

# WOMEN AND WORSHIP FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND CANON LAW

Eva M. Synek\*

## 1. Introduction: Evolution of Ritual Worship in Christianity

In the New Testament, (i.e. the canonical collection of scriptures deriving from the Jesus-movement), the conviction is expressed that the last days of the world have arrived, or in other words: that the Kingdom of God, His New World, has come very close, that it is already here - at least in its nucleus. As it seems, Paul expected the second arrival of the Messiah, of the Christ, and thus the definite end of this world during his own life-time. Such apocalyptic enthusiasm was disappointed by historical progress. Only one generation after Paul, the author of the second epistle to the Thessalonians had to warn the followers of the Jesus-movement of too much distance from worldly affairs. Normal life had to go on. That did not only mean: "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3 : 10b). Normal life had go on.

One of the most important aspects of a rather fast process of institutionalisation of the Jesus-movement was its adaptation to forms of the religious worship such as those of the synagogue, the cultic association with other religious traditions or contacts with the philosophical schools. Thus a specific Christian cultic identity inspired by traditional cultic forms was developed. The strong eschatological expectance in early Christian communities corresponded also to a comparable extent of specific institutionalisation. The early Jesus-movement which was deeply rooted in the (multifold) Jewish mother-religion went on using the existing institutions of contemporary Judaism such as the Temple in Jerusalem, the synagogue and the house. According to the Acts of the Apostles, the members of the community of Jesus-fellows, clustered in Jerusalem, went on participating in temple-service. At the same time, they met in private

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\*Dr. Eva M. Synek is the assistant director of the Institute of Canon Law and Religion of the Faculty of Law of the University of Vienna. She serves also as the General Secretary of the Canon Law Society of Eastern Churches and Editor of *Canon*.

houses for breaking bread. Paul, spreading the gospel of Jesus in the world of the Hellenistic cities, started to preach at already existing Jewish worship-places. Besides the synagogues (where the message of Jesus, the Christ, was not accepted by the Jewish majority) there were again private houses which served as most important centres of the new movement, where—as in all new movements (at least *idealiter*) - charismatic authority (so to use the typology of Max Weber) preceded the institutionalised authority of office-holders. Specific organisational forms, a specific cult and a caste of cult specialists respectively came into existence only in course of time. It is not accidental that there is very little evidence for the term 'priest' (referring to office-holders in a specific Christian context) – *hierereus* in Greek or *sacerdos* in Latin - before the third century of Christian era (in the following: C. E.).<sup>1</sup> Only then one started to use it more and more for bishops (*episkopoi*) and with the time also for presbyters. Particularly in Western Christianity the identification of presbyter and priest became standard in the middle-ages, but first the main priestly figure was the bishop (and – to some extent - he has remained so in the orthodox world until now).

To sum up: The first Christians were deeply rooted in the Jewish mother-religion. There was certainly, not yet, a developed, specific Christian cult nor had the early Christian communities specialists for cultic affairs. But that does not mean that there were neither specific rituals. As it seems already in very early times there were two rites which connected those women and men who confessed Jesus as their Messiah (Christ)<sup>2</sup>, i.e.:

1. A water-rite for initiation, performed "in the name of Jesus" (and a little later, also "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit", cf. *Mathew 28 : 19*) and in general administered by a third person ("baptism")<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Georg Schöllgen, "Hoherpriester." *B. Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* t. 16 (Stuttgart, 1994), pp. 23-58.

<sup>2</sup>Cf., e.g., Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 140-163.

<sup>3</sup>See Eva Maria Synek, "Und er ist angenommen von Gott ...". Zur Nottaufe in der westsyrischen Tradition, *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 45 (1996), pp. 146-161.

2. A specific meal-rite with bread and wine which referred to Jesus' death (variable terminology, e.g. "breaking of bread", "Lord's supper", "Eucharist").

