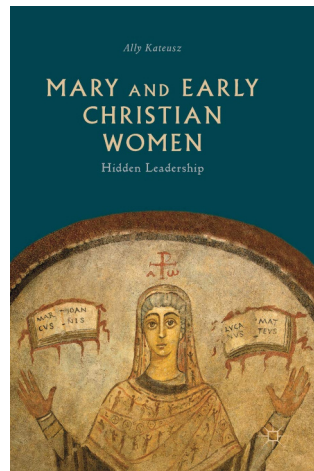




Mary and Early Christian Women Hidden Leadership

by Dr Ally Kateusz, Research Associate at the
Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research
Palgrave MacMillan, 2019, 295pp.

This is an important contribution to our understanding of the early church, buried by a subsequent Marian culture which gradually portrayed Mary as an idealised woman, as Joan Chittester had it a "gossamer goddess". Dr Kateusz has given us a wealth of new research on the very earliest material focussing on Mary Mother of Jesus as an active player in the Gospels and a leader in the early church.

Post Second Temple, there developed a Matriline, culture in Judaism in which rituals were led jointly by a Miriam- Moses duo. Thus, Mary was compared to Abraham, e.g. both received an Annunciation, both had sons who carried the wood for their own sacrifice. In the extra- canonical gospels featuring Mary's childhood and her connection with the Temple, there are no references to purity or virginity. She is portrayed as conducting liturgy, preaching, censuring, dispatching women around the Mediterranean with books.

In the New Testament, many of the House Churches were led by women: Chloe, Appia, Priscilla, Phoebe, Prisca. This trend continued; Celsus noted that out of seven Christian groups, five were led by women. Tertullian, c.155 CE lamented that there were women "heretics" who taught, healed, exorcised and even baptised or "sealed", implying they were acting like bishops.

In the Dormition Narratives, very widespread

and surviving in nine languages, a figure called the Great Angel gives Mary a book of mysteries to deliver to the Apostles. Later scribes replaced the book with a palm branch. A recently discovered fresco in an Egyptian monastery circa 700 CE has Mary surrounded by women swinging censers; a sixth century pottery version in Israel shows the same scene. Later versions show men not women around Mary's bed. Easter liturgies had women censuring Christ's tomb. In 381, Egeria said it was done every Sunday.

The iconographic evidence Kateusz examines, which is beautifully illustrated in colour in this book, complements her thesis very convincingly. The Madonna of Humility, seated on the ground, pious and shy, think Bellini, is from a different millennium. The early church Mary stands boldly, arms raised in prayer, wearing an episcopal pallium, and carrying the white cloth of a Eucharistic celebrant. An ivory pyx dated 500s, is the oldest depiction of an altar probably of the Anastasis, in Jerusalem, being censured, by two women. This censuring was a key element in liturgical processions.

In the later chapters, resistance to women and men presiding together came from Irenaeus in the second century, to women being ordained from the Council of Nîmes in the late fourth century, and from Pope Gelasius about South Italian practices in the late fifth century.

By the ninth century bishops were still complaining, and in our time, a Bishop of Rome has attempted to make the issue unspeakable.

Many thanks to our Research Associate Dr Ally Kateusz for analysing the changes by which the feminine had been eliminated to suit the dominant social mores of later times.

Review by Pam Wearing

SUPPORT OUR RESEARCH INTO WOMEN'S ROLES IN CHRISTIANITY

SEND US BACK A STANDING ORDER
FORM, AND AS A THANK YOU WE WILL
SEND YOU A FREE HARD COPY OF
"MARY & EARLY CHRISTIAN WOMEN"
(WORTH £20).

communion

The Official International Newsletter for The Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research May 2019

In this issue >



P2 :

Vatican report on
Women Deacons



P3 :Moya's story



P4 : Book review

Why no diaconate for women?



Nelleke Wijngaards Serrarens MA Social Sciences.
She is married to Aloys Wijngaards, an ordained
deacon. Both Nelleke and Aloys have taught at the
Diaconate Formation Institute in Driebergen in The
Netherlands.

The research about women deacons by the Wijngaards Institute is very impressive and inspiring. It gives hope and perspective to all women who would like to serve God and the people as deacons: as servant leaders and connectors between Church and society, especially between Church and people in need.

In this context I would like to share my experience with the issue of women's diaconate, via examples of groups of women.

