Spirituality



by NCR Staff

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On April 8, Pope Francis announced he had created a new commission to study the ordaining of women as deacons in the Catholic Church. This is the second commission on the topic under Francis, however several members of this new commission seem to be opposed to women deacons. This revelation sparked a response from NCR columnist Jamie Manson, who writes: "By selecting these members for the commission, Francis has effectively killed the possibility of any real progress for women in the church." Relatedly, St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk wrote a column entitled "Women demonstrate what the priesthood of Jesus truly means,"

of which NCR executive editor Tom Roberts mentions in his last NCR Connections column.

From what I could read, the argument is not whether there were women deacons, or whether there ought to be deaconesses, rather if the "rites" were different for men and women. As Catherine Brown Tkacz argues, the rites were ontologically different: "Examination of the ordination rites for deacons and deaconesses shows them to be ontologically different."



Rites are symbolic human constructs. There is no doubt men and women are equal as beings, that God created them both and loves them both. All else becomes human construct. Women were ordained deaconesses, as Tkacz argues, though their role "waned" following the development of infant baptism. While in effect they became the first Eucharistic ministers, they were ordained for another larger purpose.

Further, one has to dig to the depths of some human philosophical construct to meander through verbiage and find the missing adjective to achieve one's goal of finding some nuanced possible argument against women deaconesses.

In my opinion, the inability to move past the fallacious argument that women cannot be deaconesses is also a human construct of blindness.

DAVE MURRAY

Cedarville, Michigan

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Much of St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk's "Women demonstrate what the priesthood of Jesus truly means" rings true. (Except the sentence that avers that there was/is nothing that can be done about president bloviator).

The "lockdown" and hiatus on liturgical observance feeds my preoccupation with "incarnation." Like Schenk, I am more convinced (as our doctrine states) that "sacraments are outward signs." The balance between "instituted by Christ to give grace" or by an institution to retain subservience is up for grabs.

However we interpret the "supper," it is reprehensible to deny the significance that he chose womb as his entry into creation, male followed. Jesus is no more bound by bread and wine than he was by tomb. Sacramental subservience in our tradition sacrifices incarnation upon the altar of self-interest. The reality that Jesus lives is profoundly diminished by burying it in the over-emphasis on "the real presence," in a building, by male confection. The real "real presence" is Christ incarnate. Nowhere is the teaching (message) of Christ incarnate more vividly demonstrated than in the multilayered immersion in woman, through woman and with women. The creator missioned the word to humanity in conception, gestation, birth and nurturing by woman.

If, as church yells so superficially, if, Mary is the new Eve, our Mother, then acknowledge with profound admission that Mary is priest, ordained; the feminine is called.

DENNIS MacDONALD

Bedford, Nova Scotia

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Our dear blessed mother had to wait nine months for the God's word to be fulfilled. St. Monica waited 29 years for her prayers to be answered. These women had infinite faith and patience for their prayers to be answered.

Unfortunately, I do not have a lifelong enough to see my prayers for women to receive their rightful place in the church answered.

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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I am writing to commend St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk for her very thought-provoking column. I too believe that now is the time for the people of God (the church) to take seriously their responsibilities as baptized Christians.

Perhaps now is the time to reimagine what and how our church will be after this pandemic and its accompanying sequestering. We can look back to the time of the Apostles to see one such model — home churches. We can look back to the 1970s for another model — the base communities of Latin America.

If we truly believe Jesus' words that he is with us when two or three are gathered in his name, then the possibilities are wide open. It may be many months or longer before we can gather as large faith communities to celebrate liturgy as we have in the past. Let us not lose this opportunity to claim our baptismal rights and duties.

SUSAN FULLAM

Greensboro, North Carolina

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In his final letter as executive editor, Tom Roberts mentioned a voice that is often featured prominently in the paper, St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk. Like many Catholics, Schenk had commented on the women — and men — who have used the Kairos time of the pandemic to provide life-giving liturgies online to those left cold by a livestreamed service of a lone priest celebrating Mass to an emptied church.

Then Roberts dropped what was for me, a bomb, when he proceeded to write that her article — and his — was not about women's ordination because we don't need "gender inclusive clericalism." Then he left his fear hanging there for serious

Catholics to read and perhaps internalize. If women were ordained, God forbid, they would act just like the men. Is that really all Roberts can say about the possibility of women priests?

There is another model of priesthood that Roberts has failed to examine in his ill-founded prediction. Roman Catholic Women Priests have been ordaining women to the priesthood for the last 18 years. While hardly perfect, RCWP has tried to avoid the many pitfalls of clericalism by adhering as closely as possible to the priesthood of all believers where hierarchy and eminence of degree have little to no meaning.

I would cordially invite Roberts to worship with us (via Zoom, unfortunately) at the Community of St. Mary Magdalene. He would find clericalism conspicuously absent in both ritual and priestly practices.

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