

Diaconal Ministries and the Ordination of Women

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INTRODUCTION

Can women be ordained to the priesthood? The question of admitting women to the priesthood is the most recent topic in the ecumenical dialogue and it is tending to become the most contentious one. Today many women feel that they are called by god into the church ministry of service. From the theological point of view diakonia is an integral part of the mission of the church. “for the haling of the world” and Christians are mandated to serve according to their gifts and skills. In today’s ecclesiastical and social scenario, is ordination of women necessary for the diaconal ministry? This paper is an attempt to analyze the importance of the diaconal ministries and the necessity of women ordination for this ministry.

Definition of “Ordination”, “Ordained Ministry” and “Diakonia”

“*Ordination* gives them authority publicly to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments according to Christ’s command and promise; for the purpose of the continuance of the apostolic life and mission of the church”.¹

The term *Ordained Ministry* refers to persons who have received a charism and whom the church appoints for service by ordination through the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands.² The Ordained Ministry is the visible focus of the deep and all-embracing communion between Christ and the members of his body. Thus it has its dignity. This ministry is endowed with authority.³

The Greek word for “ministry” is *diakonia* (means serve or waiter); and it is significant that this term was in New Testament times, as it is still, the most favored way of referring inclusively to the church’s workers and their work. When Paul gives us the first account we possess of the various functions being performed by individuals in the primitive church (I Cor. 12.4-30), he speaks of them as varieties of ministry.⁴ *Diakonia* has been described as the responsible service of the Gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of the people. Like mission, diakonia exists in a contemporary social context and expresses the life and nature of the church.

Ordination - The Common and the Ordained priesthood.

Ordination is generally understood as an act of the Holy Spirit. Roman Catholics and the

1. Ministry, Women, Bishops-Report of an International Consultation Cartigny, Switzerland, 1992 (Geneva, The Lutheran World Federation, 1993), p.37
2. Max Thurian (ed), Churches respond to BEM, Vol.IV, (Geneva, WCC- Faith and Order Paper No.137, 1987), p.199.
3. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, (Geneva, WCC- Faith and Order Paper No.111, 1982) p.21
4. Richard Niebuhr & Daniel D. Williams, The Ministry in Historical perspectives, (Toronto, Harper& Row Publishers, 1983), p.1

Orthodox churches clearly expressed the sacramental nature of the ordination. On the other hand many protestant churches insisted that ordination is not to be understood as a sacrament and accordingly not to put

on the same level as baptism and the Lord's Supper. The purpose of the ordination is for God and the church to endow and appoint some of the baptized for the ministry of word and sacrament, which is essential for the existence, life and mission of the church.⁵

The Sacramental priesthood is a distinctive gift (Charisma) of the Holy Spirit. ⁶ **Roman Catholics** understand ordination as the call of the Holy Spirit with laying on hands by a Bishop and claims that this is legitimate means of the Holy Spirit. Only celibate men were ordained as priest. In **Orthodox** theology of ordination, one finds the call of the Holy Spirit expressed in the unanimous approval of the candidate by the body of Christians who are gathered together for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Through that sacrament [Holy Orders] priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit are signed with a special character and are so configured to Christ the priest that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head. It is clearly, states that the ordained priesthood means the headship of Christ. Church has always allowed marriage before the ordination. This sacramental priesthood, iconically presenting Christ, as the head of the body, is granted to the church through the grace of the Holy Spirit at the sacrament of the ordination those being ordained are made servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1). ⁷The common priesthood (brotherhood in Christ-1 Peter 2:9) is that of those who are united with Christ the priest in the mystical union of faith and baptism, without however sharing in his headship. While both forms of priesthood in the Church have Christ's priesthood, they exist and operate as gifts of God to the Church, and indeed as different gifts.

Of the ordained priest it says that "*the minister at the altar acts in the person of Christ considered as head and as offering in the name of all the members.*" In it we find the same tendency to understand the ordained priesthood directly in Christological terms. But of the common priesthood it says that, "by reason of their baptism Christians are in the Mystical Body and become by a common title member of Christ the Priest; by the character that is graven upon their souls they are appointed to the worship of God." In the case of the ordained, the word has in addition a broader sense, which includes prophetic and pastoral elements.

