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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Summary:

♢ Summary of the Study Commission on the Women's Diaconate.

To His Holiness

Leo XIV

Dear Holy Father,

I am addressing you because, as is well known, Pope Francis has referred to himself the question of the possible access of women to the diaconate: for this reason, keeping in mind the work done by the various Commissions appointed to study this topic, I would like to submit to you a brief summary of some thematic nuclei in the hope that they may be of help to you in your discernment.

Relying on historical research, the first Commission already stated, "The Church has at various times, in various places and in various forms recognized the title of deacon/diaconess referring to women while attributing to it a non-unique meaning."[1]. This statement is in line with another proposition made by the International Theological Commission: "It seems evident that this ministry was not intended as the simple female equivalent of the male diaconate."[2].

The second Commission, which I chaired, came unanimously-in its first Session (2021)-to elaborate the following thesis (No. 3): "In the present state of historical research and of our knowledge of the biblical and patristic evidence, it can reasonably be said that the female diaconate, which developed unevenly in different parts of the Church, was not understood as the mere female equivalent of the male diaconate and does not seem to have clothed itself with a sacramental character."[3].

We know, however, that the purely historical perspective does not allow us to arrive at any definitive certainty. Ultimately, the issue must be decided on the doctrinal level (cf. Benedict XVI, Letter for the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the CTI).

Therefore, issues concerning the diaconal ordination of women remain open to further theological and pastoral investigation, holding firm to the principle of "communio hierarchica" that

assigns the final decision on these issues to the Magisterium of the Church, as an authoritative response to questions present in some sectors of the People of God.

I clarify that the following considerations are inevitably incomplete and fragmentary with respect to the documentation produced by the Commission I chaired.

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[1] Text prepared by the first Commission as a whole.

[2] INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *II Diaconate. Evolution and Prospects* (2002), II, 4.

[3] The same Commission points out, "Although some testimonies, considered in isolation, lead one to think that the female diaconate had sacramental traits at some times and in some places, when one evaluates the sources as a whole, according to the hermeneutical criterion of the organic unity of Tradition, one concludes that, in general, the female diaconate was conceived as a ministry *sui generis*. This ministry - unlike the episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate conferred on men - is not in the line of apostolic succession. In its time, such a female diaconate testified to the Church's ability to respond to certain pastoral challenges, within societies characterized by a strict separation of the sexes": Second Session July 11-16, 2022, no. 3.

However, they can represent cognitive "coordinates" aimed at fostering an overall view of the argumentative terrain on which we have advanced.

By a shared methodological choice, the Commission Members were called upon, at the end of their dialogical interaction, to express, through a vote, their summary opinion on the thematic core that had been debated.

In schematic form, the result of the vote taken on thesis No. 3 of the Second Session (mentioned on the previous page) is given.

Number Thesis	**Results**		
	Placet	***Non Placet***	***White***
3	**7**	**0**	**1**

In the year 2021, theological discussion led to the following thesis:

"The systematic study on the diaconate, within the framework of the theology of the Sacrament of Orders, raises questions about the compatibility of women's diaconal ordination with the Catholic doctrine of ordained ministry."[4]

The vote on this sentence was unanimous:

Thesis Number	**Results**		
	Yes	***No***	***White***
4	**10**	**0**	**0**

Subsequently, the Commission voted on the following assertions:

5A "The undersigned does not favor the establishment in the Church of the female diaconate understood as the third degree of Holy Orders."[5].

5B "The undersigned does not appear at this time to favor the institution in the Church of the female diaconate understood as the third degree of Holy Orders. This assessment is based on the historical and theological elements acquired to date, without excluding later developments on this issue."[6].

5C "The undersigned is in favor of the institution in the Church today of the female diaconate understood as the third degree of Holy Orders."[7].

[4] First Session September 13 to 18, 2021, No. 4.
[5] First Session from September 13 to 18, 2021, No. 5/A.
[6]First Session from September 13 to 18, 2021, No. 5/B.
[7]First Session from September 13 to 18, 2021, No. 5/C.

