

A PRESENTATION OF CANONICAL SOURCES
(7TH TO 17TH CENTURIES)
ON THE *ORDO AD DIACONAM FACIENDAM
SEU CONSACRANDAM*

UNA PRESENTAZIONE DELLE FONTI CANONICHE
(SECOLI VII-XVII) DELL'*ORDO AD DIACONAM
FACIENDAM SEU CONSACRANDAM*

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this article is to introduce the evolution of the *Ordo ad diaconam faciendam seu consacrandam* in the Latin Church from the 7th to the 17th centuries. The terms “*ordinatio*” and “*ordinare*” in sources from the 12th century took on a sacramental dimension. Roger Gryson stated that women in antiquity and the Middle Ages were ordained as deaconesses. Aimé G. Martimort rejected this thesis. Deaconesses were a group of women associated with monasticism, consecrated virgins and other specific forms of life in the Latin Church. In medieval canonical sources, the ordination of deaconesses had no sacramental value from the point of view of canon law.

KEYWORDS: Deaconesses, Women Deacon, Ordination, Consecration, Blessing.

SUMMARY: Introduction. – 1. The «*Status quaestionis*». – 2. The term «*ordo*». – 3. The term «*diacona-diaconissa*». – 4. Deaconesses in the City-Church of Rome. – 5.

RIASSUNTO: L’obiettivo di questo articolo è d’introdurre l’evoluzione dell’*Ordo ad diaconam faciendam seu consacrandam* nella Chiesa latina dal VII al XVII secolo. I termini *ordinatio* e *ordinare* nelle fonti del XII secolo hanno assunto una dimensione sacramentale. Roger Gryson affermava che nell’antichità e nel Medioevo le donne venivano ordinate diaconesse mediante l’imposizione delle mani. Aimé G. Martimort respinse questa tesi. Le diaconesse erano un gruppo di donne associate al monachesimo, alle vergini consacrate e ad altre forme specifiche di vita nella Chiesa latina. Nelle fonti canoniche medievali, l’ordinazione delle diaconesse non aveva alcun valore sacramentale dal punto di vista di diritto canonico.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Diaconesse, ordinazione, consacrazione, benedizione.

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The Romano-Germanic Pontifical of the 10th century. – 6. Gratian, The Roman Pontifical of the 12th century. – 7. The Pontifical of William Durand. – 8. The rebirth of the diaconal role in female monasticism. – 9. The Case of the Profession of Nuns. – Conclusion. – Summary.

INTRODUCTION

THE existence of deaconesses in Medieval law is attested to by sources originating in the culture of the Latin and Greek Churches. The issues related to the institution of deaconesses are still an object of theological debate in Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The objective of this article is to introduce the evolution of the ordination of deaconesses in the Latin Church from the 7th to the 17th centuries. Research will include liturgical texts and the legislation of the councils and local synods of the Latin Church.

The author will focus on the norms of canon law which, though no longer in power, still influence historical changes in canon law. The observed causal relationships confirm the Latin adage: “*nullum est iam dictum, quod non sit dictum prius*”.

A historian of canon law is a researcher of the past who tries to describe and explain the history of canonical norms that were once in force. The author, in order to avoid ahistoricity, will analyze not only the norms themselves, but also the practice expressed in the synodal law in accordance with the statement “*lex orandi, lex credendi*”. Historical and legal studies, among others, aim to search the past for elements that permit us to predict the future of canon law. Robert F. Taft, a well-known researcher of liturgical sources in Rome, wrote that the study of the tradition is not so much about collecting data, but rather observing the relationships between elements, as to organize them as intelligible intellectual models. In context of research conducted here, it should be emphasized that a historian of canon law is not so much a researcher of the past, but rather of tradition, which is a vision of the past born in the present. A historian of canon law differs from a historian of theological ideas in that he does not treat the ordination of deaconesses in the Latin Church as “ordination”, because, as it will be demonstrated below, only in the 12th century were the theological and canonical criteria for Holy Orders formulated. On the margins of methodological remarks, it should be noted that the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* will be cited according to Emil A. Friedberg.

