

Deaconesses and Ritual Impurity

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Cultural diversity underlies the differences between deaconesses of the East and of the West.¹ In the West, women were recognized by their faith as able to catechize others and to assist women at baptism; in some parts of the East, only a deaconess could take these roles. Again, only in some areas of the East, women at certain times were not permitted to enter the church building, but deaconesses could take the Eucharist to these housebound women. In religious life, corresponding differences existed. In the West, nuns were fitted by their vows to take various roles in the Liturgy of the Hours; in the East, in some areas, only a diaconal abbess could take these roles. In remote monasteries which might lack a priest for some time, the diaconal abbess could distribute pre-consecrated communion to the community. Long has cosmic dualism been recognized as a trait of the Eastern groups that had deaconesses. Now another trait can be identified:

¹ Extensive bibliography on deaconesses is cited in full in the notes below and includes studies by Butler, Fitzgerald, Fresnillo Ahijón, Gryson, Hauke, Kalsbach, Karras, Macy, Martimort, Menke, Schäfer, Schaefer, Theodorou, Tkacz, Vagaggini, Wijngaards, and Zagano. Also of note are: the report of the Commission Théologique Internationale, “Le ministère des diaconesses,” in *Le Diaconat: évolution et perspectives* (Paris: Cerf, 2003), 34–43; *The Diaconate: Sacramentality, Ministry, and the Question of Women’s Ordination*, special issue of *The Thomist* 85, no. 4 (2022); and, for sacramental theology, Sara Butler, M.S.B.T., “Women Deacons and Sacramental Symbolism,” *New Diaconal Review* 6 (2011): 39–49, and *New Diaconal Review* 9 (2012): 4–13. Any English translation not otherwise attributed by citation from an English edition is original.

apparently the groups which retained the Levitical laws of ritual impurity were the ones that needed the gender-specific ministry of deaconesses. Examining the theological and cultural context in which that office arose helps explain this varied history. Next, the Western deaconess is most clearly limned by comparing the pertinent Latin ceremonies. This also sheds unexpected light on how the Roman Catholic Church protected the property rights of consecrated women.

The Context in Which Deaconesses Arose

Jesus taught a new doctrine: the call to sanctification: “Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt 5:48). Again, he commanded them to imitate him, to take up their cross daily and follow him (Luke 9:23). The post-Gospels New Testament continued to suggest ways for the believer to imitate Christ (for example, Heb 13:10–15). These teachings ground the doctrine that every human person is called to be holy and like Christ. To ensure that his followers knew that this vocation to holiness concerns women equally with men, Jesus demonstrated and emphasized the spiritual equality of the sexes throughout his time on earth.² In an unprecedented way, he provided balanced examples of male and female in his interactions with men and women, in his healings, resurrection miracles, parables, and prophecies.³ In contrast, in the Old Testament and in the Jewish Haggadah,

² Even when he was *in utero*: both Elizabeth and John responded to the gestating Lord (Luke 1:39–45). See also Simeon and Anna at the Presentation (Luke 2:29–32, 34–38).

³ For examples, see healings (Mark 1:23–26, 29–31; Matt 8:14–15), resurrection miracles (Matt 9:18–19, 23–25; John 11:1–45), parables (Matt 13:31–33; Luke 13:18–21; 15:4–10), and prophecies (Matt 24:17–19, 40–41; Luke 17:30–35). For discussion of these and other passages, see Catherine Brown Tkacz, “Jesus and the Spiritual Equality of Women,” *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2001): 24–29. For the professions of Peter and Martha and the healing of the Hemorrhissa and the leper, see below. Early Christian art depicted such balanced events; see Tkacz, “The Doctrinal Context for Interpreting Women as Types of Christ,” *Studia patristica* 40 (2006): 253–57, at 255–57. On spiritual equality, see also Patricia Ranft, *Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998); Sara Butler, M.S.B.T., “Embodiment: Women and Men, Equal and Complementary,” in *The Church Women Want: Catholic Women in Dialogue*, ed. Elizabeth A. Johnson (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 35–44; Tkacz, “Deaconesses and the Spiritual Equality of Women,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 108 (2013): 5–44, at 6–17; and Mary Healy, “Women in Sacred Scripture: New Insights from Exegesis,” in *Ruolo delle donne nella Chiesa* (Vatican City: Vatican Library, 2017), 43–54. The contrary claim, that Jesus was “patriarchal” and demeaned all his female followers including his mother as “whores,” Kathleen E. Corley bases entirely on citing

paired male and female examples are “quite rare.”⁴ While Tannaite Jews “exempted” women from reciting Shema and other acts of ritual worship and required only domestic devotions, Jesus elicited a public profession of faith from a woman as well as from a man—Peter (John 6:69) and Martha of Bethany (John 11:27)—and hers proves to be fuller.⁵ This dynamically demonstrated the spiritual equality of the sexes, and Eustathios of Antioch, Chrysostom, Augustine, and others praised Martha for teaching the faith.⁶

From the start, both men and women were instructed in the faith, baptized, and received communion.⁷ Women also participated with men in evangelizing others. This began at Jesus’s presentation in the Temple, his first public appearance, when the prophetess Anna announced the coming of the Messiah (Luke 2:36–38). The Samaritan woman evangelized her community: as soon as she learned of Jesus through conversation with him, she actively instructed others, so that many believed in him “because of the woman’s testimony” (John 4:28–30, 39–42). The evangelical work of Priscilla was reported, with the account of her teaching a man (Acts 18:2, 26). That is, Christians interacted without a strict segregation of the sexes. When the apostles learned of neglect of the Greek widows, they obviously did not think that only other women could respond to this social need, for the apostles appointed men to do so (Acts 6:1–6).⁸

Contrast this to the Jewish understanding of the roles of men and women. In the Temple, only Jewish men were allowed inside; women were relegated to the women’s court. This segregation continued in medieval synagogues.⁹

Matt 21:31–32 without quoting it (*Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* [Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2002], 4, 142, and throughout). That passage recounts Jesus’s praise of male and female sinners—tax collectors and the prostitutes (οἱ τελῶναι καὶ αἱ πόρναι)—who repented at the preaching of John the Baptist and are “going into the kingdom of God.”

⁴ Tal Ilan, *Mine and Yours Are Hers: Retrieving Women’s History from Rabbinic Literature*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 269, 272.

⁵ On the Tannaite “exemption,” see Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, *Gender and Timebound Commandments in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. 180, 195, 199–200, 210.

⁶ Catherine Brown Tkacz, “Singing Women’s Words as Sacramental Mimesis,” *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 70 (2003): 275–328, at 300–301; Tkacz, “Jesus and Spiritual Equality,” 26–27.

⁷ For example, see Acts 2:41–2, 8:12, and Tkacz, “Jesus and Spiritual Equality,” 27–28.

⁸ As Ambrosiaster and others noted; see José-Juan Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam seu consecrandam: el diaconado femenino en el occidente medieval* (Madrid: San Dámaso, 2016), 231.

⁹ Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, cod. Heb. 37, fol. 114, dated 1434, has

Likewise, as noted above, the Tannaite Jews “exempted” women from public worship. In Christian churches, however, men and women worshipped together and came to the sanctuary to receive the Eucharist. In the words of the late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, women had “new standing”: their new place was “in the sacred space itself.”¹⁰

In most of the Church, therefore, a solution came naturally when a pastoral problem arose with baptism. Initially baptism was of nude adults.¹¹ How could the Church safeguard the modesty of the women being baptized and of the men baptizing them? Part of the answer was to build baptisteries with curtains, one with an opening through which the priest or deacon could reach to lay his hand on the head of the female baptizand and pronounce the baptismal formula.¹² The rest of the answer was for a baptized woman to assist her. Faith fitted the baptized woman to do this: relatives, servants, and widows could provide pre-baptismal anointing and help the newly baptized woman don a white garment.¹³

In some areas of the East, however, by the third century, certain groups permitted only deaconesses to assist female baptizands as part of a ministry exclusively to women.¹⁴ That is, in this regard, all other women of faith were deprived of their freedom. Moreover, the same cultural groups at times restricted various religious actions by women; most seriously, they limited women’s reception of the Eucharist. Whereas in most churches women could

a miniature showing the synagogue service: men and boys at the front, women and girls in back.

¹⁰ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 73.

¹¹ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Co., 2009), 36, 855, 857, and throughout.

¹² Tkacz, “Deaconesses and Spiritual Equality,” 23.

¹³ Tkacz, “Deaconesses and Spiritual Equality,” 23–24, 26–27. Absent a Christian community, a catechumen could assist (Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 432).

¹⁴ On the *Didascalia*, see Aimé-Georges Martimort, *Les diaconesses: essai historique*, Bibliotheca ephemerides liturgicae subsidia 24 (Rome: C.L.V., 1982), 31–54; on the *Apostolic Constitutions*, see 55–72 and Pauliina Pylvänäinen, *Agents in Liturgy, Charity and Communication: The Tasks of Female Deacons in the Apostolic Constitutions* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020). Also, canon 17 from the First Synod of Dvin in Armenia (527) excluded women other than deaconesses from assisting at baptism; see C. J. von Hefele and H. Leclercq, *Histoire des conciles d’après les documents originaux*, 11 vols. in 21 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907–1952), 2.2:1078. Canon 41 in *The Canons of Marutha* identified deaconesses as women whose role was “to fulfill the rite of the ministry of baptism only”; see Sebastian P. Brock, “Deaconesses in the Syriac Churches,” *One in Christ* 54, no. 1 (2020): 147–57 (ninth paragraph).

engage in catechesis, assist at baptism, and teach, a few churches in the East with a strong separation of the sexes lacked these practical expressions of spiritual equality.