The results of the voting are as follows:

Number Theses	**Results**		
	Yes	***No***	***White***
5A	**4**	**5**	**1**
5 **5B**	**4**	**5**	**1**
5C	**2**	**6**	**2**

The Commission also discussed about the possibility of establishing possible new ministries, and voted unanimously on the following thesis (No. 7):

"The implementation of such established ministries could contribute to the synergy between men and women. Their implementation would require the development of appropriate means of formation (theological, practical, mystagogical) and support."[8].

Number Theses	**Results**		
	Yes	***No***	***White***
7	**10**	**0**	**0**

In the second Session, held in July 2022, attempting to arrive at a synergistic formulation, the following thesis was voted:

"The *status quaestionis* around historical research and theological inquiry, considered in their mutual implications, excludes the possibility of proceeding in the direction of the admission of women to the diaconate understood as a degree of the Sacrament of Orders. In the light of Sacred Scripture, Tradition and the ecclesiastical Magisterium, this assessment is strong, although it does not allow to date to make a definitive judgment, as in the case of priestly ordination."[9]

Thesis Number	**Results**		
	Placet	***Non Placet***	***White***
5	**7**	**1**	**0**

[8]First Session from September 13 to 18, 2021, No. 7.
[9]Second Session from July 11 to 16, 2022, No. 5.

In the last Session, held in February 2025, the Commission had received a substantial and significant amount of written material for analysis on the issue of the female diaconate, after, at the instance of the Synod, anyone who wished to do so was allowed to send in his or her own contribution. Although there were many contributions that flowed in, there were only twenty-two individuals or groups who had sent in their papers and they represented few countries. As a result, although the material was plentiful and in some cases skillfully argued, it could not be considered as the voice of the Synod let alone the People of God as a whole.

Moreover, the relevant problematic nature of the topic and the absence of sufficient consensus are also attested by the preparatory documents of the Synod on Synodality. In fact, in them it is stated, for example, that "some consider that this step [ordination of deaconesses] would be unacceptable, as it would be in discontinuity with Tradition"[10]; or: "...dangerous anthropological confusion, by accepting which the Church would align itself with the spirit of the times."[11]It should also be noted that some Churches are firmly opposed to this perspective. We are told that in the final document of the Synod, proposition 60 on the study of the possibility of the female diaconate was the one that received the most votes against it (97 No).

Favorable contributions on the ordained diaconate of women leverage ideations concerning issues of theological anthropology. These are beliefs that often conflict with the Tradition of the Catholic (and Orthodox) Church to admit only baptized men to the Sacrament of Orders.

Theological and cultural currents that agree with the openness to the female diaconate argue that these positions of Tradition seem to contradict:

- the equal status of "male" and "female" as the image of God (Gen. 1:27)
- the equal dignity of both genders, based on this biblical fact
- the statement of faith that: "there is no longer Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, for you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28)
- social development that provides for equal access, for both genders, in all institutional and operational functions (including at the apex level) of political and administrative life in which the civil community is divided.

For these reasons, many petitions not only call for the admission of women to the sacrament of the diaconate, but also argue that the other degrees of Holy Orders (presbyterate and episcopate) should also be made accessible to women. The argument resting on the masculinity of Jesus Christ is seen as a sexist and narrow view, leading to discrimination against women. According to such views, *repraesentatio Christi* should no longer be tied to gender categories, but focus on the ministerial mediation of salvation through men and women.

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[10]Summary Report of the First Synodal Session (10/28/23), no. 9.
[11]Ibid.

From this perspective, since ordination to the diaconate is not *ad sacerdotium* but *ad ministerium* (LG 29), the exclusion of women would not seem justified, since women are also capable of representing Christ as *diakonos*[12].

In the documentation that arrived, read carefully, many women described their work for the Church, often lived with great dedication, as if it were a sufficient criterion for ordination to the diaconate. Others spoke of a strong "feeling" of being called, as if it were the proof needed to assure the Church of the validity of their vocation and demand that this conviction be accepted. Many were already performing diaconal functions, especially in communities without a priest, and felt that they were "deserving" to receive ordination, having, in some way, acquired the right to do so. Others spoke simply of wanting ordination as a sign of visibility, authority, respect, support and, above all, equality[13].