1. THE «STATUS QUÆSTIONIS»

There seems to have been some dispute among historians and canonists as to whether or not (for over half of Christian history) women were ordained similarly to men. But if this matter were so obvious, why is it that so many

theologians, canonists and even some historians have tenaciously continued to assert that women were never “really” ordained? A brief review of writers on the subject is illuminating. Early researchers on the ordination of deaconesses that should be mentioned are, for example: Ioannes Morinus and Ioannes Pinius. Ioannes Morinus produced a monumental collection of ordination rites in Greek, Latin and Syriac in 1655, and concluded that, as the same rites were used for deacons and deaconesses in most ancient Greek rites, then deaconesses were indeed ordained. Ioannes Pinius wrote an early tract on deaconesses as an appendix to the 1746 volume of *Acta Sanctorum*. He did not treat the ordination of deaconesses in the strict or sacramental sense of the word, but according to that sense which might be ceremonial or improper.

Josephine Mayer, Adolf Karlsbach, and Santiago Giner Sempere’s writings in the early 20th century determined that ordination was a term loosely used in the early Church, and so did not, and indeed could not, refer to full sacramental ordination. Marie-Joséphe Aubert supported this position, quoting Yves Congar’s hypothesis that, in antiquity, there was an “order” of the female diaconate.

Recently, Moria Scimmi has extensively presented a bibliography of the studies of the 20th century about deaconesses. Of course, in our study, we cannot omit the fundamental research of Roger Gryson and Aimé G. Martimort. The most complete early study of deaconesses from this period was Adolf Kalsbach’s, which stated that from the second half of the 4th century, women were not considered to be ordained. He insisted that ordination in the past needed to be judged as valid on its own terms. According to Robert Gryson, deaconesses in Christian antiquity participated in the diaconate “*sensu stricto*”. On the other hand, contemporary scholar Aimé G. Martimort concluded that both sexes were ordained as deacons but only men served at the altar and continued on to the priesthood.

In 1997, Hans Jorissen and Peter Hünemann summarized the arguments for and against the ordination of deaconesses. More recently, in his *Priesthood and the Diaconate*, Gerhard L. Müller argued from a theological position against the validity of past ordinations of women as deaconesses. According to him, the Church has determined that the three offices of bishop, priest and deacon constitute a sacramental unity, and hence are significantly different from any other function in the Church.

Modern Orthodox theologians opposed to the ordination of women take a similar position on the validity of the ordination of deaconesses in the past. According to Kyriaki Fitzgerald and Valarie Karras, the diaconate is part of a broader priesthood made up of the three orders of bishop, priest, and deacon.

On the other hand, such researchers as, for example, Dirk Ansorge, Joseph Ysebaert, John Wijngaards and Phyllis Zagano, based on Robert Gryson’s

analysis, argued that the ordinations of deaconesses in the past were valid because they contain the same liturgical elements as in those of men.

Two historians – Gary Macy and John H. Martin – researched the phenomenon of deaconesses in the Middle Ages. They demonstrated that ordination in the early Middle Ages referred to any ceremony by which a person moved into a new role or ministry in the Church.

The ordination of deaconesses in the Middle Ages became the object of scientific research in liturgy, which recently resulted in the publication of a dissertation by José-Juan Fresnillo Ahijón in Madrid in 2016, containing a rich bibliography. Ida Ramming made a legal analysis of the phenomenon of deaconesses in *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, in particular in the *Decretum Gratiani*. Recently, Samuel Klumpenhouwer reported a discussion from the 12th and 13th centuries about deaconesses in sources from medieval *pastoralia*.

In this discussion, the Medieval liturgical sources will be analyzed in the context of the canonical discipline.