For nearly a century, it has been known that the groups with deaconesses also rejected the Incarnation of Christ.¹⁵ A common feature of many heretical Christologies is cosmic dualism, which entails the belief that only the spiritual is good and that matter is inherently evil.¹⁶ In their focus on the transcendence of God, these groups considered it blasphemous to think the divine would in fact have become human. Many of the groups that found the Incarnation problematic also strongly segregated the sexes socially.¹⁷ Consequently Syrians, Copts, Paulinians, Armenians, and other monophysites had deaconesses. As Manfred Hauke observed in 1982, "The appearance of deaconesses thus presupposes patriarchal conditions."¹⁸

In these churches, deaconesses provided social services to women, as deacons did for men. There women were not permitted to speak to a cleric, but they could speak to a deaconess who would relay their concerns. Pregnant women were forbidden to go to church, and as the *Didascalia* indicated, it would have been considered scandalous for a man to visit their homes.¹⁹ Therefore a deaconess would take communion to her. Note that these churches were committed to providing the Eucharist to housebound women, at least at Easter.²⁰ It was evidently because the deaconess had this limited role with the Eucharist that her blessing took place within the sanctuary itself.²¹ Given that the deaconess served women exclusively, it

¹⁵ Adolf Kalsbach, *Die altkirchliche Einrichtung der Diakonissen bis zu ihrem Erlöschen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1926), as noted by Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood? A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption*, trans. D. Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 441. On Paulinian deaconesses, see canon 19 of the Council of Nicea (325).

¹⁶ Michael Maher, "Dualism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton, 1909). For additional discussion and references, see Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., *The Way Toward Wisdom: An Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Introduction to Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), esp. 335.

¹⁷ It may well be that cosmic dualism, with its distrust of the material aspects of creation, entailed for many a distrust of women.

¹⁸ Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?*, 440–44.

¹⁹ *Didascalia* 3.12, in the Latin translation of Franz Xaver Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, vol. 1 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 1905), 208.

²⁰ The fifth-century monophysite *Testamentum* indicates that deaconesses dispensed communion, only during Easter, to pregnant women who did not attend church; see Msgr. Roger Gryson, *Le ministère des femmes dans l'Église ancienne* (Gembloux, France: Ducolot, 1972), 119.

²¹ Tkacz, "Deaconesses and Spiritual Equality," 33.

evidently seemed reasonable to restrict to her the role of assisting at the baptism of a woman.

Yet this leaves a question: Why did some dualists groups not have deaconesses? Clearly, dualism alone did not make deaconesses necessary. In the East, the Ethiopians rejected the Incarnation, yet they did not have deaconesses. In the West, dualism had many adherents, yet the Marcionites and Arians did not have deaconesses.

Levitical Laws of Ritual Impurity

A new line of research suggests that deaconesses were needed in groups that retained the Levitical laws of ritual impurity for women.²² Such customs as barring menstruating and pregnant women from church began in some groups within early Christianity.²³ In some areas, these restrictions continue; in 1980 the Orthodox Church in America found it necessary to reject them:

Ideas that women with their menstrual periods should not receive holy communion or kiss the cross and icons, or bake the bread for the eucharist, or even enter the nave of the church, not to speak of the altar area, are ideas and practices that are morally and dogmatically indefensible according to strict Orthodox Christianity.²⁴

Universally Christians had the doctrine of spiritual equality, yet this was in practice partly curtailed in those Eastern Christian groups which kept and even extended Levitical laws of ritual impurity.

It is now possible to suggest both why the Church as a whole did not

²² My research on this new hypothesis began while serving on the Commissione di Studio sul Diaconato Femminile, 2020–2022. Preliminary findings were in my presentation on “Women and the Diaconate” at the Ukrainian Catholic University, Center for Women’s Studies, Lviv, September, 20, 2021, and my seminar on “Deaconesses in Context” for permanent deacons and their wives in the Diocese of San Diego, November 13, 2021.

²³ On barring pregnant women, see Gryson, *Le ministère des femmes*. Chrysostom decried customs such as barring menstruant women from church as unworthy of Christians and superstitious; see Vassa Larin, “What Is ‘Ritual Impurity’ and Why?,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 52, no. 3–4 (2008): 275–92, at 291.

²⁴ Orthodox Church in America, *Women and Men in the Church: A Study of the Community of Women and Men in the Church* (Syosset, NY: Department of Religious Education, Orthodox Church in America, 1980), 42–43; discussed by Lawrence R. Farley in *Feminism and Tradition: Quiet Reflections on Ordination and Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013), 177.

observe the laws of ritual impurity and also why some groups retained them. Significantly, Jesus had set aside the impurity laws when he healed the woman with the flux of blood.²⁵ Note that Matthew introduces her in terms of her impurity, as “bleeding woman” (9:20; γυνή αἱμορροοῦσα). The Synoptic Gospels recounted her healing with details that contrast Levitical law. A woman with unnatural bleeding was to sequester herself, to touch no one, and to let no one touch her, and when well again, to remain sequestered for a week and then make sacrifice, including sacrifice for sin.²⁶ The verb ψάύω (“touch”) is used in several ritual laws forbidding contact with the ritually impure.²⁷ Yet the bleeding woman deliberately touched the Lord’s garment, and in the very instant of her touch, he healed her. Insistently, the verb ψάύω is reiterated three to five times, in each of the accounts of her healing.²⁸ Jesus praised her, calling her “Daughter” and declaring that her faith had healed her. Notably, he did not direct her to comply with Levitical law, although he had enjoined that upon the lepers he healed.²⁹ Also, although she had touched him, he did not consider himself unclean. By the end of the account, she had become “the woman” (ἡ γυνή) because ritual impurity had ended (Matt 9:22). Given the role of the article in Koine Greek to elevate a word or phrase into a title, as in “Son of Man,” it is possible Matthew presents the healed Hemorrhissa as representative of “Woman.”³⁰ Jesus’s followers received this “new, transfigured understanding”³¹ as freeing Christians from impurity laws, and this led to the lessened segregation of the sexes evident in the Acts of the Apostles.

Notably, some of the groups which retained impurity laws still maintain them. An Orthodox women’s conference in Istanbul in 1997 requested that the hierarchy consider anew some ancient customs such as

²⁵ Matt 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48. See also Lev 15:27–30. Gregory the Great and others taught that this healing ended the impurity laws; see note 38 below.

²⁶ Lev 15:25–31 (“sin offering” in v. 30).

²⁷ See Lev 15:5, 7, 11, 22 (man with seminal emissions); 5:21, 23 (menstruant woman); 5:27 (woman with unnatural bleeding).

²⁸ For touching, see Matt 9:20–22, esp. 20–21; Mark 5:25–34, esp. 27–28 and 30–31; Luke 8:43–48, esp. 44–47.

²⁹ For lepers, see Matt 8:2–4, Mark 1:40–43, Luke 5:12–14. Cf. Lev 13:1–16, 45–46; 14:1–32.

³⁰ On this new sense of the article, see Samuel Sandmel, “Son of Man,” in *In Time of Harvest: Essays in Honor of Abba Hillel Silver*, ed. Daniel Jeremy Silver (New York: MacMillan, 1963), 355–67, at 355.

³¹ Carrie Frederick Frost, “A Theology of Motherhood” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2015), 178.

the presentation of infants and the 40-day rule for childbirth, the prayer for miscarriages, abortions and post-partum mothers, and expectations pertaining to the reception of communion. Some of us feel these practices and prayers do not properly express the theology of the church regarding the dignity of God's creation of women.³²

In 2008, these practices were directly correlated with Levitical impurity laws. Russian Orthodox nun Vassa Larin, now a professor at the University of Vienna, focuses on "the theological and anthropological implications of 'ritual im/purity.'" Explicitly prescinding "from egalitarian concerns," she posed theological questions:

What is the meaning of abstaining from communion during menstruation? What does this say about the female body? What is the meaning of not setting foot in church after giving birth to a child? What statement is being made about childbirth? Most importantly, is the concept of "ritual im/purity" congruent with our faith in Jesus Christ?³³

Her documentation of the role of ritual im/purity in many Orthodox churches since the sixteenth century includes the report that, while today some Russian Orthodox continue to forbid menstruating women from entering the church, "in Russia, however, women are generally allowed to come to church during menstruation, but cannot receive Holy Communion, kiss icons, relics, or crosses, touch prosphora or the antidoron, or drink holy water. In parishes outside Russia, as far as I know, women usually only abstain from going to communion."³⁴ Current even now are prayers at the birth of a child "asking forgiveness for the mother and everyone who touched her."³⁵ Larin concludes that belief in "ritual im/purity" does more than restrict women: it constitutes "depreciation of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and its salvific consequences."³⁶

The following historical sketch suggests why it was only in the East that ritual impurity laws regarding women survived. During apostolic times, certain groups of Jews who became followers of Christ enjoined circumcision

³² Document included in *Orthodox Women Speak: Discerning the Signs of the Times*, ed. Kyriaki Karidoyanes Fitzgerald and Aruna Gnanadason (Geneva: WCC, 1999).