These rites were linked to contemporary Judaism, but there were also analogies in other ("pagan") cults. So, not only people of Jewish origin, but also other could easily understand these rites as meaningful symbols.<sup>4</sup> Thus integrative effects were guaranteed. According to the old baptismal formula quoted in Paul's epistle to the Galatians (cf. *Galatians* 3 : 28), in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female."

## 2. Women's Participation in Early Christian Worship

As it seems from the very beginning women were baptised and they participated in the Lord's supper.<sup>5</sup> There were also women among the leading authorities of the Jesus' movement: e.g. female disciples of the historic Jesus, particularly Mary Magdalene, who must have played an important role in the reorganisation of the movement after Jesus' violent death (cf. the broad evidence of the Synoptic gospels but also John, and the evidence of later non-Canonical books the "apostle" Junia, the "diakonos" and "prostatis" ("deacon and patron") Phoebe and the other women celebrated by Paul in the greeting-list of his epistle to the Christian community in Rome (cf. *Romans* 16) or the daughters of Philip (first mentioned in *Acts* 21 : 8), who became famous for prophetic gifts. Women obviously participated in the diffusion of the good tidings of Jesus, the

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<sup>4</sup>For analogies to Christian baptism see, e.g., Brooke W.R. Pearson, "Baptism and Initiation in the Cult of Isis and Sarapis: Baptism, the New Testament and the Church. Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R.E.O. White," eds Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 1. 171 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 1999), pp. 42-62.

<sup>5</sup>For the question of women's participation in early Christian cult cf. the summary of Teresa Berger, *Sei gesegnet, meine Schwester: Frauen feiern Liturgie. Geschichtliche Rückfrage – praktische Impulse – theologische Vergewisserung* (Würzburg: Echter, 1999), pp. 49ss. – A second, just published study of Berger was not available for me when preparing this paper: Teresa Berger, *Womens's Ways of Worship: Gender Analysis and Liturgical History*, (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo – Liturgical Press, 1999).

Christ and in the organisation of his movement. When the New Testament scripts mention specific functions such as "*episkopoi*," (translated as "bishops" in general but certainly not yet referring to the developed episcopal office of later centuries), "*diakonoi*" ("deacons") or "*presbyteroi*" (presbyters, sometimes also falsely translated as "priests"<sup>6</sup>), it is sometimes hard to say whether they use gender-inclusive language or definitely speak about men only. Only in some cases as "apostle" or "deacon" we have direct evidence that they were used for women and men (cf. the above mentioned Junia and Phoebe). But the lacuna does not prove that other titles were gender-exclusive.<sup>7</sup> As it seems some women presided over Christian communities which clustered around households – alone or together with their husbands (cf. e.g. the Lydia-tradition in *Acts 16* or the testimony for apostolic couples such as *Priscilla and Aquila* [cf. *I. Corinthians 16 : 19, Romans 16 : 3-5, Acts 18*] or *Junia and Andronicus* [cf. *Romans 16 : 7*]). Therefore it is reasonable to imagine that such female heads of early Christian communities also presided the Lord's supper here and then, but there is no explicit evidence. As for baptism we have normative texts from the second century C. E. onwards which want to ban women – not from being baptised, but from administering baptism. These interdicts indirectly witness that *de facto* there were women performing this important rite of initiation to the Christian community.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Thus also the book of Karen J. Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests. Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), is clearly misleading: We lack evidence for Christian "priestesses" (though there is some evidence for female forms of the title "*presbyteros*" in post-biblical source-material).

<sup>7</sup>The feminist approach of a "hermeneutic of suspicion" was mainly developed by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, (London: SCM-Press, 1983); for an application to epigraphic evidence see Ute E. Eisen, "Amtsträgerinnen im frühen Christentum. Epigraphische und literarische Studien," *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte* t. 61 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

<sup>8</sup>Cf., e.g., Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 17; Letter of Flavian of Caesare in the Epistularium of Cyprian (ep. 75); Didascalia (syr. version) 15; Apostolic Constitutions 3,9; Epiphanius, Panarion 1,3,22 (vel 62) et al.