2. THE TERM «ORDO»

To explain the terminology, the etymological origin of the term “*ordo*” should be clarified. The “*ordo*” was used in ancient Rome to describe colleges or definite social classes (“*ordo clarissimus*”). The “*ordinatio*” coming from the term “*ordo*” was a technical term used in secular Rome to appoint officials who were admitted into an *ordo* or status separate from the “*plebs*”. Tertullian († after 225) was the first Christian writer to say: “*differentiam inter ordinem et plebem constituit ecclesiae auctoritas*”, introducing the secular Roman term “*ordinatio*” into Christian literature. Tertullian is the originator of the analogy between the relationship of the “*ordo*” and the people of the city of Rome to the relationship of the clergy with God. Studies have not shown that the term “*ordo*” was used in Christian literature before 313. Tertullian, according to Pierre van Beneden, used it to indicate the following: a list or succession of bishops, the hierarchy; the various ecclesiastical classes; and the singular order of priests, widows or virgins.

Saint Jerome († 419), in his commentary on Isaiah, used the Greek term “*χειροτονία*” to designate the ordination of a cleric; a bishop, on the other hand, was designated as blessed or consecrated.

The term “*ordo*” in Medieval Latin was understood, among other things, as: “government”, “rule”, “status”, “order”, “assemblage”, “holy orders”, and “species”. In liturgical books, the term “*ordo*” was used to designate “a liturgical rite” “ordination”, “sacrament” or “dignity”, through which clergy obtained access to Church functions.

One of the first treatises on the orders of Church hierarchy was the *De septem ordinibus Ecclesiae* (5th-7th centuries), which significantly influenced

later theologians and canonists. In the Augustinian and Pseudo-Dionysian ideals, Hugh of Saint Victor († 1141) in the treatise *De sacramentis christianis fidei* defined the concept of the sacrament as the “*sacraereisignum*”. Hugh of Saint Victor, among the “*sacramenta praeparationis*”, also mentioned ordination. According to him, the sacrament of Holy Orders is: “*spiritualis potestas in clero ordinatur habens gradus et ordines dignitatum diferentes*”. Peter Lombard († 1160), the intellectual successor of Hugh of Saint Victor, clarified that the sacrament and the seven ecclesiastical orders correspond to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, he did not specify the correlation between the individual gifts and the orders. He elaborated on the concept of ordination: doorkeeper (“*ostarius*”), reader (“*lector*”), exorcist (“*exorcista*”), acolyte (“*acolythus*”), subdeacon (“*subdiaconus*”), deacon (“*diaconus*”), and priest (“*presbyter*”). The concept of the sacrament and the seven orders of the sacrament of Holy Orders was subsequently systematized by the Great Scholastics. As a consequence, Hugh of Saint Victor and Peter Lombard distinguished between the “*ordo*” and the “*dignitas*” and therefore made a distinction between ordination (from the door-keeper to the presbyter) and dignity (episcopate and archdeaconate). The concept of the term “*ordo*” in the *Decretum Gratiani* and *Decretales* of Pope Gregory IX is fundamentally limited to the meaning of Holy Orders.

3. THE TERM «DIACONA-DIACONISSA»

The origin of the women’s diaconate remain unexplained. The first information about the “*διακόνισσα*” is found in the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans (16:1). The bishops of the Syriac Apostolic Church in the 4th century ordained deaconess by the laying on of hands, which is attested to by the *Apostolic Constitutions*. The presence of deaconesses in the Latin Church is confirmed in Gaul and Italy.

The 325 Council of Nicea’s can. 19, related to, among others, the canonical regulation of the status of those who left the sect of Paul of Samosata († after 272), and in relation to deaconesses used the term “*χειροτεσία*”. The Council of Chalcedonia in 451 in can. 15 forbade ordaining (“*χειροτονεσθαι*”) women as deaconesses before they reached forty years of age.