The Lord Jesus "*whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world*" (John 10:36) makes his whole Mystical Body sharer in the anointing of the Spirit wherewith he was anointed: for in that Body all the faithful are made a holy and kingly priesthood, they offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, and they proclaim the virtues of him who has called them out of darkness into his admirable light (1 Peter 2:5, 9). It should be noted, however, that the priesthood of the Church, and with it the common priesthood, are declared to share in the pneumatological nature of the priesthood of Christ.

Here too the ordained priesthood is explicitly asserted to be pneumatological. This has now been said of all four instances of the priesthood, that of Christ, that of the Church, that of the ordained, and that of the faithful. The ordained priesthood and the service of the common priesthood are for the achievement of the unified and ultimate worship of God. ⁸ "The ministry of priests is directed to this and finds its consummation in it." This statement is important, because it defines the ordained priesthood in terms of its service of the common priesthood, but it does so without specifying the nature of the intrinsic bond between them.

5. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1982-1990), (Geneva, WCC- Faith and Order Paper No.149, 1990), p.128

6. Gennadios Limouris, The Place of the Women in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women (Katerini, Tertios Publications, 1992), 22

7. Ibid. 23

8. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper No.111, op.cit., p.23.

Here I aim to develop the two points highlighted above, the pneumatological understanding of the priesthood of Christ, and the priesthood of the Church as a distinct category, so that thereby the relation of the ordained and the common priesthood in the Church can emerge with new clarity.

3. Ordained Ministry

When Christ ascended to heaven, he left the apostles in charge of his Church on earth. The office of apostle was a special one. The Greek term *apostolos* roughly means "delegate" or "ambassador" and carries the idea of

one who is authorized to act in place of and exercise the authority of the one who sent him. The term "ordained priesthood" means of distinguishing between clergy and laity.

The Ordained Ministry in the NT: The notion of ministry as such is very prominent in the New Testament. The authority of the ordained minister is rooted in Jesus Christ, who has received it from the Father (Mt 28:18) and confers it by the Holy Spirit through the act of ordination. This act takes place within a community which accords public recognition to a particular person. Because Jesus came as one who serves (Mk 10:45), to be set apart means to be consecrated to service. The chief responsibility of the ordained ministry is to assemble and build up the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the word of God, by celebrating the sacraments and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry.⁹ But until late in the NT period we do not encounter what would today recognize as an ordained ministry.

Though Jesus did not choose a woman to be one of the 12 disciples, who were to represent the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, he apparently did choose them to be a part of a larger group of disciples. These female disciples remained faithful to their master to the end, and some of them stood at the cross and observed the burial of Jesus.

Development of the Forms of the Ordained Ministry: The Roman Catholic, Orthodox and many Anglicans believed that our Lord commissioned the apostle to be the rulers of his church and that they handed on their authority to successors, who in turn handed it on to others, until the period when we can distinguish the first bishops. From those bishops, it was believed, our Lord's authority has been handed on to the bishops in today's church. The basis of the ordination is this apostolic succession.¹⁰

As the Church grew in size, it became too large for the handful of apostles to govern by themselves, and it became necessary for them to delegate some authority and responsibilities. The first office to be established is what we now call the *diaconate*, which was created due to a dispute over the proper apportionment of the Church's charitable resources. (Acts 6:2).

The next office was the *priesthood or presbyterate*. The Church began to grow geographically, with congregations in widely separated places. These congregations, many of which had been created by Paul on his missionary journeys, needed men to oversee them in the apostles' absence, to perform the sacraments, and to preach in them. Paul appointed presbyters in the congregations he created (Acts 14:23), though the office had existed earlier (cf. 11:30). The presbyters had oversight of individual congregations. Timothy and Titus were among them. As the church grew larger presbyters assumed the care of individual congregations while bishops oversaw groups of congregations and retained certain prerogatives not only in the region but in individual congregations. They had the function of appointing and disciplining presbyters (1 Tim. 5:19-22, Titus 1:5).¹¹ The apostles thus set up first the office of deacon, then priest, and later development

9. William H. Lazareth, *Growing Together in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry- A study Guide*, (Geneva, WCC, 1982), p.87