Galatians did not prevent that in the further development of Christian cult gender (as well as other dimensions of legal and social status<sup>9</sup>) became an important category. Is it tolerable that women speak in the community-assembly, and if yes, are there specific conditions for women to do so? Pauline interdict for women's teaching (cf. *Corinthians 14 : 34-35*), which was very successful in canon-law, could be a secondary interpolation. As for the related passage in *1. Timothy 2 : 11ss* there is broad scholarly consensus that the whole epistle cannot be from Paul, but is a pseudepigraphy that points to the developed consolidation process in the third Christian generation. But the dispute concerning proper behaviour of women during the community-assembly as testified by *1. Corinthians 11* obviously points to the first expansion of the Jesus-movement to a Hellenistic milieu. Later, Christianity went often much further when discussing whether women are allowed to preach in the service or to read from the Holy Scripture (both was usually denied) or sometimes even whether it would be proper that they sing and pray aloud.<sup>10</sup> Our text is very clear about that it was not yet Paul who wanted to ban female prayer and prophetic expression (we would say "female preaching") from the community-assembly. But he was only willing to accept it under the condition that a woman covers her head. This was a question of decency for him, but he also interpreted it as a symbolic expression for the presupposed gender-hierarchy:

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<sup>9</sup>There is a broad canonical tradition that excludes slaves from Holy Orders, e.g. Another point where slavery could have a serious impact on one's legal position was sexual relations. Though the Christian authorities disagreed to all forms of extramarital sex in general, there was great consensus that slaves who could not have a legal marriage in terms of Roman Law should be granted stable, monogamous relationships. More crucial than such "quasi-marriages" of two slaves were relationships between a free-born (or a freed person) and a slave, particularly relationships of free men and slave women, when the man had already a legitimate wife. At times, even ancient baptismal-law paid respect to the legal and social order insofar one asked the testimony (or even the permission!) of a slave's master before accepting her or him for baptism. - Cf., e.g. Eva Maria Synek, Oikos. "Zum Ehe- und Familienrecht der Apostolischen Konstitutionen," *Kirche und Recht* t. 22 (Wien: Pöchl, 1999), particularly pp. 256ss.

<sup>10</sup>For the Roman Catholic Church singing in the choir was forbidden by a papal *Motu proprio* as late as 1903!

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered dishonours his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head [...] For a man indeed ought not cover his head, since he is the image of God; but woman is the glory of man (*1. Corinthians 11 : 3-7*).

Until recently the Pauline rule was widely observed insofar as women were expected to use a veil or headscarf when approaching sacred places (e.g. churches, burial places, memorial of a saint) or persons (e.g. during papal audience), participating in service or at least in moments considered particularly important in the ritual context (e.g. taking communion).<sup>11</sup> Today things are very much depending on the social surrounding: In eastern contexts women are more likely to behave in the traditional way than in the western churches where the Pauline rule has widely fallen in disuse.

But the very issue of covering or not-covering the head in Paul's letter points already to the further development in a more general way also. I want to mention no more than three linked key-words: opposing views concerning the "right" female behaviour, truth to traditional gender-ideology versus actual behaviour of women, theological-canonical ambiguity. Though there is good reason to see Christian cult as a drama with male actors and female supernumeraries, this is only half of the truth. The discussion of liturgical role-distribution and linked questions as hair- and dress-codes or ritual purity,<sup>12</sup> was enforced in the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. e.g., canon 1262 § 2 of the Old Roman Catholic Code of 1917. Likewise the Pauline rule was observed insofar Christian men were expected to uncover their head in a cultic context in general though there are remarkable exceptions, e.g. monastic veils used by orthodox monks or the episcopal mitre.