³³ Larin, "What is Ritual Impurity?," 277.

³⁴ Larin, "What is Ritual Impurity?," 275.

³⁵ Larin, "What is Ritual Impurity?," 289.

³⁶ Larin, "What is Ritual Impurity?," 292.

on Gentiles who would follow Christ (Acts 15:1–2). The nascent Church prayerfully and authoritatively set aside any such requirement (Acts 10–15).³⁷ Similarly, certain Eastern Christian groups with Semitic backgrounds evidently retained Levitical laws of ritual impurity. Communities of Jewish heritage had observed these laws for generations and apparently found them still a reverent expression of piety. Western groups, however, with no affinity to Judaism and certainly no cultural tradition of following Levitical laws, evidently did not adopt them.

As a result, in the West, even in dualist groups, deaconesses were not needed in the parishes. This was positive for women. Women in Latin churches could speak directly to clergy; no deaconess was needed as an intermediary. Women while menstruating or pregnant were free to worship in church, so no deaconess was needed to take the Eucharist to pregnant women in their homes. Indeed, Pope Gregory the Great taught that menstruating women and women newly delivered may attend church and receive Holy Communion, and he explained that Jesus's actions (as with the Hemorrhissa) had set aside the Levitical laws of ritual impurity.³⁸ Also in the West, as long as adult baptism was the norm, female baptizands were assisted by a variety of Christian women, because they were recognized as qualified to prepare the baptizands in the faith and to assist at the sacrament; again, no deaconess was needed. For instance, Gennadius of Marseille cited widows and nuns as well able *aperto et sano sermone docere* (to teach with clear and wholesome speech), instructing women for this sacrament.³⁹ Although modern scholars who want women to be ordained suggest that the lack of deaconesses in the West shows a misogynistic restriction of women, the opposite is true: deaconesses were evidently not needed in the West because of the proper recognition of women's capabilities there.⁴⁰

³⁷ Tkacz, "Deaconesses and Spiritual Equality," 18–19.

³⁸ *Libellus Responsionum*, l.27. Q. VIII, quoted in Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum libri quinque*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 90, 92.

³⁹ Gennadius of Marseille, *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*, par. 100 (Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 194).

⁴⁰ Hauke observes: "Since more liberal circumstances prevailed in the West, the office of deaconess [was not needed] there" (*Women in the Priesthood?*, 441). For the claim of misogyny, see, for example, Mary M. Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office: The Story of Santa Prassede, Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 208, 173.

Eastern Deaconesses

Cultural conditions, then, made it “greatly necessary” (*maxime necessarium*) for Eastern groups to have deaconesses while the Roman Church did not need them.⁴¹ Their ministry was exclusively to women and only outside of the Divine Liturgy; they had no liturgical role. Thus, unlike the male deacon, deaconesses were members of the laity, as noted by the Council of Nicea.⁴² Correspondingly, the Greek rites for ordaining a deacon and consecrating a deaconess are markedly different.⁴³

A second kind of deaconesses also existed in the East: abbesses in remote communities where clergy was unavailable for several days at a time. To insure that these nuns could pray the Hours and receive the Eucharist regularly, the Church instituted diaconal abbesses. In fifth-century Syria, such monophysite abbesses had the widest range of duties: they could distribute already-consecrated communion to their sisters and read the Epistle and Gospel at services in the monastery.⁴⁴ The pre-consecrated host

⁴¹ See *Didascalia* 3.12: *maxime necessarium* (Funk ed., 1:210).

⁴² See canon 19 of Nicaea I on Paulinians (Tkacz, “Deaconesses and Spiritual Equality,” 38). Silently Karl Heinrich Schäfer and Cipriano Vagaggini amended the canon, changing “clergy” to “other clergy,” implying that deaconesses were clergy; see Schäfer, “Kanonissen und Diakonissen: Ergänzungen und Erläuterungen,” *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 24 (1910): 49–90, at 68–69, and *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches: Essays by Cipriano Vagaggini, O.S.B.*, ed. Phyllis Zagano (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 23. Vagaggini’s change here is critiqued in my book review in *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 110, no. 1–2 (2015): 309–12, at 310.

⁴³ See Tkacz, “Deaconesses and Spiritual Equality,” and Tkacz, “Deaconesses and the Church’s Affirmation of Women,” *Josephinum Diaconal Review* 9 (2019): 38–39. The rites are in *L’euclologio Barberini gr. 336* (ff. 1–263), ed. Stefano Parenti and Elena Velkovska, 2nd rev. ed. (Rome: C.L.V., 2000), items 161–62 (deacon, pp. 170–72) and items 163–64 (deaconess, pp. 172–74). See also Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 149–50, 249. Significantly, the newly ordained deacon distributes communion immediately, but the newly consecrated deaconess left the sanctuary (*L’euclologio Barberini*, item 162, §13). Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch of Antioch, confirmed this in *Responsa* 35 (PG, 138:988). The deaconess took the Eucharist only to housebound women, *pace* Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press 1999), 102; Valerie A. Karras, “Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church,” *Church History* 73, no. 2 (2004): 272–316, at 286–87, 309; Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office*, 287.

⁴⁴ Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?*, 442–43. See also Kalsbach, *Die altkirchliche Einrichtung*, and Ignatius Rahmani, “Chapitres qui furent écrits de l’Orient, leurs questions furent présentées aux saints Pères et elles reçurent les réponses suivantes,” *Studia Syriaca* 3 (1908): 5–33, at 33.

was reserved at the side of the sanctuary on the proskomedion table, so they could gather it without approaching the altar.⁴⁵ Disregard of this by some caused the Council of Laodicea to reaffirm, "The women ought not to approach the altar."⁴⁶

In sum, certain Eastern churches that retained the Levitical laws of ritual impurity for women had deaconesses of two kinds. Deaconesses in the local churches assisted with baptism of adult women, as well as catechesis for women and works of practical charity for them, such as home care for the sick. Diaconal abbesses in the monasteries were commissioned to serve in the absence of men in the Divine Office in roles that usually clerics filled. In clearly defined circumstances, each kind of deaconess had the authority to give pre-consecrated communion exclusively to women. This is significant evidence of the Church's commitment to provide the Eucharist to women when it was not possible for a deacon or priest to do so.

Deaconesses in the West?

In Western parishes, a variety of women did the work assigned in the East to deaconesses. Scholars have examined diverse documents, seeking evidence of Latin deaconesses.⁴⁷ In Rome, Africa, and Spain, records listing all Church roles lack them.⁴⁸ Pope Cornelius cited several roles from priests through widows, including exorcists and porters, but no deaconesses. They are also absent from Mass prayers listing every group within the Church to be prayed for: "Oremus et pro omnibus episcopis, presbyteris, diaconibus, subdiaconibus, acolythis, exorcistis, lectoribus, ostiariis [porters], confessoribus, virginibus, viduis [widows], et pro omni populo sancto Dei."⁴⁹ Only in some female monasteries were there deaconesses, and they are not attested before the Middle Ages.

⁴⁵ The canon of 1736 asserts, "in no way were they permitted" (*nullatenus permittuntur*) to approach the altar to offer communion to the nuns, even in the absence of a priest or deacon (Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 177). On services with pre-consecrated communion, see Jean Leclercq, "Eucharistic Celebrations without Priests in the Middle Ages," *Worship* 55 (1981): 160–68.

⁴⁶ Council of Laodicea, canon 44 (45) (Péliclès-Pierre Joannou, *Discipline générale antique*, Fonti 9, 2 vols. in 3 [Grottaferrata: Tipografia Italo-Orientale, 1962–1964], 1.2:148). Jacob of Edessa emphasized that "a deaconess has absolutely no authority in the altar space" (Brock, "Deaconesses in the Syriac Churches," eighth paragraph).

⁴⁷ For instance, see Samuel Klumpenhower, "The Deaconess: New Sources in Medieval Pastoralia," *Logos* 21, no. 1 (2018): 19–39.

⁴⁸ Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 187–90, 193.

⁴⁹ Paul de Clerck, *La prière universelle dans les liturgies latines anciennes* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1977), 136–39.

Well-attested, however, is an unrelated use of the word *diacona*, exclusive to the West: the term designates the continent wife of a deacon. In Gaul and Rome, when a married man was called to become a deacon, priest, or bishop, then continence was enjoined upon both husband and wife, and the wife was identified by a feminine form of the husband's office: *diacona* and *diaconissa*; *presbytera* and *presbyteria*; *episcopa* and *episcopissa*.⁵⁰ The couple would continue to live under one roof, but without sexual relations. Church documents specifying penance for a deacon and *diacona* who failed to remain continent obviously refer to a deacon's wife.⁵¹ Also, a cleric's mother could be identified by the feminine form of his office. Thus Theodora, the mother of Pope Paschal, *episcopus* of Rome, was styled *episcopa*.⁵² Could a deacon's sister also call herself *diacona*? That might explain an abbreviated votive inscription naming a brother and sister, Dometius and Anna, each as *DIAC*.⁵³

A single prayer for a *diacona* is found in the Gregorian Sacramentary (ca. 685), absent any rite: "Exaudi, Domine, preces nostras." It focuses on giving a good example: "Hear, O Lord, our prayers, and upon this your servant [Name] send forth the spirit of your blessing, so that, endowed with the celestial reward, she may be able to acquire the grace of your majesty, and by living well she may offer an example to others."⁵⁴ The prayer also occurs

⁵⁰ Jean Morin, *Commentarius de sacris Ecclesiae ordinationibus, secundum antiquos & recentiores, Latinos, Graecos, Syros et Babylonios*, new ed. (Amsterdam: Stephanum Lucam, 1695), 144; Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 201–02; Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office*, 220; Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 405–6.

