

Why and for Which Purpose Is There an Ordained Ministry In the Church? The Answer Provided by the Letter to the Ephesians

Michael Theobald, Germany

Abstract

Eph. 4, 7-16 is one of the fundamental New Testament texts on the ordained ministries in the Church. In the time of upheaval following the passing away of the first generation of Christians and the death of the Apostle Paul, this text answers the question of why there are any ordained ministries in a Church that initially understood herself as charismatic, what is the task of these ministries and whom they serve. This presentation interprets the text in outline and explains its contribution to a theology of Church ministry.

The Variety of Functions - The Deacons' Tasks in the Early Church

Esko Ryökäs, Finland

Abstract

One of the biggest problems we face when investigating the tasks of the deacons in the early Church is that we delineate the task with an all too high degree of certainty, losing sight of the fact that our assumptions are very hypothetical. There are several different views and therefore I address the critical question: what can we ultimately know? In my presentation, I will show the individual notes which exist on the matter as well as the formulations which attempt to sketch the tasks of the deacons as a whole. We will see a great diversity.

Why Does the Church Need a Sacrament of the Diaconate?

William T. Ditewig, USA

Abstract

The range of answers to the question posed in the title display the continuing confusion that exists in many segments of the Church today about the nature and role of the diaconate. In responding to the question, this paper offers a contemporary reflection on the renewed Order of Deacons as an outward sign of God's inward grace of *diakonia*. In particular, it will draw upon some of the classic insights on the diaconate of St. Paul VI and St. John Paul II in light of the current state of the Church. Both of these popes stressed the sacramentality of the diaconate and their teaching remains helpful today. One important text from St. John Paul II is perhaps largely unknown outside the United States, since it was an address given to the deacons of the United States during his apostolic visit to Detroit in 1987. Upon this foundation from the papal magisterium, the presentation will consider the work of contemporary theologians such as John J. Collins of Australia and others. Finally, we will conclude with certain recommendations for future efforts in formation, catechesis, religious education and pastoral practice.

Common and ministerial priesthood: Where should one place the diaconate?

Santiago del Cura Elena, Spain

Abstract

By means of this presentation, we intend to provide assistance in the evaluation of the issue whether applying “priestly” categories to the diaconate finds theological justification or it is more appropriate to adhere to a way of understanding it with “ministerial” categories. To put it differently, how should one understand its integration in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In this regard, one must take into account that both the question and the approach correspond to a perspective that is unique to the Catholic Church and is not shared by the Protestant understanding of the ecclesial ministry. The presentation starts with some precisions as to the terminology used, situating the diaconate within the baptismal priesthood as original reference and subsequently tackle its understanding as a sacramental reality different from Baptism. This makes it necessary to address the fundamental lines of the theological debate surrounding the application to the diaconate of “priestly” categories commonly used in the case of the episcopate and presbyterate. Hence some brief references to the history of theology, but giving more space to contemporary ideas in the theology of the diaconate. And, with regard to the path taken by the most recent magisterial and canonical intervention in the Catholic Church (CCE, CIC) some theological and ecclesial implication of the debate will be discussed: unity of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the outline of the three *munera*, the possibilities of a sacramental diaconate for women.

The Permanent Diaconate in Brazil and its Pastoral Implications

Valburga Schmiedt Streck, Brasil

Abstract

This text reflects on the ministry of the Permanent Diaconate in Brazil, using data coming from bibliographic research, reports, a questionnaire and interviews with deacons of different regions. Comments have been made to the effect that the Roman Catholic Church, for centuries the largest religious denomination in the country, will be outnumbered in a few years by the Evangelical Pentecostal Churches. Also being taken into consideration is the current polarization in the Brazilian society, affecting all its levels, be it families, Churches, workplace or conflicts mainly taking place in the social media. The permanent Diaconate, a well-organized ministry which serves all the regions of the National Council of Bishops is, according to the data available, also affected by all the changes brought about by this context. From the different voices of the deacons, one can feel their enthusiasm about working for the Church and being “the voice of the Church for the people” and the “voice of the people for the Church”, as well as their commitment in carrying out their ministry. Different understandings of and opinions on several issues are reflected in the study. The text concludes with the question about the role of Practical Theology or Pastoral Theology in the critical reflection on this ministry.

Young and Fresh: The Diaconate in Lithuania – and Eastern Europe?

Algirdas Jurevičius, Lithuania

Abstract

How does the diaconate develop in the post-Soviet space? We present this taking Lithuania as an example. Four years ago, the first permanent deacons were ordained in Lithuania. But in the neighbouring countries, the development of the diaconate looks different. Why have things gone differently there? The lecture seeks to offer some answers. The discussion which took place during the Amazon Synod shows us that the specific pastoral needs of the various Christian communities lead us to a broader understanding of the diaconate. This could be a good impulse for the Catholic Church in Central and Eastern Europe: to give greater importance to the permanent diaconate and to rethink its position.