<sup>12</sup>The purity question is very important until nowadays, at least in orthodox contexts. I am preparing a study precisely dealing with different aspects of this very issue, e.g. the question if a woman who has given birth or a menstruating woman is allowed to receive Eucharist (or to be baptised or just to enter church). This study will appear in the yearbook of the Society for Eastern Canon Law, *Kanon* (vol. 16, Eichenau: Kovar, 2000). See now Eleutheria Papaganne/Spyros Troianos, 1988: Thessaloniki, 1988), pp. 29-46; Dorothea Wendebourg, "Die alttestamentlichen

And it led to quite different results within the various Christian denominations and even within single communities of one ecclesiastical jurisdiction. But from the very beginning, gender questions have always been part of the history of Christianity, which though is only a very short time in terms of the history of humankind – is extremely manifold, particularly in the formation period, and again, in present times. In medieval and early modern times there was more consensus concerning restrictions for female participation in Christian cult than in the formative period. But even then it would be dangerous to suppose too much homogeneity. There were regional and institutional differences. Thus in a monastic milieu women shared the “male” prerogatives to a greater extent.<sup>13</sup> Stereotypic generalisations concerning “the status of woman in Christianity” were very common for long.<sup>14</sup> But as far as I understand, it would be necessary to speak of all three basic concepts—status, woman, Christianity – should be evaluated as pluralistic. In this paper I take some particular settings testified in ancient source-material as a starting point and to link them with contemporary canonical development. I shall conclude with a summary addressing the canonical status-quo of today’s Christian denominations. Thus I hope to give at least some expressions of historic as well as of today’s plurality.

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Reinheitsgesetze in der frühen Kirche” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 95 (1984), pp. 149-170 or Franz Kohlscheid, “Die Vorstellung von der kultischen Unreinheit der Frau. Das weiterwirkende Motiv für eine zwispältige Situation: Liturgie und Frauenfrage. Ein Beitrag zur Frauenforschung aus liturgiewissenschaftlicher Sicht,” *Pietas Liturgica* t. 7, eds Teresa Berger and Albert Gerhards (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1990), pp. 269-288.

<sup>13</sup>Cf., e.g., Gisela Muschiol, “Famula Dei. Zur Liturgie in merowingischen Frauenklöstern,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens* t. 41 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1994); eadem, “Psallere et legere”. Zur Beteiligung der Nonnen an der Liturgie nach den frühen gallischen “Regulae ad Virgines”, Berger/Gerhards, pp. 77-125 or Anna Ulrich, “Die Kanonissen. Ein vergessener Stand der Kirche,” *op. cit.*, pp. 181-194.

<sup>14</sup>For a more detailed survey see Eva Maria Synek, “*Ex utroque sexu fidelium tres ordines*” – The Status of Women in Early Medieval Canon Law, Gender & History: Gendering the Middle Ages, eds Pauline Stafford and Anneke Mulder-Bakker (forthcoming 2000).

### 3. Historical Instances of Women's Involvement in Ritual Worship

#### 3.1. Women Devotees of Mary

First historical setting: Women are preparing small breads or cakes and offer them to Mary, the mother of Christ. Thus they venerate her as a goddess and act as priestesses in the very cult.<sup>15</sup>

This specific women's ritual is referred to in the *Panarion*, some kind of an early guide to different denominations which considered themselves as Christians or were at least categorized among Christian "heretics" by its author Epiphanius († 403 C.E.). Epiphanius was an "orthodox" bishop of Salamis (Cyprus), i.e. he belonged to the Pro-Nicean wing of the Great Church, which won the battle in the theological quarrels concerning the relationship between God, the Father, and Christ. His knowledge concerning other Christian groups is highly polemical. Sometimes it seems that he misunderstood those theological doctrines or practices he criticised, or he referred to doubtful sources. Still the underlying message is correct in principle. Baking bread or cake for a female deity had a very old tradition, particularly in the Semitic world, where it survived all theological revolutions.<sup>16</sup> Already the prophet Jeremiah reproached women who, besides JHWH, venerated also Ashera