In a very different line of thought, in the development of the third Session, the following thesis was advanced:

"The masculinity of Christ, and therefore the masculinity of those who receive Holy Orders, is not accidental, but an integral part of sacramental identity, preserving the divine order of salvation in Christ. To alter this reality would not be a mere adjustment of ministry but a rupture of the nuptial meaning of salvation."

The above paragraph, had the following outcome in the Commission votes:

- 5 out of 10 Members felt it should be confirmed as is;
- 5 out of 10 Members felt it should be deleted.

The Commission, in this last Session, discussed with special interest another thesis:

"In this regard, it is appropriate today to expand women's access to ministries instituted for the service of the community. Pope Francis' motu proprio *Spiritus Domini* and *Antiquum ministerium*, while confirming what was expressed in St. John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, go in this direction. It is now up to the discernment of pastors to assess what additional ministries can be introduced for the concrete needs of the Church of our time, thus also ensuring an adequate ecclesial recognition of the diakonia of the baptized, especially women. This recognition will prove a prophetic sign especially where women still suffer situations of gender discrimination."

[12]Cf. Final Document of the Commission on the Diaconate to Women, Feb. 07, 2025.
[13]Cf. Final Document of the Commission on the Diaconate to Women, 07 February 2025.

The outcome of the vote is as follows:

Preamble	**Results**		
	Placet	***Non Placet***	***White***
Diaconia e Diaconate	**9**	**1**	**0**

Final Considerations

I add a personal comment after having carefully informed myself (also thanks to the contribution of my Co-workers) on the main conceptual trends emerging in the massive material as well as in the texts drafted by the different Commissions.

The totality of the documentation, composed by the different Commissions that followed, shows that there is an intense theoretical and existential dialectic between two theological orientations (the results of some of the Commissions' votes also manifest this). One of them insists on the assertion that the ordination of deacon is "*ad ministerium*,*"* and is not "*ad sacerdotium*": this factor would open the way toward the ordination of deaconesses. The other, on the other hand, insists on the unity of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, together with the spousal significance of the three degrees that constitute it, and rejects the hypothesis of the female diaconate: he also points out that if the admission of women to the first degree of the Order were approved, the exclusion from the others would be inexplicable.

The pronouncements of these theological "schools" in antithesis, and the lack of convergence on fundamental doctrinal and pastoral polarities, motivates, in my opinion, the maintenance of a prudential evaluative line on the issue of the diaconate to women; a choice to be flanked with "global range" investigations, always better "equipped," and leaning, with far-sighted wisdom, to probe these ecclesial horizons.

In this context, it appears indispensable, as a precondition for subsequent discernments, to encourage a rigorous and broadened critical examination conducted on the side of the "diaconate itself," that is, on its sacramental "identity" and its ecclesial "mission," clarifying certain "structural" and pastoral aspects that are currently not entirely defined. In this "diakonia to truth," the Church must act with evangelical "parresia," but also with due evaluative freedom and discursive transparency.

It should also be noted that in many dioceses around the world the ministry of the diaconate does not exist, and on entire Continents this sacramental institution is almost absent. Where it is operating, the activities of deacons not infrequently coincide with roles proper to lay ministries or ministers in the liturgy, raising questions in the People of God about the specific meaning of their ordination.

It should also be emphasized that the various Commissions were unanimous in pointing out the need to dilate the "communal spaces" so that women can express adequate participation and co-responsibility in the decision-making ganglia of the Church, including through the creation of new lay ministries.

At the end of these Considerations, I think it is important to note that the Commission insisted on the urgency of valuing "baptismal diakonia" as the foundation of any ecclesial ministry.

Within this framework, the "Marian dimension," as the soul of any "diakonia," in the Church and in Humanity, must be better and better understood and developed.

Signing with me these sheets is Msgr. Denis Dupont-Fauville, who served, with dedication and competence, as Secretary of the Commission.

Hoping to have offered a useful contribution, I greet you with filial devotion, reconfirming my full unity of mind and heart with the Successor of Peter.

With these feelings of deep esteem and complete pastoral "closeness," I ask for your paternal blessing, assuring you with gratitude of my prayers.

Rome, September 18, 2025

In the Lord Joseph

Card. Petrocchi

President

Msgr. Denis Dupont-Fauville
Secretary

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