⁵¹ For example, see canon 20 of the Council of Tours (*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* [CCL], 148A:184); Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 200–201.

⁵² See inscriptions in Figures 2.7 and 2.8 in Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office*, 106, 107.

⁵³ Although Schaefer would posit an entire sixth-century "Roman diaconate of women" from this one votive inscription (*Women in Pastoral Office*, 219), Martimort finds interpreting it and the few other sixth- and eighth-century inscriptions "precarious," given their ambiguity (*Les diaconesses*, 202). In Greek and Latin, evidently "diaconate" was never used collectively of deaconesses.

⁵⁴ "Exaudi, Domine, preces nostras, et super hanc famulam tuam illam spiritum tuae benedictionis emitte, ut caelesti munere ditata et tuae gratiam possit maiestatis acquirere, et bene vivendi aliis exemplum prebere" (Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 203). It also appears solo in the *Leofric Missal* from the tenth or eleventh century (Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 105–6). Though absent from the thirteenth-century *Pontificale Romanum de la Curia*, it reappeared once more with mention of a *diacona* in the *Pontificale Romanum* of 1497 (Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 62–63, 385). The *Exaudi* prayer continued to appear solo as "oratio ad diaconam faciendam" in later MSS; see *The Gregorian Sacramentary: Under Charles the Great, edited from three manuscripts of the ninth century*, ed. H. A. Wilson, Henry Bradshaw Society 49 (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1915), 139. In contrast, that same sacramentary

in the consecration of an abbess and, in the masculine gender (*famulum*), as an alternate collect in the ordination of a deacon.⁵⁵ Notably, the *Exaudi* lacks mention of office, service, or ministry, all included in the full rite for the deacon in that sacramentary.⁵⁶ Though some scholars would construe the *Exaudi* prayer by itself as an ordination, their translations “do violence to the text.”⁵⁷ As a stand-alone petition, outside of any ceremony, however, the prayer could have been used for a “diacona” in the sense of the spouse of clergy.

A lengthy, rubricated ceremony for a diacona is attested by the tenth century. It has been claimed that the Roman diacona was the equivalent of the Roman deacon.⁵⁸ Those who assert this point to a few similarities between the rites for the two groups.⁵⁹ Yet these rites differ substantially, even in their titles: *Ad diaconam faciendam* but *ordo elegendi diaconi*. That difference matches the coherent differences between the diacona and the deacon. To show this requires a detailed analysis of the pertinent rites, beginning with the rite for clergy.

The *Pontifical Romano-Germanicum* has a composite *ordo* for all grades of clergy: at one Mass, the bishop could ordain subdeacons, deacons, and priests (rite XVI).⁶⁰ The first obvious point is this: if the Church had considered deaconesses to be clergy, they would surely have been ordained during that

has developed rites for “Ad ordinandum presbyterum” (6–7) and “Ad ordinandum diaconum” (7–8).

⁵⁵ The *Exaudi* prayer for deacon (Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 163, 174, 420–21); for abbess, see rite XXII (“Ordinatio abbatissae canonicam regulam profitentes”), §3, in (*Le Pontifical romano-germanique du dixième siècle* [hereafter *PRG*], ed. Cyrille Vogel and Reinhard Elze, vol. 1 (Vatican City: Vatican Library, 1963), 48.

⁵⁶ The rite for the deacon mentions *officium, trinis gradibus, officium diaconii, electis*, and a prayer to be worthy to succeed *de inferiori gradu* (Wilson, *Gregorian Sacramentary*, 7).

⁵⁷ “Violente al texto” (Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 157; amid analysis of the *Exaudi* prayer [149–60], critiquing Schaefer, John Wijngaards, and Gary Macy on 156–57).

⁵⁸ For instance, by Gary Macy and Schaefer, as noted in the following discussion, as well as John Wijngaards, *Women Deacons in the Early Church: Historical Texts and Contemporary Debates* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2002), and Phyllis Zagano, *Women: Icons of Christ* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2020), xiv–xv.

⁵⁹ Although Macy acknowledges in a note that the rites for deaconess and deacon “differ significantly,” he stresses “some similarities”; see Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 73n136.

⁶⁰ Rite XVI (“Ordo qualiter in romana ecclesia presbyteri, diaconi, vel subdiaconi eligendi sunt”; *PRG*, 1:20–36); for the deacon see §§1–4, 9–20 (pp. 20–22, 24–28), and “Orationes pro ipsis ad missam,” §4 (pp. 36–37). See also Karl-Heinz Menke, “Die

same Mass. Their absence from the Mass of ordination shows that they were not ordained as clergy, but rather were blessed or consecrated to their state. Also, even the rite for lower offices in the Church—cantors, porters, lectors, exorcists and acolytes (rite XV)—shares three notable features with the ordination of clergy: an election of the candidates, followed by the prostration of the bishop as well as the candidates during a litany, and then overt reference to the candidate's *officium*.⁶¹ For clergy, reference is to both the *officium* and *ministerium* of the deacon and priest, as well as the three grades of office (rite XVI). The importance of the election—of ascertaining that the candidate is worthy in character—is emphasized in some manuscripts: the first rubric stipulates that the election at the ordination on Saturday is preceded on Wednesday and Friday by specific scrutinies of character “to see if the candidates are worthy to perform the labor” of holy orders.⁶² In contrast, the rite for the diacona (rite XXIV) lacks all three features: the election, prostration with the bishop, and blessing specifically for office.

Because the men who are to be ordained will serve the Church in various ministries, their character is of grave importance.⁶³ Thus, the Church requires an election of all candidates, even for the lesser offices (cantors, porters, lectors, exorcists, and acolytes).⁶⁴ For a deacon or priest, even the title of the ordo uses the word *eligendi* and the detailed election includes the public exchange at Mass between the archdeacon, certifying that the man is worthy with respect to the burden of this office, and the pontifex, formally electing him (*eligimus*).⁶⁵ In contrast, the character of the diacona is not examined and she is not elected. This again indicates that the diacona in the West is less substantial than the Eastern deaconess: canon 19 of Nicaea I required examination of the character of Paulinian deaconesses, evidently because they could participate in the catechesis of other women, a substantial and theological duty.⁶⁶

triadische Struktur des Ordo und die Frage nach einem Diakonat der Frau,” *Theologie und philosophie* 88 (2013): 340–71.

⁶¹ Rite XV (“Ordo qualiter in romana ecclesia sacri ordines fiunt”; *PRG*, 1:13–19). For election, see §§2–4; for prostration, see §5; for *officium*, see §§ 9, 16, 19, 22.

⁶² “Scrutandi sunt ipsi electi secundum canones, si sint digni hoc onus fungi” (*CCL*, 199C:316). See Arthur Westwell, “The *Ordines* of Vat. Lat. 7701 and the Liturgical Culture of Carolingian Chieti,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 86 (2018): 127–52, at 135–36.

⁶³ For Frankish concern that clergy “should be properly examined prior to ordination,” see Westwell, “The *Ordines* of Vat. Lat. 7701,” 136.

⁶⁴ Rite XV, §§2–4 (*PRG*, 1:13–19).

⁶⁵ Rite XVI, §1 (*PRG*, 1:20–36, at 20–21).

⁶⁶ For the Paulinians, see canon 19 of Nicaea I (see note 42 above).

After the deacon's election, "then the pontifex prostrates himself with the archdeacon before the altar with those whom he is consecrating, and the scola chants the lityny" (rite XVI, §2). The lityny completed, "*ipsi electi* [the elected men] go forward and the pontifex blesses those who are *vocati* [called] to that office" (§3).

Next the bishop places his hand on the head of each man as he is being consecrated *ad ministerium* ("to ministry"; rite XVI, §9). The bishop announces to the people that the candidate is prepared for *diaconatus ministerio* (the ministry of the diaconate) and for the *leviticae benedictionis ordine* (the order of Levitical [i.e., diaconal] benediction; §10). Next the bishop prays God to deign to bless and sanctify and consecrate the stoles to be used by the *leviticae . . . gloriae ministris* (§11). A second prayer follows, asking God to make the candidates worthy *ad officium diaconatus* (§12). The next prayer is "Exaudi, Domine, preces nostras," asking God to enable the candidate, "by living well to offer an example to others" (§13). The fourth prayer refers to *tribus gradibus ministrorum* ("the three ranks of ministers"), calling the candidate to *officium diaconi* ("office of deacon") and the *opus ministerii* ("work of ministry") and citing his possibility, in Christ, of succeeding *de inferiori gradu* ("from the lower rank"), that is, to become a priest or bishop (§14).