1. During my 25 years' staffwork at the Diaconate Formation Institute, I met a lot of wives of deacons. They joined their husbands in the full

four years' formation process, supporting them as future deacons. Several of them experienced the diaconate vocation themselves.

2. As the general representative of deacons' wives I functioned for 12 years as board member at the International Diaconate Centre, located in Germany. When I conducted the international research project 'Partners in Solidarity', the same question emerged from wives of deacons all over the world. Although they were socially engaged in all sorts of activities in their parishes and in society and were well educated, they could not be ordained as deacons, because of their being women.

3. In fact, **female parishioners especially already perform a lot of impressive diaconal work in many parishes.** Several of them possess all the qualities required for deacons. It would be a blessing for the Church and society in general if these women could be ordained.

4. Last but not least, in the Netherlands we have not only male but also female 'pastoral workers'. They are theologically qualified. They work full-time for the Church. Often they do the same work as their ordained colleagues. **Several of the male pastoral workers have become deacons, but their female colleagues – with the same qualities – are barred from being ordained.**

It is really very sad and unjust that it is not possible for all these dedicated and capable women to be ordained deacons. Are we not all created children of God, women and men in equality? Is God not asking all of us to involve ourselves in a life of dedication to other people, to serve the needs of especially the most vulnerable?

website : www.wijngaardsinstitute.com
Founder : Dr John Wijngaards, LSS, DD
Director : Luca Badini Confalonieri, MA, PhD
Pastoral Outreach : Colette Joyce, MA
Communications : Miriam Duignan
Administrator : housetop@btconnect.com

Patrons | UK : Dr Sheila Cassidy, Prof Mary Grey, Lord Hylton, Prof Michael Hornsby-Smith, Baroness Kennedy QC,
Christina Rees, Baroness Richardson and Dr Pauline Webb
| Australia : Prof Marie-Rose Joyce
| Belgium : Baroness Holvoet | France : Dr Suzanne Tunc | Japan : Sister Naoko Iyori
| Netherlands : Prof Rene van Eyden, Prof Eric Jurgens and Prof Joris Vercammen
| USA : Prof Leonard Swidler



YouTube : [Housetopwomenpriests](https://www.youtube.com/Housetopwomenpriests)



facebook : [womenpriests.org](https://www.facebook.com/womenpriests.org)

Website : www.wijngaardsinstitute.com

Most women who experience a call to the diaconate are highly qualified for the diaconate ministry. They excel in being go-betweens, networkers, fostering solidarity, organising groups that engage in social and charitable activities, motivating people to bring their faith into action – thus creating a society of greater mercy and justice, to the blessing of all.

Let us hope and pray that these motivated women can be ambassadors of hope and justice as ordained deacons in the near future.

Women Deacons: Kicking the Can Down the Road

Theologian Layla Karst once remarked, *"I remember responding to a faculty member's question about my career goals in my senior year in college by expressing my desire to go into ministry and being told that as a woman, my options for this were either to become a nun or become a Protestant or become unemployed."*

On May 7 Pope Francis revealed that, after almost three years of study, his own experts could not agree on whether women were ordained as deacons in the same way that men were in the early church. That lack of unanimity is likely to be used by Pope Francis to continue the current practice of excluding women from the diaconate.

This is just the last episode of a long-running saga. The Vatican first asked its own International Theological Commission to study the issue of women's ordination to the diaconate in 1992. The study went on until 1997, and its final 18-pages report allegedly expressed support for the reintroduction of women deacons based on precedent. The report was never published; it was allegedly shelved by then Cardinal Ratzinger, who asked for more study to be done and proceeded to greatly expand the commission membership with scholars regarded as safe pair of hands – including then theology professor Gerhard Müller, later to become Cardinal, a former pupil of Ratzinger who already back then was known as a strong opponent of women's ordination to the diaconate.

The expanded commission eventually published a second report in 2002, about four times longer than the first. This time the report was made public under the title "From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles". It could not airbrush completely the historical evidence of ordained women deacons, but it did downplay it considerably, and pronounced it insufficient to answer the question. On that basis, it refused to offer an opinion about whether or not women's ancient ordinations as dea-

cons had been sacramental. It simply concluded by saying that the reintroduction of women deacons was a question for the Magisterium to decide, thus kicking the ball back to the church authorities. They did not say no; they just did not say yes.

Fast forward to 2016, with Pope Francis establishing a third commission to yet again study the question. Now, almost three years later, it seems that the latest commission's as yet unpublished conclusions suggest once again that the historical evidence was deemed inconclusive.