10. A.T&R.P.C. Hanson, *The Identity of the Church* (London, SCM Press, 1987), p.123.

11. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper No.111*, op.cit., p.24 was the office of bishop.¹²

In the New Testament, bishops and presbyters are usually synonymous, and most often functioned as a group. In the beginning of the second century Ignatius of Antioch contends for the rule of one bishop over both presbyters and deacons in the congregation. By in later centuries, the terms had acquired the fixed, technical meanings they have today. "*Deacon*" became the fixed description of the lowest order, "*presbyter*" (which was shortened to "priest") was the term for those who oversaw individual congregations, and "*bishop*" became the term for those who oversaw multiple congregations. Already at Nicaea (325) the power deacons were curbed and the council of Toledo (633) and the Trullan (692) had to stress their hierarchical inferiority to the priesthood. Their influence diminished considerably during the middle ages, and in Episcopal churches in modern times the diaconate has become merely a stage in preparation for the priesthood.¹³

Women Ministry at a glance: There are many statements particularly in the Greek Church fathers, about the equal status of men and women before God: both are created in the image of God; both have the same ethical and spiritual capacities and duties; women are the first witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. In the New Testament times women had played a very important role.¹⁴

Many historians see a shift in the church's view of women beginning in the second and third centuries. In the account of the first three centuries by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, around 325, we learn essentially more about the active participation of women in church life. The reports of Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret on the fourth and fifth centuries; we can note a clear tendency to marginalize women and make them anonymous. In other words, in the fourth and fifth centuries the voices of women began to be slowly snuffed out, especially from the field of women ministry.

In the imperial church, which often took its cues from the magisterial court, hierarchical thought increasingly suppressed the original Christian efforts at egalitarianism. Augustine and Jerome, the great church fathers also viewed women as temptations. During the twelfth century, Gratian pulled together the various laws of the Roman Catholic Church in a work known as "*Decretum Gratiani*". This Canon Law prescribed that women were subject to men with an argument from natural law. Thomas Aquinas, the greatest theologian of the thirteenth century, did not understand three things: art, children and women. He says that man is the 'starting point and goal of woman,' and that there is something deficient and unsuccessful in a woman. He also claimed that woman is "defective and misbegotten."¹⁵

In light of this material drawn from the tradition, even some early church fathers, keep in place a far more limited role for women in the church than they had enjoyed in charity and grace during the first century. After the coming of the western missionaries the women participation again encouraged in the church ministry.

Diaconal Ministry

The term Ministry denotes the service to which the whole people of God are called, whether individually or corporately. Diaconal ministries are consecrated for service in ministries at the intersection of church and world. These restored lay leaders work to seek wholeness in the world and to help the people of God to live out the Gospel. They are committed to altering the church to the needs of the world. Diaconal ministry is a ministry of word and service, sharing the hope of Christ, helping where there is need and equipping others for healing and justice in the world. Diaconal

12. Philip Hughes, *A History of the Church*, Vol- I, (London, Sheed and Ward, 1989), p.48.

13. F.L Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London, Oxford University Press, 1961), p.377

14. http://www.asburyseminary.edu/_docs/community/328_Collins_WaTForum.doc

15. http://www.asburyseminary.edu/_docs/community/328_Collins_WaTForum.doc" ministries serve through agencies, institutions, and traditional church programs are they build bridges between the God and man.¹⁶

Daniel William wrote "*To bring salvation to the human spirit is the goal of all Christian ministry*". The whole church, as the people of God has a ministry and priesthood. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's own people (1 Peter 2:9). We must never separate ministry and church, for the ministry is to be understood in the context of the church. But we must not simply absorb the distinctive ordained ministry into the diaconal ministry of the whole church."¹⁷

Diaconal ministry in NT: Though Jesus did not choose a woman to be one of the 12 disciples, he apparently did choose them to be a part of a larger group of disciples. These female disciples remained faithful to their master to the end, and some of them stood at the cross and observed the burial of Jesus.¹⁸