The “*diacona*”, “*diaconissa*”, “*presbytera*”, “*presbiteria*”, “*presbyterissa*” (diminutive), “*episcopa*”, “*episcopia*” and “*archiepiscopa*” were rather used to indicate the mother or wife of a church official. Deaconesses and presbyteresses, as the wives of bishops and presbyters, were present in Rome since the pontificate of Pope Siricius († 399), who unsuccessfully attempted to impose the law of celibacy on higher clergy. Only in Rome was this attempt to introduce celibacy successful.

However, Pope Gelasius I († 496) disapproved of the liturgical service at

the altar by ecclesiastical women in the southern Italian regions of Campania, Calabria and Sicily. Some researchers, for example Giorgio Otranto, write that in this case his disapproval could probably have referred to the priesthood of women.

The conciliar legislation of the Latin Church opposed the custom of ordaining women as deaconesses: can. 25 (26) in Orange (441), can. 4 in Vannes (465), can. 21 in Epaone (517), can. 20 (19) in Tours II (567), and can. 73 in Worms (868).

By contrast, in the Eastern Church, the institution of the deaconess in the first millennium was known. Therefore, for example, the synod at Trullo in 692 in can. 40 forbade the ordination of women over the age of forty as deaconesses. The synodal legislation also incorporated imperial law.

Mary M. Schaefer, citing *Notizie al pellegrino della basilica di Santa Prassede* by Dom Benigno Davanzati († 1746), writes about the ancient custom of deputizing some virgins to the ecclesiastical ministry of custodian for the temple of Holy Praxedes next to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. The abbot called these virgins “*Presbiteresse, o Diaconesse*”.

A synod convened in Rome in 826 warned: “*cavendum, ut nullus ex propria cognatione aut velatam, diaconam vel raptam uxorem accipiat*”. This synod, in can. 9, emphasized that the state of deaconesses was similar, but also different from that of virgins and religious women.

Usually a married deacon, presbyter, or bishop, after his election and ordination, was obliged to live a life of continence in the Western Church’s provinces of the Roman Empire. The term “*diacona-diaconissa*” becomes distinct when it is associated with ordination, blessing or consecration. Thus, “*diacona-diaconissa*” can be defined either as a deacon’s wife or as an order of ecclesiastical ministry. In the first case, it is an order created by marriage, and in the second, it is a liturgical rite.

4. DEACONESSES IN THE CITY-CHURCH OF ROME

It should be emphasized that until the 7th century neither the *Sacramentarium Leonianum* nor the *Sacramentarium Gelasianum* recognized the ordination of deaconesses.

The oldest source of liturgical tradition of the Latin Church that researchers currently have mentioning deaconesses is the *Sacramentarium* of the 7th century, and is described in the literature on the subject as the *Sacramentarium Gregorianum* (types reconstructed by the scholars *Paduensis*, *Tridentinum* and *Hadrianum*). The type I of the *Sacramentarium Gregorianum* (*Tridentinum*) dates back to the pontificate of Sicilian Pope Leo II († 683) and contains this “prayer for making a *diacona*”: “*Orationem ad diaconam faciendam. Exaudi Domine preces nostras, et super hanc famulam tuam illam spiritum tuae benedictio-*

nis emitte, ut coelesti munere dicata, et tuae gratiam possit maiestatis acquirere et bene vivendi aliis exemplum praeberere. Per [...]. Except for the change in gender from “*hancfamulam*”, this prayer is almost identical to the collect used for male deacons – “*Orationes ad ordinandum diaconum*”. According to José-Juan Fresnillo Ahijón, this “prayer for making a *diacona*” was adapted from the liturgical ordination rite of male diaconate in the Carolingian period and the “*Ordo ad diaconam faciendam*” was probably used in the rite of the profession of widowhood. Because the text of the prayer does not have a “*rubrica*”, it is difficult to establish the liturgical “*praxis*”.