The bishop then bestows on the deacon two objects representing his work. First the bishop blesses the *stola* and places it over the man's shoulder, declaring: "Receive your stole, fulfil your ministry, for God is powerful so that he may increase his grace to you."⁶⁷ Next the bishop gives the deacon the Gospel book, saying: "Receive the power of reading the Gospel in the church of God as much for the living as for the dead, in the name of the Lord. Amen."⁶⁸ The stole and the Gospel book are visible attributes, their meaning emphasized by the bishop's public references to the deacon's ministry and to his authority to read the Gospel in God's church. The deacon is then clothed with the dalmatic, exchanges the kiss of peace (*osculum*) and stands at the bishop's right hand as the Mass continues (rite XVI, §19). That is, he at once begins the liturgical work of his diaconal ministry.

A fifth prayer asks God that "sped along through your worship, they may readily grow to be pure ministers for your holy altars."⁶⁹ This prayer cites the example given by *beato Stephano*. A sixth prayer for the new deacon(s)

⁶⁷ "Accipe stolam tuam, imple ministerium tuum, potens est enim Deus ut augeat tibi gratiam suam" (§15).

⁶⁸ "Accipite potestatem legendi evangelium in ecclesia dei tam pro vivis quam pro defunctis in nomine domini" (§17).

⁶⁹ "Ut tuis obsequiis expediti sanctis altaribus tuis ministri puri accrescant" (§18).

and priest(s) is offered, indicating that the Mass is offered “for your servants whom you have deigned to promote to the grade of priesthood or diaconate” (*presbyterii vel diaconatus gradum*).⁷⁰

When a Latin rite for making (*faciendam*) a diacona is found in the tenth century, it proves to be significantly different from the ordination rite just reviewed. It has, however, an overlooked feature that is affirmative of female autonomy: its final rubric protects the property rights of the woman. The ritual as a whole, however, is a “pastiche”: it cobbles together elements from the consecration of a widow and that of a virgin.⁷¹ The blessing of the Western diacona is located amid rites for religious women. Like those rites, that for the diacona has no reference to any ministerial role. Moreover, it lacks any theologically rich prayer such as found in the first invocation in the Eastern consecration of a deaconess.⁷² Although the orarion or stole has a role in the Eastern deaconess’s gender-specific ministry—it was worn when she gave communion to housebound women—in contrast, for the diacona the stole appears to be a part of her religious habit. The Western rite may even be an antiquarian’s attempt to express in Roman idiom what was known of Eastern deaconesses.⁷³ In any case, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars concurred that, in the West, the rite for a deaconess was “purely ceremonial.”⁷⁴

Ad diaconam faciendam

In the pontifical from Saint-Alban de Mayence (950), the rite *Ad diaconam faciendam* (rite XXIV) is placed before the consecration of a widow.⁷⁵ Two

⁷⁰ For this prayer, see §4 in rites XVII, “Orationes pro ipsis ad missam” (*PRG*, 1:36–37).

⁷¹ Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 212, 213; “pastiche” is Schaefer’s term (*Women in Pastoral Office*, 281). I am grateful to Jonathan Roger Hayes and Simon Stehr for their bibliographic assistance with this section.

⁷² The prayer’s invocation correlates the Virgin Birth with the sanctification of the female as well as the male: ‘Ο Θεός ὁ ἅγιος καὶ παντοδύναμος, ὁ διὰ τῆς ἐκ παρθένου κατὰ σάρκα γεννήσεως τοῦ μονογενοῦς σου Υἱοῦ καὶ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν [ὁ] ἀγιάσας τὸ θῆλυ, καὶ οὐκ ἀνδράσιν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ γυναιξὶν δωρησάμενος τὴν χάριν καὶ τὴν ἐπιφύττησιν τοῦ ἁγίου σου Πνεύματος . . . —“O God, holy and omnipotent, Who through the birth in the flesh of Thine only begotten Son and our God from a Virgin, sanctifieth the female, and granting not only to men but also to women the grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit . . .” (Parenti and Velkovska, *L’euclologio Barberini*, item 163, par. 3 [pp. 185–86]). See also Tkacz, “Deaconesses and Spiritual Equality,” 31–32, and “Deaconesses and Affirmation,” 45, 47.

⁷³ Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 215, 217, 219.

⁷⁴ For example, Jacques Goar, O.P. (1647), and Joannes Pinius, S.J. (1746) (Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 253, 248, 252). On the title as honorific, see Farley, *Feminism and Tradition*, 140–41.

⁷⁵ Rite XXIV, “Ad diaconam faciendam” (*PRG*, 1:54–59, with lections on 55). The

lections are specific to the diacona, one that suits a virgin and one that suits a widow; neither points to ministry. The Epistle is 1 Corinthians 6:15–20, focused on bodies as members of Christ, a text fitting for consecrated chastity. The Gospel is John 3:27–30, which identifies Christ as the Bridegroom, the basis for one of the richest metaphors lived in female religious life. The Alleluia verse declares, “The Lord clothes her with a stole of glory.”⁷⁶ In contrast, in the ordination of a deacon, the Epistle is St. Paul’s description of the character of a deacon (1 Tim 3:8–14).⁷⁷

The *faciendam* begins with a litany of the saints, during which the candidate prostrates herself before the altar (rite XXV, §6). Then the bishop offers the brief prayer discussed above: “Exaudi, Domine, preces nostras.” The bishop does not lay his hand on the diacona’s head. Next the diacona receives a blessing, one specific to widows in the Gallican books: “Deus qui Annam filiam Phanuelis vix per annos . . .” (§8; cf. Luke 2:36–37).⁷⁸

Four items were given to the diacona: stole, veil, ring, and crown or wreath. The stole is also received by the deacon, the veil by both widow and virgin, and the ring and crown by the virgin.⁷⁹ In the West as in the East, for the woman the stole is around her neck.⁸⁰ This placement indicated that, in the West as in the East, she was not to chant the litanies as deacons do.⁸¹ The words of the Roman bishop when he placed the stole on the diacona

“Consecratio viduae que fuerit castitatem professā” is rite XXV (1:59–62).

⁷⁶ For the full verse—“Amavit eam dominus et ornavit eam stolam glorie induit eam”—see the Cantus Database for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant, cantus.uwaterloo.ca/chant/219789.

⁷⁷ *Ordo* rite XXXIV, in *Les ordines romani du haut moyen âge*, 5 vols., ed. Michel Andrieu, Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense 24 (Leuven: Peeters, 1931–1961), 3:601–13, at 605. The fact that this Epistle is not used at the making of a diacona accords with Farley’s analysis: St. Paul’s discussions of bishops and of deacons are parallel, and central in each Paul treats the character of the man’s wife: *Feminism and Tradition*, 141–42. Nonetheless, modern scholars who seek women’s ordination construe v. 11 as referring to deaconesses; see Jennifer H. Stiefel, “Women Deacons in 1 Timothy,” *New Testament Studies* 41, no. 3 (1995): 442–57. If that were so, why was that Epistle not read at the making of a *diacona*?

⁷⁸ Rite XXV, §8; see also §14. See also Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 216–21.

⁷⁹ Misleadingly, Schaefer introduces the phrase *traditio instrumentorum* to imply a parallel between the deacon’s stole and the diacona’s ring and wreath (*Women in Pastoral Office*, 283–84, 287).

⁸⁰ Indeed, as Martimort notes, a rubric indicates that, in the future, it is to be worn with the length of it under her tunic (§1), while during the ceremony, the bishop put the oration around her neck (§9), on top of her tunic (*Les diaconesses*, 212). Misconstruing these directions, Schaefer holds that the bishop put the stole on her outside the church before Mass, so that she could place it under her tunic before entering (*Women in Pastoral Office*, 136–37).

⁸¹ Tkacz, “Deaconesses and Spiritual Equality,” 30.

echoed his words over the virgin's veil, which he calls "the clothing of eternal joy" (*indumentum aeternae iocunditatis*).⁸² To the diacona, the bishop would intone, "May the Lord clothe you with the stole of joy" (*Stola iocundatis induat te dominus*), echoing the Alleluia verse. This points to the woman's relationship with God, rather than assigning any duty to her. Thus, for the diacona, the stole is part of her garments of consecration.

At once the reference shifts from virgin to widow: whereas the bishop puts the veil upon the virgin's head (rite XX, §16), the widow *ipsa* veils herself (rite XXV, §10), and likewise the diacona *ipsa* veils herself (rite XXIV, §10). The next elements, though, are absent from the rite for the widow: the diacona, like the virgin, receives a ring and a wreath. They evoke the consecration of the virgin and her spiritual marriage to the Lord, also recalled in the antiphon, *Ipsi sum desponsata* (Ps 44:5).⁸³ The diacona is mentioned again only after the Eucharistic consecration, in a rubric. Then, as in the Eastern rite, she received communion (rite XXIV, §24).⁸⁴

The rite concludes with a significant rubric, notable as evidence of the Church's concern to protect the autonomy of women who chose religious life outside the cloister. Lest anyone misconstrue a woman's consecration as her relinquishing her property, the rites for widow and virgin secure protection to her through the final rubric. That rubric also concludes the rite for a diacona. Even if that ceremony is a scholarly construct, the presence of this rubric shows a basic ecclesiastical commitment to protect single women. Strikingly, these are practical safeguards. The rite for the diacona ends thus: "After the Mass, the bishop confirms peace for her by pastoral edict [*bannum*],⁸⁵ so that she may possess her things [*sua*] with security and undisturbed."⁸⁶ The diction—"pastorali banno,"⁸⁷ cum securitate,

⁸² Rite XX, "Consecratio sacrae virginis quae in epiphania vel in albis paschalibus aut in apostolorum natalicii celebratur" (*PRG*, 1:38–46, at §6 on 1:40). The widow's habit is called *indumenta sanctitatis* or *indumenta benedictionis* (rite XXV, §§4–5).