We can see the basic functions of Christian diaconal ministry as portrayed in the NT. The functions of Jesus ministry grouped under three heading. a) *Serving Function*. The ministry of Jesus was one of service and this is what he demanded of his disciples also. (Mk 10:42-45, Jn 13: 13-15, Phil 2:7) and the word here translated

“servant” is “doulos”, a word signifying the abasement of an every slave. We look to Jesus Christ and we find that his service was above all directed to the sick, the handicapped, the outcaste, and rejects of society. His was a ministry of healing in the broadest sense, or bringing wholeness. b) *He is the suffering servant*: suffering is inseparable from ministry. This aspect of ministry may be designed in a general way of proclamation. c) *Priestly functions*: This function unites two aspects of ministry i.e service and proclamation. In New Testament Christ represented as a priest (not OT priesthood, but the priesthood of Melchizedek). These three functions joined together in Jesus ministry.¹⁹

Right from the beginning in Jewish Christianity, there were not only prophets but also prophetesses. In the New Testament, deacons have a variety of functions. Although some may have been given the function of distributing food, many functioned as evangelists, teachers, and readers. Later, deacons were thought of primarily as assistants to bishops and presbyters. As the office gained definition in the early centuries, male deacons were assigned liturgical duties including the reading of lessons from the epistles and the gospels, the gathering of alms, dismissal of the catechumens, and the distribution of the elements to communicants. Deacons were also often responsible for the administering of alms in the congregation.²⁰

The Apostle Paul (Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:11) refers to what may have been a distinct office or order of deaconesses in the Pauline congregations. The four daughters of Philip are prophetesses (Acts 2:17). At the end of Paul's letter to the Romans says that many women were actively involved in the proclamation of the gospel: ten of the twenty-nine prominent people addressed here are female. Phoebe, who was on an official mission for the church of Cenchreae, was called *diakonos*, she was the leader of a house church. Women were worked as teachers (Acts 18:24-26, 2 Timothy 1:5) and Apostles (Paul describes Junias as apostles).

Historical Development and Ecclesiological significance: Through out church history, the people of God have taken seriously the burden of the diakonia. Various epochs and churches, however, have had to carry this burden in different ways.

The Early church and Orthodox Christendom: -During the time of church fathers that women play an active role in the church and that in the age of fathers there were orders of virgins,

16. Ministry, Women, Bishops-Report of an International Consultation Cartigny, Switzerland, 1992, op.cit, p.50

17. <http://www.-leadership/diaconal-ministry.aspx> , 22/7/2008, 3.45 pm.

18. John Macquarrie, *Theology of church and Ministry*, (London, SCM Press, 1986), p. 160.

19. Ibid. pp.160- 165.

20. Ian Hazlett, *Early Christianity* (London, SPCK, 1991), p.108.

widows, and deaconesses, but that women were not ordained. In Didache there is definitely an order of deaconesses and their position in the hierarchy is clearly spelled out.²¹ In the time of Constantine, the church to take over the role of a state privileged diaconial organization after it became a state church. Answering the demands of the new situation, the church in the following decades created welfare institution like hospitals for which Basil the Great (ca. 330-79) provided a model and developing monasteries took over responsibility. Monastery was then the centralized charitable activity. Helping others, showing sympathy and kindness to the unfortunate and suffering was a fundamental part of a spirituality that followed the great example of orthodox saints.²²

The term did not however come into widespread use until the fourth century. Deaconesses were women of good repute and of mature age who ministered to sick and poor women. Deaconesses also assisted the bishops in interviews of women and with keeping order among the women of the church. In some places deaconesses continued for centuries to administer communion to other women. The most important distinct liturgical function of the deaconesses in the early church was to assist with the baptism of women which involved a

ritual unclothing and clothing of candidates. The office of deaconess declined in importance when the baptizing of adult women became rare.²³

Middle Ages and Roman Catholic Development: - In the west monastic diakonia developed after the pattern of Basil. In the later middle ages, it was supplemented by the charitable work of spiritual fellowships by the orders and congregations, which linked spiritual concerns to organized aid for the needy and suffering. Only after the Council of Trent did Borromeo (1538-84) and Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) set a new direction with their charitable work. In later period the Society of Vincent de Paul, the German Charitable Society (1897) etc sharpened the social conscience of Roman Catholics.