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* (also known as "Adversus haereses") 3,2,59 (vel 79); Franz J. Dölger, "Die eigenartige Marienverehrung der Philomariniten oder Kollyridianer in Arabia" *Antike und Christentum*, 1 (1929) 107-140.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Renate Jost, *Frauen, Männer und die Himmelskönigin. Exegetische Studien* (Gütersloh: Kaiser-Güterloher Verlaghaus, 1995); Mathias Delcor, "Le culte de la "Reine du Ciel" selon Jer 7,18; 44,17-19,25 et ses survivances. Aspects de la religion populaire féminine aux alentours de l'Exile en Juda et dans les communautés juives d'Égypte: Von Kanaan bis Kerala." *Festschrift J.P.M. van der Ploeg*, eds W.C. Delsman et al. (Kevelaer-Neunkirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Becker-Neunkirchener Verlag, 1982), pp. 101-121. – For an evaluation of iconographic evidence for female deities cf. Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, "Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole. Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen," *Quaestiones disputatae* t. 134 (Freiburg: Herder, 1992).



to whom they offered cakes. It is hard to say which was more shocking for *Epiphanius*: the deification of Mary or female priests!

Mary's promotion can easily be understood in the Greco-Roman tradition of the *deificatio* of great humans. From a Jewish-Christian-theological perspective it is acceptable to speak about God not only in abstract terms such as love, but also in personal categories, such as father and mother.<sup>17</sup> Thus also the present Pope, taking up a word of his predecessor, likes to stress that God is not only father but also mother. There are a lot of actual efforts within the western denominations to include something of this theological insight, which was strongly fostered by feminist theology. But its roots go back to old-testament<sup>18</sup>. Today several protestant communities are not only very open for an inclusive language when addressing the faithful, but also to female God-language (for instance to address God in the "Our Father" to "Our Father and Mother" or even alternatively to "Our Mother"), while parts of the catholic hierarchy have considerable reservations concerning such changes in liturgical speech.

There are, however, remarkable inter-cultural differences. Most conservative are the hierarchies of some orthodox denominations. At the same time, it is in the East where female God-language had a stronger tradition than in the West.<sup>19</sup> Particularly the early Syrian Churches liked to use female-related metaphors in their liturgical poetry, which partly has been in use until now such as the hymns composed by Ephrem († 373).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Cf., e.g., Elizabeth A. Johnson, "The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God as Male and Female," *Theological Studies*, 45 (1984), pp. 441-465.

<sup>18</sup>Cf., e.g., Isaiah 42,14 and Deuteronomy 32,18 (compare God to a woman giving birth); Deuteronomy 32,11 (compares God to a mother-eagle); Psalm 22,10 (compares God to a midwife).

<sup>19</sup>But there are of course also western starting-points, particularly in medieval mystic literature, e.g. in the works of Julian of Norwich († uncertain, after 1164). – A lot was published about Julian during the last years, c.f., e.g., Margaret Collier-Bendelow, *Gott ist unsere Mutter. Die Offenbarung der Juliana von Norwich*, herder frauenforum (Freiburg: Herder, 1998).

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syrian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977).

There might be a philological reason for the intensive use of female God-language Syrian Churches, and this definitely had some effect in the institution of a female office: the "Spirit" is a female term in early Syrian language (as it is in biblical Hebrew)<sup>21</sup>. It used female metaphors when referring to the Holy Spirit. And it seems that the office of the deaconess is a typological representation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> But a philological speciality of Semitic languages cannot be the only reason for a strong development of female images in religious language. One of the so-called *Odes of Solomon* went thus far to speak about God "Father" as having breasts:

*A cup of milk was offered to me,  
And I drank it in the sweetness of the Lord's kindness.  
The Son is the cup,  
And the Father is He who was milked;*