⁸³ For the antiphon, see rite XXIV, §10, and rite XX, §19.

⁸⁴ Although some assume that the diacona distributed communion to the congregation, nothing in any written source or artwork supports this (see note 43 above).

⁸⁵ J. Parisot, O.S.B., attests the sense "edict" (*bannum*) here ("Les diaconesses," *Revue des sciences ecclésiastiques* 80 [1809]: 193–209, at 205). See also Charles du Fresnes Ducange et al., *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitas* (Paris: Niot-Favre, 1883–1887), who include "Bannum mittere super rem, aut personem aliquem," i.e., give protection to.

⁸⁶ "Post missam episcopus ei pastorali banno pacem confirmet, ut sua cum securitate et quiete possideat" (*PRG*, 1:59). The spelling *ei* is an obsolete form of the dative, *eo*.

⁸⁷ Variants among the rubrics regarding women are *auctoritate pastorali* and *bannum episcopalem*.

quiete, possidere”—was standard for indicating Church protection of just ownership from presumptuous seizure, used by, for example, Gregory of Tours,⁸⁸ the archbishop of Lyon,⁸⁹ and in bulls.⁹⁰ This is also seen in the concluding rubrics of other rites for individual women.⁹¹ These rubrics attest the Church's commitment to protect women from wrongful seizure of their person or property. This Christian regard for single women contrasts the cultural norm of marginalizing and exploiting them.⁹²

Surprisingly, some commentators, without mentioning that this rubric is in rites for other women, assert far different meanings for it concerning a diacona.⁹³ John Wijngaards renders it thus: “After the mass the bishop confirms her peace with a pastoral embrace [!] so that she may possess her peace with security and quiet.”⁹⁴ Evidently Wijngaards wants to suggest a parallel between the *bannum* after Mass and the kiss (*osculum*) of peace exchanged within the Mass by the newly ordained deacon and the bishop. However, *bannum* is a legal term and does not mean “embrace.” Also, although Wijngaards translates *sua* as if it were *suam* and were referred to *pacem* in the first clause, clearly *sua* must be neuter-plural-accusative here and mean “her [things]” or “her [possessions].” More seriously, Mary M. Schaefer invents a wide-ranging clerical ministry. Without quoting or translating the rubric, she asserts that it establishes a “pastoral jurisdiction.”⁹⁵ Further, she claims that the diacona is thereby “commissioned to a specific ‘charge’ or ‘title’” and has richly varied service.⁹⁶ Such assertions load the final rubric with claims about ministry that are absent from the rite itself.

⁸⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Historia ecclesiastica Francorum* 4.20 (PL, 71:499, 500).

⁸⁹ “Burchardi Lugdunensis ArchiEpiscopi charta pro Monasterio Insulae Barbarae, Anno 979,” in *Origines Guelficae*, vol. 2, ed. G. W. Leipnitz (Moringen, 1751), 143–44.

⁹⁰ Jean Hubert, “Abbaye exempte de Déols et la Papauté (X^e–XI^e siècles),” *Bibliothèque de l'École de chartes* 145, no. 1 (1987): 5–44, at 32.

⁹¹ Rite XXV, “Consecratio viduae que fuerit castitatem professa: (PRG, 1:59–62, at 62). The two rites for a virgin include one for a *monialis virgo* (rite XX, §27 [PRG, 1:38–46, at 46]). René Metz analyzed this rubric in *La consécration des vierges dans l'église romaine: Étude d'histoire de la liturgie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1954), 213–14, 310. The other rite (XXIII, §18) is for a virgin who will continue to reside in her own home (PRG, 1:51–54, at 54). See also the rite for a virgin in the *Pontificale Lexoviense* (Toulouse, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 119, fol. 104).

⁹² Most Rev. Thomas A. Daly, bishop of Spokane, private communication, March 1, 2022.

⁹³ Or they quote the Latin without translation (Macy, *Hidden History*, 137).

⁹⁴ “Pontifical of St. Alban Benedictine Monastery, Mainz,” translation by John Wijngaards, at womendeacons.org/minwest/vienna701.shtml.

⁹⁵ Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office*, 284.

⁹⁶ Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office*, 287, 285.

Comparison of the Rites

Compared to the Eastern deaconess, the Western diacona (if she existed) had a lesser role. Nothing in the rite or in the Western comments suggests that the diacona had any duties or service to the Church or to any individual parish; the prayers for her never mention service. No account of duties for a Western deaconess is known, early or late.⁹⁷ In contrast, the deaconess in the East had a clear range of practical charity for women and could be involved in their catechesis and baptism. A signal role of the Eastern deaconess was her capacity to give pre-consecrated communion exclusively to women housebound due to impurity laws. In the West, no such restriction existed, and no diacona had that role. Moreover, compared to the Latin rites for the consecrated virgin and widow, that for the diacona is less developed and not even fully coherent, suggesting that it may be an antiquarian construct.

Moreover, the numerous differences between the ordination of a Latin deacon and the rite for the diacona were visible and audible to the congregation. An initial detailed election of the deacon concludes with the bishop proclaiming to the people that he elects (*eligimus*) “this man for the order of the diaconate.” In contrast, the word *eligere* is never used of the diacona, even in a rubric. Also, the bishop places his hand on the man’s head for the opening prayer, but he does not do so with the woman.⁹⁸ The bishop and archdeacon join the male candidates in prostration before the altar, but do not join the candidate to be a diacona; here, too, she is unlike the clergy but like the widow and virgin.⁹⁹ When the bishop bestows the stole on the deacon, he commands him: “Receive your stole, fulfil your ministry.” To the diacona, the bishop issues no imperative. Instead, he prays, “May the Lord clothe you with the stole of joy.” The focus on the ministry of the deacon permeates his *ordo*; five of the six prayers treat his office, ministry, and grade within holy orders. In contrast, no prayer for the diacona mentions any of this. Notably, *diaconus* and *diaconatus* recur in the prayers over the deacon, but in the rite for the diacona, the word *diacona* appears only three times, always in the rubrics.¹⁰⁰ Only one, optional prayer for a deacon, the *Exaudi*, lacks reference to ministry and instead focuses on living so as to be a good example.¹⁰¹ Significantly, “it

⁹⁷ A point also made by Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 402.

⁹⁸ Schaefer dismisses this as unimportant (*Women in Pastoral Office*, 283, 285).

⁹⁹ Prostration of the diacona (rite XXIV, §6), virgin (rite XX, §11), and widow (rite XXV, §6).

¹⁰⁰ Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 214.

¹⁰¹ In one MS—*The Pontifical of Egbert*—that prayer’s rubric notes: “alia benedictio diaconi sive diaconissae” (*Two Anglo-Saxon Pontificals (The Egbert and the Sidney*

has no reference to any ministerial task.”¹⁰² As Gabriel Ramis notes, it is a blessing, not a prayer of ordination.¹⁰³ Although advocates for female ordination attach great “importance” to the use of that prayer for a diacona, because, “but for a change of gender, it is the very same prayer” found in the ordination of a deacon,¹⁰⁴ the prayer could readily be used for any Christian.

Thus, the evidence indicates that the ordination of a deacon and the consecration of the diacona are “entirely different.”¹⁰⁵ This is consistent with the reality of their roles, for he has a ministry, both liturgical and pastoral, but she had none.

Religious Women and the Divine Office

In the West, the deaconess served only in a monastic setting.¹⁰⁶ Different religious orders in East and West have had different ways of assigning roles to members of their communities in the Liturgy of the Hours. The Church has respected this individuality.¹⁰⁷ These women’s autonomy in governing

Sussex Pontificals), ed. H. M. J. Banting [London: Boydell, 1989], rite on 24–26, comment in 25n55). Although Macy construes the masculine throughout the rite as generic (*Hidden History*, 70), the MS specifies masculine and feminine where intended (Banting, *Two Anglo-Saxon Pontificals*, 114).

¹⁰² “No hace referencia a tarea ministerial alguna” (Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 171).

¹⁰³ Gabriel Ramis, “La consagración de vírgenes y viudas en los Pontificales Romanos,” *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 110 (1996): 97–140 at 127; Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 74, 143 et passim.

¹⁰⁴ Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office*, 269; see also 287.

¹⁰⁵ Farley, *Feminism and Tradition*, 145; Jean Galot, S.J., *Mission et ministère de la femme* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1973), 61. Martimort properly identified as *fallacieuses* the claims by Evangelos Theodorou, Vagaggini, and Gryson that both deacon and deaconess were ordained (*Les diaconesses*, 248). Although Schaefer claims the rites are “substantially the same,” she ignores the absence of election, divergence in the prayers, etc. (*Women in Pastoral Office*, 287).

¹⁰⁶ See also Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 204; Manfred Hauke, “Die Geschichte der Diakonissen—Nachwort und Literaturnachtrag zum Standardwerk von Aimé-Georges Martimort über die Diakonissen,” in *Der Diakonat: Geschichte und Theologie*, ed. Hauke and Helmut Hoping (Regensburg: Pustet, 2019), 361–94, at 385.