Other redactions of the sacramentary in Britain also include the collect “*Ordo ad diaconam faciendam*”. For example, the *Pontificale* of Egbert archbishop of York († 766), in Britain, contains, in addition to the “*Ad ordinandum Diaconum*” also the “*Alia benedictio Diaconi sive Diaconissae*” as well as an episcopal blessing for a virgin-diacona (the “*Benedictio episcopalis in ordinatione Diaconissae*”). Because Egbert was educated in Rome where he was also ordained as a deacon, he used the Gregorian model of ordaining deaconesses complete with a blessing. Also the *Leofric Missal* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 579) is for the most part not actually a missal, but a late 9th or early 10th-century combined sacramentary, both pontifical and ritual with the sung parts of various masses. It contains a collect entitled “*Oratio ad diaconissam faciendam*” which is initiated by the expression: “*Exaudi, Domine, preces nostras*”.

Evidence of the ancient custom of ordaining deaconesses existed also in some papal privileges. The literature mentions three occurrences. In letter 22 (“*Ecclesiae Portuensis privilegia possessionesque confirmat*”) written to Benedict, bishop of the “*Ecclesiae Portuensis*” in Italy in 1018, Pope Benedict VIII († 1024) certifies, among others, the ordination of deaconesses: “*concedimus et confirmamus vobis vestrisque successoribus in perpetuum omnem ordinationem episcopalem, tam de presbyteris quam diaconibus vel diaconissis [...]*”. Pope John XIX († 1032) confirmed these privileges (“*Ioannis XIX papae privilegium pro Ecclesia Portuensis*”), and again in 1026 confirmed with “*Ecclesiae Silvae Candidae*” the privilege: “*consecrationem [...] sacerdotum, diaconorum, seu diaconistarum [...], concedimus et confirmamus*”. Pope Leo IX († 1054) in a decree in 1051 issued to John, bishop of the “*Ecclesiae Portuensis*”, confirmed his previous privileges (“*Leo IX Joannem ex Tuscanensi factum episcopum Portuensem testatur a synodo in ecclesia S. Salvatoris sancitum esse*”). This decree was issued in the synod, during which a polemic flared up between bishop John and other bishops. This decree was signed by Eberhardus, archbishop of Trier in Germany, Alinardus, archbishop of Lyon in Gaul, Cadalus, bishop of Parma in Italy, Conibertus, bishop of Turin in Italy, Oppizo, bishop of Pisa in Italy, Henricus, bishop of Spoleto in Italy and Martinus, bishop of Pistoia in Italy, along with seven other bishops.

Thus, the presence of deaconesses in the Roman Church is confirmed by the development of the “*Ordo ad diaconam faciendam*” which is in the various redactions of the Gregory sacramentary. Also some papal privileges for certain suburban dioceses confirm the ancient custom of ordaining deaconesses, which was still used during the pontificate of Pope Gregory VII († 1085). Subsequently, this rite developed in the *Romano-Germanic Pontifical* of the 10th century.

5. THE ROMANO-GERMANIC PONTIFICAL OF THE 10TH CENTURY

The *Romano-Germanic Pontifical* was written in the Benedictine abbey of Saint Alban, Mainz, circa 950-962, in Germany. It can be presumed that its pontifical origins trace back to the papal Gregorian sacramentary. The *Romano-Germanic Pontifical* of Mainz includes the “*Ordo ad diaconam faciendam*” and from the end of the 10th century was common in the Latin Church, defining for the next several centuries the liturgical future of ordinations. Title xxiv: “*Ad diaconam faciendam*” is preceded by titles xx-xxi: “*Consecratio sacrae virginis*”, title xxii: “*Ordinatio abbatissae*” and title xxiii: “*Consecratio virginum quae a seculo conversae [...] voluerint*”. The order of the titles is similar in some manuscripts. A careful approach of redactors of the *Pontifical* caused the “*Ad diaconam faciendam*” rite concerning the diaconate institution, which practically disappeared in the West at the time, to be included in the next manuscripts of the *Pontifical*.

According to the conclusions made by Mary M. Schaefer, fifteen out of about forty manuscripts of the *Pontifical*, which served to establish the critical text, contained the ritual “*Ordo ad diaconam faciendam*”.