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<sup>21</sup>Cf. Helene Schüngel-Straumann, "Ruah bewegt die Welt. Gottes schöpferische Lebenskraft in der Krisenzeit des Exils," *Stuttgarter Bibelstudien* t. 151 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1992); eadem, "Zur Dynamik der biblischen ruah-Vorstellung," Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel (ed.), *Die Weiblichkeit des Heiligen Geistes. Studien zur feministischen Theologie*, (Gütersloh: Kaiser-Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995); Winfried Cramer, "Der Geist Gottes und des Menschen in frühsyrischer Theologie," *Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie* t. 46 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979); Sebastian P. Brock, "The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition," *The Syrian Churches Series* t. 9 (Kottayam: Anita-Printers, 1979); Gabriele Winkler, *Überlegungen zum Gottesgeist als mütterlichem Prinzip und zur Bedeutung der Androgynie in einigen frühchristlichen Quellen*, Berger/Gerhards (see note 12), pp. 7-29 and Verena Wodtke-Werner, "Der Heilige Geist als weibliche Gestalt im christlichen Altertum und Mittelalter. Eine Untersuchung von Texten und Bildern" (*Theologische Frauenforschung – Erträge und Perspektiven* t. 3) (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1994).

<sup>22</sup>The earliest evidence is from the *Didascalia*, a church-order from 3<sup>rd</sup> century Syria, which was originally composed in Greek but mainly transmitted in Syrian (the Greek original is lost except some very small fragments; besides the old Syrian translation which seems to be quite confident to its text we have great parts of an old Latin translation). The editor of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a later church-order (end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century) reworked the *Didascalia* in the first six books of his own work. He kept true to the "Holy Spirit" typology for the deaconess which in the context of his subordinatist theology fitted well the traditional idea of gender-hierarchy. Cf. Synek, *Oikos*, passim.

*And the Holy Spirit is She who milked Him;  
 Because His breasts were full,  
 And it was undesirable that His milk should be ineffectually released.  
 The Holy Spirit opened Her bosom,  
 And mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father.  
 Then She gave the mixture to the generation without their knowing  
 And those who have received (it) are in the perfection of the right  
 hand.*

*The womb of the Virgin took (it),  
 And she received conception and gave birth.  
 So the Virgin became a mother with great mercies. [...]*<sup>23</sup>

As it seems there was a further link between the use of female God-language and the development of a strong veneration of *Mary*. Most early evidence for a specific mariological piety points to Syria.<sup>24</sup> With the time the veneration of the mother of Christ made its way through the whole Christian world. But it lost its connections with a strongly female connoted religious cosmos. In medieval and modern prayers and songs, the attributes conferred to *Mary* made her often nearly God-like, they did not in her a deity. At the same time a direct reference to God's – so to say – "female side" was extremely rare until recent developments. While already early modern protestant theologians expressed a critical attitude towards an – what they thought to be – exaggerated veneration of *Mary*, traditional mariological piety is deeply rooted in Orthodoxy, and – with some exceptions of recent times – in Catholicism.<sup>25</sup> It has its place in the "official" cult and in various paraliturgical forms of popular piety as well. Nevertheless there is a very broad theological consensus that a real deification of *Mary* would be heresy. But it would still remain rests controversial, as to what would be the adequate answer to the challenge of

<sup>23</sup>"19<sup>th</sup> Ode of Solomon," ed. and transl. by James H. Charlesworth, *Texts and Translations* t. 13/Pseudepigrapha Series t. 7 (Missoula, Montana, 1977, pp. 19-84). The composition of these texts was variously assigned to dates ranging from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century; 2<sup>nd</sup> century is most likely.

<sup>24</sup>Cf., e.g., Sebastian Brock, *Bride of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches* (Kerala: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1994).

<sup>25</sup>There is an extensive literature on mariological questions, see Giuseppe Besutti, *Bibliografia mariana* (Rome: Edizione Marianum, 1950ss).

expressing God's "female side." Also the question whether traditional mariological piety has served (or at least could serve) to promote women's ecclesiastical status is answered in various ways.<sup>26</sup>