Yet **the findings of that papal commission fly in the face of well-known facts.** Not only was the rite for ordaining women to the diaconate identical to that used for men: it also included all the markers exclusive to what was later termed the "sacrament of Holy Orders". **And if it was done in the past, why not now?**

Ironically, one of the manuscripts preserving two such ordination rites to the diaconate, identical for men and women, is held in the Vatican library. Perhaps the Pope could examine these for himself?

This evidence has long been known. **In August 2015 the Wijngaards Institute summarised decades of research into women deacons and sent it to Pope Francis for his consideration.**

As we wrote back then: 'The rationale which subverted female deacons in the Middle Ages was the phobia concerning menstruation and the conceit that women are innately inferior to men.' There should be no tolerance in our church for the upholding of a ban based on ancient prejudice and misogyny. It does not reflect the truth of our tradition, history or theology.

Pope Francis further observed that while the commission has now disbanded, its members are continuing to study the matter individually, and he commented "Let us go forward to study [the women's diaconate]. I am not afraid of the study".

Yet, extraordinarily, the text of the report of this latest commission is still a "papal secret", unavailable to the public. The Wijngaards Institute agrees with Pope Francis that there is nothing to be afraid of from studying church history, and so **we call for the immediate release of the commission's report, so that its conclusions, as well as the evidence they are based on, can be publicly evaluated.**

Where are the women?

As the Church prayed on Vocation Sunday for "labourers for the harvest," supporters for women's ordination gathered outside their churches and cathedrals to ask **Where are the women?** In the UK, Westminster and Clifton Cathedrals were the focus of the witness. Wijngaards Institute members Jo Dixon, Miriam Duignan, Sr Anne Miller and Michelle Saaf stood outside Westminster alongside members of WoW (Womens Ordination Worldwide).

A Call I cannot answer



Moya St Leger (pictured above) is a journalist and long time campaigner for womens diaconate. She is currently battling with cancer, which makes her story so poignant

"I want to be a deacon." Moya St. Leger says. "When I put myself forward to a bishop to be considered as a candidate for the permanent diaconate, I received a one-sentence reply turning me down."

She continues "I was rejected because I am the wrong sex. The bishop's letter simply informed me that *"the Roman Catholic Church does not ordain ladies to the diaconate"*. No reason given. No canons quoted.

I want to be an ordained servant of Jesus Christ in the Community at the disposal of my bishop. I want to function alongside those with a mandate from the Church to teach, to lead, and to sanctify.

The bishops of England and Wales have stated:

"Being an ordained minister lends authority to the position and work of the deacon". I should like to be included.

Most clergy are perplexed if the subject crops up in conversation. Few have thought about it at all.

One venerable priest knew all about women deacons in the early Church but argued that the only reason for women ministers was that they had been necessary for reasons of propriety in early Christian Society. In other words, there have been social reasons for women deacons.

Are there none today?

It is to the deep spiritual and emotional needs of women, which they can sometimes only share between themselves, that a woman deacon could minister. Mediating a different image of God, she could inspire another kind of ministry. And a Church that can be experienced as hostile to women needs a visible embodiment to the blessing God gave to female creation.

Another priest told me it was major orders women would have "to crack". And Canon Law is unambiguous: *"Only a baptised man can validly receive sacred ordination"* (CAN.1024). My response to this argument is that theology on women must change first, then canon law can be amended. As long as the Church's teaching implies that the incarnation of God as a male necessarily renders female nature inaccessible to the grace of major orders, canon law can stand unchallenged.

"This malaise at the heart of Catholic Christianity is why women, like lepers of old peeping in on the action through a hole in the wall, are prevented not only from ministering as deacons but from freely channelling their energy and insights into building up the Body of Christ in many other ways."

Everyone knows that there have been ordained women deacons. Does it have to be left to an ordinary lay woman to declare the theological arguments against the restoration of female ministry unsound, and the appeal to authority unfaithful to tradition?

Our Church is too old and too wise to be clinging to such nonsense. Though I may not live to see it, women will become deacons. The only question left worth considering is, **When?**

Send or email your letters to us at:

111A High Street,
Rickmansworth,
Herts WD3 1AN, UK
email: hello@wijngaardsinstitute.com

We can accept your donations through the post and on our website <http://www.wijngaardsinstitute.com/donations/>