Reformation period: - Luther believed that care for the body as well as the soul was part of the duty of good Christian order, but he did not have in mind the creation of a congregational diakonia. Measures were passed that made it a Christian obligation of the authorities to help the poor, the sick, widows and orphans. Even in countries where the reformed tradition revived the diaconate with the doctrine of fourfold office. Inner mission continued the diaconate movement in the 19th century, in countries like Britain and America. Confronted with crying mass poverty as a result of industrialization the diaconate set up institution and organizations that recruited workers from training colleges for deacons and deaconesses.²⁴

Women in Church Diaconal Ministry: Women has actively participated in all churches viz; Ctholic, Orthodox and protestant churches.

In Orthodox Church: The whole of church history bears the hallmark of great female personalities carrying on a veritable diaconal tradition within the limits set down by tradition. (Eg: Saint Monica, the mother of Augustine; St.Nonna, the mother of St.Gregory of Nazianzus; etc).All these gallery of Christian women's portraits whose enriched the ministry without having received any form of ordination. The orthodox nuns are the perpetuators and spiritual inheritors of the deaconess of the early church. In early centuries women monastic communities became the centre of diaconal ministry. Orthodox monk and nuns lead identical spiritual life. Abbots and Abbesses rank in authority equal to bishops in many ways and were included in ecumenical councils. Abbesses hear

21. Mary T.Malone, Women and Christianity (Dublin, Columba Press, 2000), p.124.

22. The Encyclopedia of Christianity (Michigan, W.B.Eerdmans pub. Company, 1999), 833

23 <http://www.demo.lutherproductions.com/historytutor/basic/early/genknow/deaconess.htm> (17/07/2008 Thursday, 12.30-2.00)

24. The Encyclopedia of Christianity, p.833

confessions and performance other priestly functions such as the absolution of a penitent. They were not ordained. Deaconesses serving the church and their neighbour. They were engaged in diaconal ministry of hospital, school, social works etc. The convent sisters carry out most of the preparations for the Divine Liturgy. In orthodox parish life mother of the family plays important role. Priest's wife helps the priest in all his pastoral problems. Recently, women were admitting as student to theological schools and faculties in various orthodox churches.²⁵

In Roman Catholic Church: Nuns are cloistered to the degree established by the rule of the religious institution they enter. They were work in hospitals or with poor or perform other ministries; there are also groups of cloistered Dominican nuns, and group of Dominican sisters who are dedicated to teaching or working with the sick. Women's diaconial ministry is the backbone of their missionary activity.²⁶The laity consists of those catholic who are not ordained clergy. The church calls them to the active participation of Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal officers. Some non ordained Catholics practice formal public ministries with in the church.

In modern days the women are actively involved in the church ministries on the educational and social level-dedicated to service, ministry of prayer, ministry to the poor, family counseling, house visits, interchurch

dialogue socio-economic upliftment, skilled welfare programme etc. Thus their ministry is whole heartedly acceptable at the local and at various levels of decision making. Women actively participated in the diaconial work of the churches such as Institutions (include hospitals, facilities for the handicapped, maternity homes etc) Homes (providing education for neglected children, the educationally disadvantaged, the psychologically sick and delinquents), Aid for seniors (caring for the elderly persons), Child Care (provides day care for children of greatly needed, aid for children from dysfunctional families, work among the foreign children etc), Congregational Diaconia (care of children and youth work, with centers to improve care of the sick and elderly), Ecumenical Diaconia (developed by the churches since World War II and now provides aid programmes in cases of need; send help to refugees and the victims of disasters, working among marginal groups, the illiterate etc), International Cooperation(participation in NCC, WCC, etc).²⁷

According to M.M Thomas “*diaconia, including prophetic ministry and participation in the struggle for the humanization of society and culture, becomes part of the essence of the church*”.²⁸ The churches have been seeking to make this a concern with their new approaches to diakonia. The University of Heidelberg, for example set up an Institute of Diaconial Science, which makes diakonia a subject of instruction. In modern days the churches understand the witness of practical faith better than they do the church’s preaching. The future church will become a church of diaconia.