Title xxiv of the “*Ad diaconam faciendam*” of this *Pontifical* references some rubrics of the ordination of deaconesses. Also, the structure of the rites for a deaconess is parallel to the ordination of a male deacon. In turn Aimé G. Martimort notes that the rite of the ordination of a deaconess depends on earlier Gallic rituals for widows professing chastity, the Roman consecration of virgins and perhaps even a penitential “*ordo*”.

6. GRATIAN

The knowledge on deaconesses in the Latin Church of the Middle Ages crystallized around the *Decretum* of the Bolognese master Gratian († 12th century). In the second part of the *Decretum* (C. 15 q. 3), Gratian, or one of his followers, argued as to why an accusation made by a woman against a cleric cannot be sustained: “*Mulieres autem non solum ad sacerdotium, sed nec etiam ad diaconatum provehi possunt*”. Cited in Gratian’s *Decretum* is can. 15th of the Council of Chalcedon: “*Diaconissam non debere ante annos quadraginta ordinari statuimus, et hoc cum diligenti probatione. Si vero ordinationem susceperit*”.

et quantocumque tempore observaverit ministerium, et postea se nuptiis tradiderit, iniuriam faciens gratiae Dei, haec anathema sit cum eo qui in illius nuptiis conveneri". The cited texts did not introduce anything new, but they were definitely in favor of rejecting the custom of ordaining deaconesses. Subsequently, following the adage: "*nemo [...] diaconissas consecretur*", the early commentaries on Gratian even until John the Teuton unanimously rejected the institution of deaconesses.

7. THE ROMAN PONTIFICAL OF THE 12TH CENTURY

The ordination of a deacon or deaconess took place after the gradual and before the proclamation of the Gospel in Mass liturgy. The structure of the rite with the "*traditio instrumentorum*" evolved slowly, as is observed in the retained manuscripts.

8. THE PONTIFICAL OF WILLIAM DURAND

William Durand of Mende († 1296) in his *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, (the liturgical study of which was redacted before 1291), wrote "*velum ordinationis dyaconisse in quadragesimo anno dabatur, ut posset euangelium legere in nocturnis. In concilio Laudicensi statum est ut mulieres que apud grecos presbytere appellantur, apud nos autem viduae, aut seniores appellantur, in Ecclesia tanquam ordinatas constitui non debere*".

Whereas, in his famous *Pontificalis ordinis liber*, which was redacted around 1294, he wrote about the institution of deaconesses in the past tense. His *Pontificalis ordinis liber* contains, among others, the following titles: "*De ordinatione abbatissae*" and "*De ordinatione diaconissae*", to which he offered this brief commentary: "*diaconissa olim, non tamen ante annum quadragesimum, ordinabatur hoc modo*".

The 12th-century canonist, Rolandus, also wrote about the deaconess in the past tense: "*antiquitus diaconissas id est evangeliorum lectrices in ecclesiis ordinari moris fuisse, dubium non est*".

9. THE REBIRTH OF THE DIACONAL ROLE IN THE FEMALE MONASTICISM

The *Pontifical* of Troyes contains the "*Missa ad diaconam consecrandam*" and the *Pontifical* of Poitiers includes the rite: "*Ad diaconissam faciendam. Consecratio viduae*" whereas in the 12th century *Pontifical* of Saint Bishop Otto von Bamberg of Germany, the ordination of a deaconess is entitled the "*Orditio sanctimonialium*".

Two centuries later, in the 14th century, the *Pontifical* of Perugia in Italy, informs in its "*De ordinatione dyaconisse*" that the bishop, during the ordination of a deaconess, handed her a liturgical book of the Gospel. It was a sign

that she could read the Gospel during “*officium*” in the monastic choir and guide the canonical hours “*deinde tradat ei episcopus librum evangeliorum et det ei potestatem legendi evangelium ad vigilias et incipiendi horas in ecclesia*”.