¹⁰⁷ Thus, in 1687, the Congregation for Sacred Rites confirmed “their customs and holy observance” (*suoi costumi e santa osservanza*) in a few Carthusian women’s monasteries (Decree 2321, *Ordinis Carthusianorum*, “Circa usum stolae et manipuli per monialibus,” cols. 1284–86, at 1285–86, in *Analecta Juris Pontificii: Decreta authentica Congregationis Sacrorum Rituum*, years 1663–1700, in *Analecta ecclesiastica*, ser. 8, vol. 4, part 2 [Rome, 1866], cols. 1137–388). See also Barozzi’s pontifical, cited in note 121 below.

their communities included their election of their own abbesses.¹⁰⁸ The abbess herself has “a specific genus of authority that is distinctly nonpriestly, yet which is conceded only to certain consecrated women, not to the laity in general.”¹⁰⁹ In the medieval West, a deaconess-nun, or the nuns of the community in turn, or a prioress or diaconal abbess might take specific roles in praying the Office.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, no free-standing rite exists in the West to consecrate a nun-deaconess for performing certain parts of the Liturgy of the Hours in community. The roles of deaconess-nun are known mainly by comments in treatises and rubrics providing historical remarks. Notably, even diaconal abbesses in the West did not have the full range of roles attested in the East: if, due to the absence of a priest, a Carthusian women’s monastery could not celebrate Mass, they were to recite the Psalter.¹¹¹ That is, unlike the Syriac diaconal abbess, the Carthusian abbess was not authorized to distribute pre-consecrated communion in such circumstances.

A few late-medieval historical notes posit the prior existence of nun-deaconesses: Guillaume Durand, thirteenth-century bishop of Mende, recounted: “Formerly the veil of ordination was given to a deaconess in [a nun’s] fortieth year so that she might read the Gospel during nocturns [i.e., Matins].”¹¹² Notably, the deaconess’s authority to read the Gospel was limited to Matins in the monastic community.¹¹³ The Dominican Durand de Saint-Pourçain (†1332) reported that the deaconess had been blessed but not ordained, and could “read the homily during Matins, but not however the Gospel during Mass or minister around the altar at the Mass as is fitting

¹⁰⁸ Sara Butler, M.S.B.T., and Jenna Cooper, “Ecclesial Roles Unique to Women: Some Reflections,” *The Thomist* 85, no. 4 (2022): 625–48, at 635.

¹⁰⁹ Butler and Cooper, “Ecclesial Roles Unique to Women,” 635–39, esp. at 638. They find the abbess the heir of the deaconess: 638–39.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, J. H. Gallée, “De regel der Windesheimsche Vrouwenkloosters,” *Archief voor Nederlandsche Kerkgeschiedenis* 15, no. 3 (1895): 250–322, esp. 266–67. By the fifteenth century, the hebdomadary read the Gospel, so again no deaconess was needed (Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 305, 231–37).

¹¹¹ *Statuta antiqua*, par. 26 (Rafał Witkowski, “Moniales Cartusienses: Mało znany rozdział historii monastycyzmu [Carthusian Nuns. A Little-Known Chapter in the History of Monasticism],” *Scripta minora* 2 [1998]: 157–74, at 165–66). “Reciting the Psalter” meant just that and did not mean “pray the Liturgy of the Hours,” which the nuns already did.

¹¹² “Velum ordinationis olim dyaconisse in quadragesimo anno dabatur ut posset legere evangelium in nocturnis” (Guilelmus Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* 2.1.48 [Naples: Josephum Dura Bibliopolam, 1859]; see Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 313, 361, and Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 220–21).

¹¹³ Schaefer aggrandizes Matins into “the divine office” as a whole (*Women in Pastoral Office*, 306–7).

for the deacon.”¹¹⁴ In fact, however, no known antique pontifical assigned any role to a deaconess.¹¹⁵

In Durand’s pontifical, between two rites for monastic women, he records *De ordinatione diaconissae*.¹¹⁶ Yet it is in the imperfect tense, recording either prior practice or what he theorized had been prior practice, done formerly (*olim*). After the Epistle was read, the woman was to prostrate herself while the bishop would pray. He would offer two prayers, “Exaudi, Domine, preces nostras” and a prayer concerned with preserving the woman’s virginity, “Famulam tuam, Domine”: “Lord, may the guard of your piety protect your servant, so that, with you protecting, she may guard spotless the purpose of holy virginity which she received, inspired by you.”¹¹⁷ He would then give the woman a stole and instruct her: “Receive the authority to read the Gospel at Vigil and to begin the Hours in church in the name of the Lord.”¹¹⁸ For the rest, the reader is directed *supra*. Justly, Aimé-Georges Martimort concludes this is likely to be “a mere archeological reminiscence.”¹¹⁹

In the fifteenth century, there appear both a short rite assigning roles to a deaconess in one pontifical and, in another, an addition to the consecration of a virgin, both dependent on Durand. The pontifical of Perugia first, in the array of rites for women, inserts Durand’s comments about the former role of deaconesses (*Diaconissa olim*; fol. 35v). Later, on a blank folio, was added *De ordinatione dyaconisse* (fol. 45).¹²⁰ It tersely assigns reading during the Office to her. This version has the bishop deliver to her the *librum evangeliorum* and authorize her to read it during Matins. Then she kisses the bishop’s hand. That is the entire rite. No oration, veil, ring, or crown is mentioned. Clearly, the candidate is already a nun.

¹¹⁴ “Legere homiliam in matutinis, non autem evangelium in missa vel ministrare circa altare in missa ut diacono convenit” (Durand de Saint-Pourçain, *In IV sent.*, d. 25, q. 2 (Venice, 1571), fol. 364v; see Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 232). “Reading the homily” meant, of course, not the nun’s own composition but the sermon provided to be read that day.

¹¹⁵ Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 349.

¹¹⁶ *Le Pontifical du Guillaume Durand in Le Pontifical romain au moyen-âge* [hereafter *PRMA*], ed. Michel Andrieu (Vatican City: Vatican Library, 1940), rite XXII in vol. 3; see and Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 231–43 (text on 234).

¹¹⁷ “Famulam tuam Domine tue custodia muniat pietatis ut virginitatis sancte propositum quod te inspirante suscepit, te protegente illesum custodiat.”

¹¹⁸ “Accipite potestatem legendi evangelium ad vigiliis et incipiendi horas in ecclesia in nomine Domini.”

¹¹⁹ “Un simple souvenir archéologique” (Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 221).

¹²⁰ Perugia: Rome, Vat. Chigi C. V. 148 (*PRMA*, 3:253). See Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 234–35; and appendix 10 (“Fórmula de Entrega del Libro”) in Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*.

Although the pontifical of Giovanni Barozzi, bishop of Bergamo (†1466), lacks a rite for a deaconess, its consecration of a virgin recounts a previously used option, followed by a rubric of historical detail explaining that no longer are deaconesses made (*fiunt*): “And if [the bishop] will have made some one of these a deaconess, then after the crown has been given, let [him] give to her the book of homilies, saying, *Receive the power of reading the Gospel with the homily in the church of God.*”¹²¹ The rubric explains: “At this time deaconesses are not made, but commonly in whatever place the hebdomadarian reads the Gospel, or another [nun], according to the custom of her monastery.”¹²² Thus, this too is a report that, in the past, certain nuns had been commissioned to read the homily assigned to the day, during their community’s service of Matins. Note again the Church’s respect for the variety of customs of different religious orders.

Reading the homiliary during communal service of Divine Office did not entail extemporaneous preaching and never extended into taking this role in the parishes.¹²³ The rites of blessing indicate this clearly. Among thirteenth-century theologians stating the distinctions were Raymond of Pennafort, O.P., St. Bonaventure, O.F.M., Duns Scotus, O.F.M., and Ricardus de Media Villa.¹²⁴ Petrus de Tarantasia (Pope Innocent V) was explicit: “The woman who was competent to read the homily in Matins, however not to minister during Mass, or to chant the Gospel, was called a deaconess, not according to the character of the Ordo, but from similarity of action.”¹²⁵ Such testimonies continued.¹²⁶

¹²¹ “Et si aliquam earum fecerit diaconissam, data corona, det ei librum omeliarum, dicens: *Accipe potestatem legendi evangelium cum omelia in ecclesia Dei*” (Rome, Vat. Lat. 1145, fols. 50–59v, at 59v; *PRMA*, 3:223); see Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 336–37.

¹²² “Hoc tempore non fiunt diaconissae, sed communiter in quocumque loco ebdomadaria legit evangelium, vel alia secundum consuetudinem monasterii sui.”

¹²³ It was only the violation of this by certain abbesses in Castille in 1210 who “presumed, reading the Gospel, to preach publicly” (“legentes evangelium praesumunt publice praedicare”) that Pope Innocent directed the bishops to curtail by asserting their apostolic authority (Innocent III, Letter to the bishops of Palencia and Burgos, in *In quinque decretalium libri commentaria*, 5 vols. in 2, tit. 38, canon 10, ed. Henricus de Segusio [Venice, 1581]); see also Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 228, 251; pace Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office*, 166.

¹²⁴ Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 34n750.

¹²⁵ “Diaconissa vocatur non a characterе Ordinis, sed a similitudine actus, illa mulier cui in matutines competeat legere homiliam, non tamen in missa ministrare, vel Evangelium cantare” (Petrus de Tarantasia, *In quattuor libros Sententiarum commentaria*, IV, q. 3, “De idoneitate Conferentis Ordines,” ad. 2, de Diaconissa”; see Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 340n750).