Women Ordination

Women and men today lived in a world of change and no one area of the world remains untouched. Women and men are responding to new opportunities, making new decisions about the ways they live, experiencing new and different roles and coming to fresh understanding of who they are. In this context they argued for the women ordination. The recent studies reveal that women were more religious in their beliefs and practices than men. Some argue for the women ordination with the support of theological reasons while others stand for the non-ordination of women with religio-culture-doctrinal arguments.

25. Gennadios Limouris, *The Place of the Women in the Orthodox Church*, pp.251-264.

26. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman-catholic-church>", 22/7/2008, 3.45 pm.

27. *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, p.833.

28. M.M. Thomas, *A Diaconial Approach to Indian Ecclesiology* (Tiruvalla, CSS, 1995), p.11

Church position on Women’s Ordination: The Catholic Church has never felt priestly or Episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women. According to bishop Klimer Myers, “*Those Roman Catholics who speak in favour of the ordination of women to the priesthood do not represent the main stream of their church’s tradition*”.²⁹ The first reason is the restriction of the priesthood to men by Jesus Christ, himself because he did not take female as his disciples; this in no way detracts from the role of women. Secondly, was their essential inability; lack of appropriate skill or ability. The late Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* ('On Priestly Ordination') declared on May 30, 1993, that the matter of women's ordination is forever closed. He also states that the church does not have the authority to ordain women, but he went on to say that he was speaking 'definitively' and that Catholics must stop discussing the issue.³⁰ Pope Benedict XVI also followed the policy of the ancestor.

But on the contrary Pope John Paul II says concerning the dignity of all women: "Each of them from the beginning inherits as a woman the dignity of personhood. Jesus of Nazareth confirms this dignity, recalls it, renews it, and makes it a part of the Gospel and of the Redemption".³¹ In fact, in the American Roman Catholic Church today, a full 65 percent of those who sit in the pews on Sunday mornings favor the ordination of women.

The Orthodox Churches: Western or oriental does not ordain women, the chief reasons that are given for not ordaining women are related to biblical interpretation and the weight of patristic traditions.³² Ordination is a mystery or sacrament. Priesthood is seventh step in ordination. Women were allowed upto three steps. Late Paulose Mar Gregorios, an Indian Orthodox Bishop says that, “*Women have special participation like men in*

*the priesthood of Jesus. All baptized are the part of Jesus' priesthood. But in the Orthodox tradition, women are not allowed to administer Eucharist, because we follow apostolic tradition. We recognize women as they were recognized during the apostolic period. At present there is no need to change such tradition".*³³The Orthodox churches have their own theological, traditional and cultural arguments against the admission of women into ordained priesthood.

In Anglican Church: The structure and functions of religious orders in Anglican roughly parallel that which exists in Roman Catholicism. In some Anglican orders there are sisters who have been ordained and can celebrate the Eucharist.

In Protestant Denominations: For the sake of authorization and church order and not for reason of "powers" or "ability", individuals in most mainline protestant churches must be ordained in order to preside at the sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion) and to be installed as a called Pastor of a congregation or parish.³⁴ Ordination is understood more generally as the acceptance of a person for pastoral work. Since the 19th century, these denominations have allowed for female office bearers and preachers. Churches like CSI, CNI, Lutheran churches, the Methodist church etc started to ordain their women (some churches ordained even women as bishop). Despite these encouraging trends today, "only about half of U.S. denominations grant full clergy rights to women. And even if a woman becomes ordained her chance of being placed in a church that will actually accept her is much less than that of men.

29. Emily C.Hewitt & Suzunne R.Hiatt, *Women Priests: Yes or No?* (New York, The Seabury Press, 1973), p.84.

30. Thomas C. Fox, *Sexuality and Catholicism* (New York: George Braziller, 1995), p. 207.

31. "<http://www.vatican.va>).22/7/2008, 3.45pm

32. Emily C.Hewitt & Suzunne R.Hiatt, *Women Priests: Yes or No?* op.cit., p.89

33. Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu, *Krysthava Bishappumar Janakeeya Porattangalil* (Mal), (Tiruvalla, CSS, 1999), p.55.

34. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ordination-of-women>" 22/7/2008, 3.45 pm

Diaconal Ministries and the Ordination of Women

The ordination of women is one of the burning issues being discussed in the spiritual world. The movement for the ordination of women is not new to many churches. Some churches in different parts of the world had been ordained women more than a hundred years. But in India some churches have still struggling for women ordination. Really Women has waken to reality of their roles played in the church, but so long has been denied to have any prominent roles in the church structure. Here arose a question i.e. "*Is Ordination is prerequisite for diaconial ministries in the church*"?

Diaconal ministries had done by the women from the time of New Testament itself. Jesus Christ called male disciples for his ministry, at that time female disciples also assist him in his ministry. After Jesus Christ his disciples spread the mission all over the world. During this time the women diaconial ministry also developed. They were actively participating in this church mission without any separation. But in the later centuries the sacrament of ordination conferred to male disciples only. Three main theological objections to the ordination of women are: a) based on Christ's non- appointment of women as apostles; b) on the assumed masculinity of God and Christ, and c) on the incapacity of women to receive the sacramental character of holy orders.³⁵ But during these centuries diaconal ministry of Christ continued without any question of ordination. During the medieval centuries the patriarchal domination strictly established the male ordination.

After the reformation in the 19th centuries the question of female ordination started. In 20th century many reformed church offered women ordination. But every church has their own women diaconial ministries. I think the ordination is not a requirement for the diaconial ministries. On the other hand ordination helps them

in their ministries. The ordained women ministers were not satisfied with the ordination. Experiences of women pastors indicated that the problems are not always solved by ordination. Some women pastors enjoy full acceptance in congregations and the co-workers, some of them encounter difficulties. “There are churches in Lutheran where women are ordained, but where the discussion continues because part of the church does not accept female pastors”.³⁶

But the main stream churches did not accept the women ordination. However, they were given more concentrate on the diaconial ministry. In Orthodox churches, women and men are called by God to all of the various ministries and service in the church except episcopacy and presbyterate. “*The place of the Women in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*” was the theme of an historic *Inter-orthodox Theological Consultation* in Rhodes, Greece, 30 October-7 November 1988.³⁷ “The Consultation reaffirmed the male character of the sacramental priesthood, but at the same time also issued a strong call for the restoration of the apostolic order of deaconesses”. “There was also general recognition that in the changing circumstances of the 20th century women have assumed many important roles of service in the church as lay leaders. They take on responsibility in administrative work at parish and diocesan levels, as well as in the tasks of the ecumenical movement.”³⁸

The Diaconal ministries did not reserve for the male. Orthodox and Catholic Church convent nuns and lay people are very active in the diaconal ministries of the church like hospitals,

35. C.I Mitton (ed), *The Expository Times* (Edinburgh, J&J Clerk, 1966), Vol. LXXVII, April, No.7, p.213.

36. Janet Crawford & Michael Kinnamon,(ed), *In God’s Image* (Geneva, Switzerland, 1983), p.69.

37. This Inter-Orthodox Symposium was called by Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, was attended by some 70 people, official church delegates and experts advisors, from the Eastern Orthodox Churches all over the world with exception of Greek Orthodox Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem. Women delegates also participated in this Consultation.

38. Gennadios Limouris, *The Place of the Women in the Orthodox Church.*, p.14 orphanages, poor age home, schools etc with out ordination. So we can conclude that ordination is not the stepping stone to diaconial ministries or the ordination is not a requirement for the diaconial ministries.

CONCLUSION

Just as Christ did not come to be served, but to serve man and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mt. 20:28 & Mk. 10:45), so the church as the body of Christ does not exist without to serve man and to help him to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. This service is not restricted to the ordained person. The church, by practicing the commandment of love of Christ, shows compassion, through her philanthropic work; such as nursing homes, orphanages, and hospitals etc, to help the ones in need. In this diaconal ministry men and women have played equal role. For these diaconal ministries there is no question of ordination. All the diaconial ministers are not ordained, more than that there is needed service mind. However, the ordained ministry and diaconal ministries are co-related. Women ordination is not really encourage the women to actively participate in the church service ministry. All churches should have done good service through their diaconial ministry. It has been shown in this article that the ideas of diaconal ministry as a life giving part of the church and ordination is not necessary for the diaconal ministry.

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