Giovanni Barozzi († 1466), the bishop of the diocese of Bergamo in northern Italy, based on the *Pontifical* of William the Elder Durand of Mende, redacted his own *Pontifical* in 1451 in which the previous liturgical book of the Gospel was substituted with the book of homily: “*et si aliquam earum fecerit diaconissam, data corona, dat ei librum omeliarum, dicens: «Accipe potestatem legendi evangelium cum omelia in ecclesia Dei, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti. R. Amen»*”. Giovanni Barozzi also replaced ordination of a deaconess with “*De benedictione et consecratione virginum*”.

In addition, Giovanni Barozzi also wrote the liturgical rubric according to which in his day the custom of ordination of a deaconess completely disappeared, and a “*lectio*” of the Gospel from the “*Matutinum*” in monasteries was read by the “[*h*]ebdomadaria”.

Commanded by Pope Innocent VIII († 1492), Agostino Patrizi Piccolomini († 1495), the bishop of the diocese of Pienza in Italy, in cooperation with the papal ceremony of Johannes Burckad († 1506), prepared the first edition of the *Pontificale Romanum* in the publishing house of Stefan Planck in 1485. In 1497, the second edition of the *Pontificale Romanum* was prepared in that same publishing house. The publication contained the rite of the “*Consecratio Virginum*”, in which, being the relict of the ancient ordination rite of deaconesses, the previously used book of homily was replaced by the book of the breviary. The following liturgical rubric precedes the hymn “*Te Deum*”: “*et quia in nonnullis monasteriis est consuetudo, quod loco diaconissatus, qui in quibusdam antiquis pontificalibus habetur, virginibus consecratis datur facultas dicendi officium et incipiendi horas canonicas in ecclesia, convenienter id fit hoc modo. Pontifex stans ante faldistorium predictum sine mitra, virginibus consecratis coram eo genuflexis, dicit: «Dominus vobiscum. Et cum spiritu tuo. Oremus. Exaudi, Domine, preces nostras [...], praeberere. Per [...] Amen». Tum sedet pontifex, accepta mitra, et tradit breviarium illis ambabus manibus ipsum tangentibus et pontificis manum deosculantibus, singulis dicens: «Accipe potestatem legendi officium et incipiendi horas in ecclesia. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti»*”.

The *Pontificale Romanum* promulgated in 1595 by Pope Clement VIII († 1605) provides the following rubrics: “*qui in quibusdam antiquis pontificalibus habetur*” and “*pontificis manum deosculantibus*”. In this edition, the formula for handing over the breviary book has also been modified to: “*accipite librum, ut incipiatis horas canonicas et legatis officium in ecclesia*”.

The subsequent editions of the *Pontificale Romanum* contained an unchanged version of the rite of the consecration of virgins, including the 1961-1962 edition.

10. THE CASE OF THE PROFESSION OF NUNS

In July of 1680, the Bishop of Grenoble refused to consecrate the deaconess-virgins in the nuns' monastery of Prémol. Dom Innocent Le Masson († 1703), the prior of the Grande Chartreuse, wrote a petition to the Congregation of Rites in Rome in 1687, which returned a clear answer: «They do not wear the stole nor the maniple except on the day of their consecration, on the fiftieth anniversary of that consecration and on the day of their death».

The consecration ritual as practiced by the nuns of the Carthusian Order preserved in several manuscripts was “codified” by Dom Innocent Le Masson. He published *Pratique de la Bénédiction et Consécration de Vierges selon le Pontifical Romain et les usages de l'Ordre des Chartreux*, in which the rite “*Consecratio Virginum*” of 1596 *Pontificale Romanum* enriched the elements of the liturgical Carthusian tradition. Ioannes Pinius included the *Ritus antiquus consecrandi Diaconissas apud Latinos; qui ex aliqua parte perseverat in monialibus Ordinis Cartusiani* in his treatise on deaconesses. Some researchers argue that since the virgin-nuns received the stole, maniple and cross, veil, ring and crown, then perhaps this rite was a relict of the ancient rite of the ordination of deaconesses. Mary M. Schaefer, citing K. Heinrich Schäfer, argues that before the 19th century the Carthusian prioress sang the Gospel in the liturgy on solemn feast days. The current liturgical practice of the Carthusian nuns is in keeping with some of the elements of the medieval diaconal-virginal consecration ritual.