¹²⁶ For the classic statement “Mulier in missa ministrare non potest” (“A woman cannot

Later evidence of rituals diminished. The *Pontificale Romanum* of 1485 lacks reference to a deaconess.¹²⁷ In the 1497 pontifical, after the rite of the *consecratio virginum*, a rubric explains an aspect of that rite for a few (*nonnullis*) monasteries which formerly had deaconesses: the bishop would hand the breviary to the woman, saying, “Receive the power of reading the Office and beginning the Hours in church.”¹²⁸ Since 1595, deaconesses are not mentioned and the bishop’s words are slightly revised: “Receive the book, so that you may begin the canonical Hours and read the Office in church.”¹²⁹

The pontificals of Perugia and Barozzi and the *Pontificale Romanum* since 1497 show the rite for deaconess to be “a mere capacitating, a giving of a faculty, which is not necessary for the task, since it is done without it.”¹³⁰

Diaconal Abbesses

Unique evidence of a rite commissioning a diaconal abess in the West has been clarified by José-Juan Fresnillo Ahijón.¹³¹ Six such abbesses are attested around tenth-century Rome, and Atto of Vercelli and others considered “abbess” to be equivalent to “deaconess,” yet no rite had been known.¹³² When the pontifical of Arles (first half of the fourteenth century) was catalogued (1937), the final section of the consecration of an abbess was

minister in the Mass”), see, for example, Hugh of St Cher, O.P. (thirteenth century), *De utilitate misse cum dicentium necnon profectu eam audientium deque periculis eam negligentium* (Rome 1475), fol. 18v; Gebhard Truchseß von Waldburg, *Tractatus de administratione sacramenti eucharistiae et de celebratione Missae, ex canonibus & probatis auctoribus* (Dillingen: S. Mayer, 1559), fol. 97v; and Laurentius Petius, *Epitome sacramentorum* (Venice, 1575), fol. 19v. Arcadius Pankowsky concludes that the deaconess’s blessing did not “give the power of public preaching in the church, ministering at the altar, sacrificing, or conferring the other sacraments” (*De diaconesses: commentatio archaeologica* [Ratisbon: George Joseph Manz, 1866], 13).

¹²⁷ Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 235.

¹²⁸ “Accipe potestatem legendi officium et incipiendi horas in ecclesia” (*Pontificale Romanum*, ed. Jacobus de Lutiis and Johannes Burchandus [Rome: Stephan Plannck, 1497], fol. 76; quoted by Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 349n777).

¹²⁹ “Accipite librum, ut incipiatis horas canonicas et legatis officium in ecclesia” (Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 236).

¹³⁰ “Una mera capacitación, un dar facultad, que no es necesaria para la tarea, pues esta se realiza sin ella.” José-Juan Fresnillo Ahijón, “El diacon(is)ado femenino en la Edad Media,” *Liturgia y Espiritualidad* 49 (2018): 692–704, at 704.

¹³¹ Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, appendix 7 (476–77) reproduces fol. 38v and portions of fols. 41v–42v (transcription and analysis on 344–48).

¹³² Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 205–7, treating the *diaconae abbatissae* Euphemia, Odokia, Alvisida, Eufrosina, Agatha and Sergia. Atto, ep. viii (*PL*, 134:114). See also Fresnillo Ahijón, “Diacon(is)ado femenino,” 695; Abelard, Epistle 8 to Heloise, no. 25; Fresnillo Ahijón, *Ad diaconam faciendam*, 333; Pierre de la Palud (†1342): Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 231.

incorrectly reported as a separate rite.¹³³ Fresnillo Ahijón examines the manuscript afresh, studying the large initials beginning rites, colors of inks, scribal hands, and the consistent use of the term *consecrator* in this manuscript to mean “bishop,” showing that the passage in question on folios 41v–42 is not the title of a new *ordo*, but a rubric: “For consecrating a deaconess, let the consecrator say over her this prayer.”¹³⁴ The “Exaudi . . .” prayer follows. Then the consecrator is to give her the orarium, offering the prayer for preserving her virginity, “Famulam tuam, Domine, tue custodia muniat pietatis.” Notably, once again the stole is linked with chastity, not with any ministry. For the rest of the rite, the bishop is then directed to the things “said and done in the blessing of consecrated virgins.”

Carthusian Nuns

Although it has little to do with the “real history of deaconesses,”¹³⁵ a late tradition of a small subset of Carthusian nuns had a *sui generis* addition to their consecration which parallels some activities that other religious houses assigned to deaconess-nuns. Specifically, in a few Carthusian monasteries, consecrated virgins had a role in the Eucharistic liturgy itself: they sang the Epistle at the conventual Mass. On rare occasions, the abbess could sing the Gospel there.¹³⁶ The *Statuta antiqua* of 1271 stipulated that such rare lections were their sole role: the sisters “may never serve at Mass.”¹³⁷

The bestowal of items is attested only for two Flemish houses, in Bruges in 1480 and in Gosnay.¹³⁸ The bishop was to place, briefly, insignia on the virgin at the end of her consecration. He placed the maniple on her right arm, saying, “Wait for the Lord” (Ps 6:14). Then he placed the stole around her neck, saying, “Take the yoke of the Lord upon you” (Matt 11:29). Note that this exhortation is entirely different from that when the deacon receives the stole: to him the bishop commands, “fulfill your ministry” (“imple ministerium tuum”). For the Carthusian nun, next the bishop placed a cross on her shoulder, saying, “Deny yourself and take up your cross daily” (Luke

¹³³ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Lat. 1220, fols. 38v–42 (Victor Leroquais, *Les pontificaux manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*, 4 vols. [Paris: Protat Frères, 1937], 2:119).

¹³⁴ “Ad consecrandam diaconissam dicat consecrator super eam hanc orationem.”

¹³⁵ Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 243.

¹³⁶ Pace Schaefer, who implies these could be public services (*Women in Pastoral Office*, 163).

¹³⁷ “Nec unquam serviant ad Missas” (Witkowski, “Moniales Cartusienses,” 165).

¹³⁸ *Les éditions des Statuts de l'Ordre des Chartreux*, ed. Hubert Elie (Lausanne: F. Rouge & Cie., 1943), 149. Most Carthusian monasteries lacked these extra features (Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 238–39).

9:23). The bishop was at once to retrieve (*retrahat*) the cross, and likewise the rubric continues, “let the stole and maniple be taken from the virgin” (“*stola et manipulus tollantur a virgine*”).¹³⁹ Only on three occasions could these virgins wear the stole and maniple: their consecration, its fiftieth anniversary, and their death.¹⁴⁰ Thus, and significantly, these women did not wear them when they sang the Epistle. That is, for them the stole was not a liturgical garment, but an honorific symbol.¹⁴¹ Abbesses also had a conditional faculty: reading the twelfth of a set of lections at Vigil where the twelfth was a Gospel, but only if no clergy were present.¹⁴²

Conclusion

In the East, some parishes and some female monasteries had deaconesses. In clearly defined circumstances, each kind of Eastern deaconess had the authority to give pre-consecrated communion exclusively to women. In contrast, in Western parishes, a variety of women assisted with the catechesis and baptism of women, and women’s access to communion was unimpaired by impurity laws, so deaconesses were not needed. Comparing the ordination of a Roman deacon and the *faciendam diaconam* shows clearly that the *diacona* was not clergy. Instead, the similarities of her *faciendam* to the consecration of virgin and widow identify her as religious or paramonastic. An intriguing recovery of this essay has been clarifying that all these women’s rites protected their property rights, a practical measure showing respect for female autonomy. Within the monasteries, nuns and abbesses could fill roles in the Divine Office and even conventual Mass without being installed as deaconess. In short, the deaconess in the East had a substantially different ministry from the deacon, while in the West the deaconess cannot be said to have had a ministry at all.

From the start, the Church was committed to ensuring that women were catechized and baptized and received communion equally with men. While Jewish women could not enter the Temple proper and were exempt from reciting the Shema, Christian men and women stood together in

¹³⁹ Brussels, Bibl. Royale Albert I^{er}, MS 8425, fol. 287v (Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 239–40).

¹⁴⁰ Decree 2321, *Ordinis Carthusianorum*, col. 1285 (see note 107 above).

¹⁴¹ The same seems to be the case with the stole worn by the *diacona*, for it is worn beneath her tunic (see note 80 above).

¹⁴² *Annales ordinis Cartusiensis*, VIII, ed. Carolus Le Couteulx, vol. 5 (Monstrolii: Typis Cartusiae S. Mariae de Pratis, 1889), 383; Martimort, *Les diaconesses*, 239–41; Witkowski, “Moniales Cartusienses,” 164 and note 47. Schaefer mistakes the abbess’s faculty as unconditional (*Women in Pastoral Office*, 306–7).

worship and came to the sanctuary to receive the Eucharist. In those Eastern churches that retained impurity laws, women's access to baptism required the assistance of deaconesses, and if a woman was housebound due to impurity rules, then her access to the Eucharist was again made possible by a deaconess. Absent those laws, the West simply did not need deaconesses. Christian women were recognized by virtue of their faith as able to assist at the baptism of other women, to catechize them, and so on. And that historical finding is again affirmative of women. N.V.