The diaconate in the Orthodox Church

Petros Vassiliadis, Greece

Abstract

The significance of the diaconate for the diaconal ministry and witness of the Church. The paramount importance of the biblical evidence. The example and legacy of Jesus of Nazareth, who came to serve and not to be served (Gospels). The profound meaning of the selection of the 7 deacons in the Early Church (Acts), and the success of Jesus' movement in the Roman Empire (Apologists). The Role of the order of the Diaconate in the Pre-Constantinian era. The liturgical and pastoral role of (male and female) diaconate in the Eastern Orthodox Church during the first millennium. The gradual decline of the diaconal ministry in the Church of Christ, especial of the female diaconate. The revival of the diaconal dimension of the Christian faith in the ecumenical era. Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew and their predecessors. The rediscovery of the permanent diaconate in the life of the Church. And the importance of the re-institution of the order of deaconess as a theological, canonical and especially moral issue. The recent developments in the Orthodox Church with regard to the revival (in both mission and theology) of the female diaconate and the importance of an Orthodox-Catholic cooperation for the future of Christianity and its mission in a challenging landscape.

Between Stopgap and Fill-in

Results of the "Pro Diakonia in the German-Speaking Countries" research project

Norbert Hark, Germany

Abstract

Within the framework of a qualitative empiric research on permanent deacons in a civilian profession in the German-speaking countries, no clear functional self- concept of the permanent deacons could be obtained. Deacons see themselves as commissioned by God and sent to the people through their ordination. They seek intensive encounters, between equals,

mostly in the context of their parish community. With the keyword „In the midst of people”, they link their quest for an intensive pastoral relationship to their ecclesial mission. However, they do not commit to any specific activities or functions, but understand their mission as being in function of the concrete situation at hand. When necessary, they fill in gaps in the pastoral action of the Church with their personal charism. Such a self-concept is not oriented towards a proprium which would differentiate them from other providers of spiritual care, but rather towards the model of Jesus asking the blind man: “What do you want me to do for you?” (Lk. 18, 41).

• **What is at stake in the debate on women deacons?**

Sara Butler, USA

Abstract

What is at stake is, first, the unity of the sacrament of Holy Orders, and, beyond that, its identity as a sacrament, instituted by Christ, that pertains to the Church’s constitution. Second, what is at stake is the spiritual equality of women and the value of their distinctive ministries in the Church. The debate itself calls attention to distinctive Catholic elements of the Tradition that we need to reclaim without compromise. This presentation will take into account and defend the position Pope Francis takes in *Querida Amazonia*.

Representing “Christus diakonos”. A plea for the sacramental diaconate for women

Margit Eckholt, Germany

Abstract

• Since the beginning of the new millennium, the debate on the diaconate for women has resumed in the Catholic Church. In the local Church in Germany, Catholic women’s leagues as well as the Central Committee of German Catholics are in favour of the diaconate for women and the “Diaconate for Women” Network forms women who feel this vocation and who are already working in diaconal services, so that they may exercise the ministry of deacon. My presentation introduces a plea for the sacramental diaconate to be conferred on women; this plea is made against the background of the renewal of sacramental theology and of the theology of ministries brought about by the Second Vatican Council and in response to the current pastoral challenges. Men and women are working the fields of diakonia and charity in the same way, strengthening the profile of the diaconal Church and representing “Christus diakonos”. The work of the Rome commission on the diaconate for women is not yet finished, in this sense, but it is necessary, in view of the pastoral challenges faced by the Church worldwide to work together as theologians - networking internationally – on the diaconate for women, thereby opening for the Church perspectives for the future.

“Does a Diaconal Church in Africa need the diaconate?”

Charles Palmer-Buckle, Ghana

My answer is emphatically YES! In Africa today, what is generally prevalent is the temporary or transitional diaconate; in transition to the Holy Priesthood in the Latin rite Church. The training and acceptance of the Order of Permanent Diaconate, (also referred to as Married Deacons, even though not synonymous), is in just a handful of countries. Whereas in Africa candidates preparing for the Holy Priesthood abound and growing steadily everywhere, information on permanent or married deacons is that they are hardly encouraged. The reasons range from little understanding of this *sacramental* ministry through fears of cultivating a *second class* priesthood to the lack of institutional structures, personnel and resources for training and maintaining permanent/married deacons and their families, to prospective candidates for the Holy Priesthood stopping short of embracing the sacrificial *Christ-like* life of celibate chastity highly cherished in the Latin Church over the centuries. Nevertheless, faced with the phenomenal growth of the faithful in Africa today, the *priest-faithful ratio* calls for renewed interest and nurturing of the Sacred Order of the Permanent Diaconate. After over five decades from Vatican II (see Ad Gentes 16), the question is “Africa, quo vadis?”

The Countenance of the Church in the Everyday life of People?

The Diaconate in a Diaconal Church – Process Observations on an International Symposium
Klaus Kießling, Germany

Abstract

On the program of this international symposium, there are diverse lectures and discussions on the theology of the diaconate. One can expect numerous insights in scientific, regional and Universal Church-wide developments. My presentation does not attempt to add anything to the lectures, but rather build a bridge – from the lectures previously heard to the roundtable discussion which would follow. In my presentation I will lay before the participants the process observations which I will collect over the days of the symposium – with the idea that such feedback and synthesis could be conducive to our outlining together possible future opportunities and challenges for the diaconate in a diaconal Church.