CONCLUSION

There seems to be some dispute among historians, theologians and canonists as to whether women were ordained similarly to men (for a period of time as long as a half of Christian history). In fact, presented medieval sources of liturgy and canon law demonstrate that women were ordained from antiquity up until the 12th century in the same way as men, ordination then being understood simply as appointment to a particular office in the Latin Church or in medieval society. The ordination services were celebrated by the bishop with a prayer to the Holy Spirit and the giving of a stole. The structure of the ordination of deaconesses was liturgically parallel to the ordination of male deacons with appropriate prayers. Fragments of retained sources mention, among others, the following expressions of women involved in the life of the Church: “*episcopae*”, “*presbyterae*”, and deaconesses. Theologians of the Gregorian Reform of the 11th century developed a new understanding of the Holy Orders to, among others, distinguish clerics from the laity. As a result of this process, in the 12th and 13th centuries, a new understanding of the Holy Orders was introduced and then associated with the Eucharist, thus

limiting ordination to celibate males. These innovations emerged through Gratian, Peter Lombard and the Great Scholastics. The intellectual sources of this process should be clear from a rereading of Roman law, ancient philosophical sources and the writings of the New Testament. As a result of this new understanding, women began to take up a much less prominent role in the Church. Therefore the focus of attention for contemporary research should be the question: “what are ordinations?”, rather than: “should women be ordained?” Modern researchers, looking for the answer, show that the reality of the ordained women in antiquity and the Middle Ages has been almost marginalized. Contemporary scholar Aimé G. Martimort concluded in her research that both sexes were ordained as deacons but only men served at the altar and continued on to the priesthood. By contrast, Robert Gryson defined that deaconesses participated in the diaconate “*sensu stricto*”. And finally, Gary Macy in his research demonstrated that ordination in the early Middle Ages referred to any ceremony by which a person moved into a new role or ministry (“*ordo*”) in the Church (e.g. nuns, abbesses and queens were described as ordained). In presented liturgical and legal sources from the 7th to 17th centuries, starting from the *Sacramentarium Gregorianum* and continuing on to the *Decretum Gratiani* until finally the *causus* of the Nuns of the Order of Carthusians, it is noted that ordained women were involved in the life of the Church. Due to an evolved new understanding of the Holy Orders, deaconesses have been marginalized and become a group of women associated with monasticism, consecrated virgins and other specific forms of life in the Latin Church. It is to be hoped that the above presentation of sources will contribute to a better analysis of the evolution of the role of deaconesses in the Church. The results of historical, theological and, canonical research on the value of the ordination of deaconesses will be relevant to discussion related to the possibility of restoring the diaconate of women in the Catholic Church.

SUMMARY

Women in late antiquity and early Middle Ages were admitted to the “*ordo diaconissarum*” as evidenced by sources of medieval canon law. The structure of the ordination rite of the diaconate both of men and women was parallel. Some researchers maintain the thesis that deaconesses participated in the diaconate “*sensu stricto*” (e.g. Robert Gryson, etc.), while others strongly reject this thesis (e.g. Aimé G. Martimort). After examining selected sources, it should be noted that deaconesses were not parallel to the male sacramental diaconate in the examined historical period. Deaconesses were a group of women associated with monasticism, consecrated virgins and other specific forms of life in the Latin Church. This is confirmed by, among others, the rite of the *De benedictione et consecratione virginum* and the *Pontificale Romanum* in editions from the 15th century and the case of the of Carthusian

Nuns. The ordination of deaconesses had no sacramental value, and therefore it is difficult in modern discussion, citing the medieval sources, to support the introduction of a female diaconate into the Latin Church.

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