Not less crucial is the issue of women's participation in Christian priesthood. Do Christianity's sacred scriptures allow the office of priestesses? Priestesses were not uncommon in the Mediterranean world. In some cults, in fact, there were only priestesses. On the other hand, there were also religious traditions with only male priesthood. As is well known, there were no female priests in the orthodox tradition of Israel as it is testified by the Jewish "TeNaK", or the Christian "Old Testament."<sup>27</sup> But that alone cannot serve as a convincing theological, and even less, as a historical argument for the actual development which excluded women from priesthood though, not necessarily from all kind of institutionalised ecclesiastical ministry. Nevertheless, it is often favoured, not so much by theologians and church-authorities, in order to legitimise the actual development, but by those who want to criticise it.<sup>28</sup> I already stressed above that *Christian priesthood* developed slowly from a variety of more or less "official" functions mentioned in the scriptures especially in the New Testament and other early Christian sources: they mention apostle, prophet, teacher, *presbyteros*, *episkopos*, *diakonos*. Traditional theology liked to link the developed Christian offices of bishop, presbyter and deacon/deaconess strongly with biblical evidence. Also from a historic

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<sup>26</sup>Cf., e.g., Wolfgang Beinert, "Unsere Liebe Frau und die Frauen," reihe *frauenforum* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989).

<sup>27</sup>The old Jewish tradition, of course, is more pluriform. Bernadette Brooten in her well known study on epigraphic evidence on women leaders in the synagogue mentions a Jewish priestess in the Egyptian context, where a schismatic Jewish community run its own temple in Leontopolis. Cf. eadem, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue. Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* (Chico, CA: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>28</sup>As far as I see Bernadette Brooten (and others) were quite right to point out the dangerous *subcoutane antijudaism* in some early Christian feminist publications which had the tendency to make Judaism responsible for what was criticised within Christian heritage. Today most feminist scholars are more sensitive for Jewish pluralism as well as for the selective use of Israel's (but also of Greco-Roman) heritage in formative Christianity.

point of view some continuity is evident. But there is also an obvious difference between the historical data of the first century C. E. and the following development. The 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century episcopal office such as that of the above mentioned *Epiphanius*, is neither a simple remake of the *episkopos* of a Pauline community nor a direct heir of the "Twelve Apostles" who inturn symbolised the tribes of Israel. So all direct reference to biblical evidence (e.g. the fact that the 'Twelve' were men only as a traditional argument for women's exclusion from priesthood) is crucial. The general process of institutionalisation of Christian offices (ministries) was not only linked to a progress of unification of the community but also to a continuing sacralisation. In the early context of Christianity religious authority and cultic competence progressed hand in hand, and interpret them in priestly terms though there are only minimal points of reference in the New Testament. Thus the episcopal office in its developed form the third century C. E. onwards,<sup>29</sup> included juridical power, doctrinal authority and cultic competence, particularly the competence to initiate candidates to the Christian community and to offer Eucharist, though *de facto* most of these powers could not be restricted to the bishop alone. In general the bishop had to share them with other officeholders, and to some extent also with charismatic persons, professional theologians and political authorities. Besides, the accumulation of power as promoted in normative texts was not beyond criticism from the very beginning. However, the bishop's office was not the only model for the church order. During the formation period there existed also other, competing models of church order, e. g. charismatic authority was highly esteemed and strongly linked with the authority of office. Such alternative models could offer women more place for cultic competence than the official church-structure, which was very much shaped according to the pattern of household of antiquity.<sup>30</sup> It was much more likely that a woman

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<sup>29</sup>Most significant for the development for the episcopal office is the so-called *Didascalia*. Cf. Georg Schöllgen, "Die Anfänge der Professionalisierung des Klerus und das kirchliche Amt in der Syrischen Didaskalie," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum/Ergänzungsband* 26 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1998), particularly part two.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. op. cit. (with literature), see also Ernst Dassmann, "Ämter und Dienste in den frühchristlichen Gemeinden," *Hereditas* t. 8 (Bonn: Borengasse, 1994) and

