) 155–65.

23. See the most recent publication: R. Heyder, G. Muschiol, eds., *Katholikinnen und das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil* (Münster, 2018); see also the reports by contemporary witnesses compiled in the AGENDA publication: M. Eckholt, S. Wendel, eds., *Aggiornamento heute. Diversität als Horizont einer Theologie der Welt* (Ostfildern, 2012) 51–109.

24. E. Jung-Inglessis, Women at the Council. Spectators or Collaborators, in: *Catholic World* 200 (1965) 277–84, here 279f.; J. A. Komonchak, Unterwegs zu einer Ekklesiologie der Gemeinschaft, in: *Geschichte des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils (1959–1965)* vol. 4, ed. G. Alberigo, G. Wassilowsky (Mainz/Leuven, 2006) 1–108, esp. 22–31, here 24.

Communion, but at the same time it mirrored the discussion within the Catholic Church and in-depth theological studies on the subject.

Sister Mary Luke Tobin, President of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the US during the council, was appointed one of the first women auditors of the council by Paul VI in 1964 and served as advisor to the US Women's Ordination Conference after the council. Despite how things turned out, she continued to point out that with the paradigm shift in revelation theology and ecclesiological matters caused by Vatican II, the door to the house of the church had been opened and could not be shut again.²⁵ The following considerations are based on this statement of one of the brave women of the council and its aftermath. The vivid memory of the reform movement of Vatican II and the impulses the council gave for ecclesiology and the theology of ecclesiastical offices (as laid out in the second part of this article) place the question of the authority of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* in a wider context and, from a spiritual perspective, point to the fact that the light shines brightly behind the closed door and that it cannot be locked. This is why new debates are needed, and why today's women theologians refer back to the largely rejected theological and canonical studies on women's ordination as they were submitted since the time of the council by women like the canonist Ida Raming, who took up the atmosphere of change arising from the council. Such an approach to Vatican II, based on the spiritual depth of the council, calls for the realization of the radical transformation processes initiated by John XXIII and the council as well as for the necessity of dealing with misguided decisions and therefore of admitting guilt. The church, too, is continuously called to conversion and to follow the path of the poor Jesus (see LG 8). This spiritual dynamism is fundamental to the council documents and has accompanied the reception process of the council in the universal church. According to the Spanish Jesuit Santiago Madrigal, the pontificate of Francis stands for this kind of "mystagogical rereading" of the council.²⁶ The third section of this article, which looks

25. See C. E. McEnroy, *Guests in Their Own House. The Women of Vatican II* (New York, 1996) 270: Carmel McEnroy quotes the US-American Council auditor Mary Luke Tobin. See M. L. Tobin, *Hope Is an Open Door, Journeys in Faith* (Nashville, 1981).

26. See S. Madrigal, *El Concilio Vaticano II: Remembranza y actualización*, in: *Teología* 117 (2015) 131–54.

ahead rather than offers a conclusion, will therefore take a glance at Pope Francis's pastoral magisterium: how, in times of the various challenges the church faces in its mission to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to represent a "sign" of salvation for the people, he promotes the council's reform process driven by the Spirit of God by exploring different directions in order to be able to represent the kind of church of Jesus Christ that goes back to its origin—Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom and the testimony of the apostles, male and female. The question of women's rights, which John XXIII already in 1963 called a sign of the times in *Pacem in Terris*, is one of the directions taken. The church has always been a church that includes women, and therefore the magisterium cannot turn down the invitation to discuss the question of offices for women in the church with women and female theologians and to listen to and learn about new perspectives such as the gender perspective, new approaches to theological anthropology, and a new way to look at Mary. For this reason, the concluding idea will be whether the pope may be a Kafkaesque gatekeeper who points his confreres in the episcopates as well as male and female theologians and Catholics in general to the door through which we can in fact walk, for it is not locked but only closed, because he is aware of the light shining ever more brightly behind the door, arising from the depth of God's story and his Gospel.

2. The Score of the Council: Mission, Communication, and Sacramentality

The score of the council documents comprises the theological-ecclesiological foundations for the spiritual process of renewal and, subsequently, "structural changes" in the church, allowing it to live up to its mission of proclaiming the Gospel in accordance with the "signs of the times." In this respect, one needs to investigate the statements of the magisterium regarding church ministries for women in order to reevaluate to what extent they are binding. The concepts of *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* coined by the council are a reminder of the fact that faith is a dynamic process based on the profundity of the Gospel and Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God and implies a continuous conversion to the Gospel. This dynamic process accompanies the people of God on its way through time that is an integral part of what concerns people and the world. The council refers to the "signs of the times" marking the process

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