would acquire status in terms of charismatic power (often linked with a high degree of ascetic life) than within a framework where official authority was ascribed juridical and cultic competence with less regard for personal qualities. The most famous example for the clash of these two models of church-organisation is "Montanism" (or, as – called by Anne Jensen – the movement of "New Prophecy"<sup>31</sup>). But not all credit for promoting prophetesses should necessarily be ascribed to this movement, which, in the course of time developed institutionalised forms of office itself. In her scholarly study on women in Early Christianity, Anne Jensen cites an example, which, according to her, would point to the "Great Church" of Caesarea.<sup>32</sup> According to the testimony of bishop Firmilian of Caesarea in the first half of third century C. E., an anonymous prophetess celebrated Eucharist and performed baptism according to the rites of the Church of Caesarea.<sup>33</sup> For us two facts are important here: First, at least a part of the local Christians (including a presbyter and a deacon) of Caesarea had obviously no problem with the fact that it was a woman prophet who performed the Christian basic rituals. Second, in his letter to Cyprian of Carthage, bishop *Firmilian* questioned the eucharistic ritual and the very baptism officiated by the prophetess as of demonic origin. But, as rightly observed by Jensen, the text does not include a general judgement on the validity of baptism administered by a woman. Was the bishop worried because of the woman's demoniac obsession, or did he demonise the woman because of her ritual activities?

### 3.2. Women's Ritual Roles in Baptismal Rites

Second historical setting: A deaconess accompanies the candidate for baptism to the baptismal font and performs the water-rite which the male priest who pronounces the baptismal formula stands behind a wall or a curtain.

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Kenan B. Osborne, *Ministry. Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church: It's History and Theology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Anne Jensen, *Gottes selbstbewußte Töchter. Frauenemanzipation im frühen Christentum?* (Freiburg/Breisgau: Herder, 1992), pp. 268ss (also available in English translation).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Jensen, op. cit., pp. 352-362.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. ep. 75 in the *epistularium* of Cyprian.

Such are the prescriptions for the baptism of an adult woman as testified by Syrian sources from about 500 onwards.<sup>34</sup> The fact that a woman's baptism should not take place without the assistance of another woman was considered as a matter of decency also by Greek communities at this time. She should help with undressing and redressing, and particularly in the anointing of the body. The oldest evidence for such a practice is the *Acts of Thomas*<sup>35</sup> and the *Didascalia*, a church-order from a Greek-speaking milieu of the early third century Syria. As I argued already in another place, at least in the eastern churches the deaconesses, i.e. female clerics, were granted an important role in the administration of the ritual of initiation.<sup>36</sup> Gender-separation was insisted when a) baptism was more and more defined as a priestly task, and - at the same time - b) women's exclusion from priesthood became definite. Baptism was only one (particularly important) issue. In this paper we are only dealing with the cultic context. So I might skip the question of the deaconess's teaching-competence in a female audience. But, of course, there is sometimes a link, e.g. when the deaconess was responsible for the baptismal education of women,<sup>37</sup> or when - at times - she was granted to

<sup>34</sup> Cf., e. g., the rules for baptism by Katholikos Išō'āhb I. (580-596): G. Dietrich, *Die nestorianische Tauf liturgie ins Deutsche übersetzt und unter Verwertung der neuesten handschriftlichen Funde historisch-kritisch erforscht*, (Giessen: Töppelmann, 1903), pp. 96ss; another important source is canon 9 of the East-Syrian Synod of George (676) and canon 41 of the so-called canons of Maruta: "These [particularly sisters from the *benāt qeyāma*, the daughters of the covenant] shall be made deaconesses in order to perform the rite of the service of baptism alone" (Arthur Vööbus, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, t. 439, p. 85 [ed.]; t. 440, 72 [transl.]). This text might serve as evidence that in Syria at times one was even ready to accept baptism by a deaconess without male co-operation but I am not sure whether this would not be an over-interpretation.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Acts of Thomas 121 and 157.

<sup>36</sup> Eva Maria Synek, "Christliche Badekultur," *Alltägliches Altertum*, ed. by Edith Specht (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1998), pp. 227-250 (pp. 238ss).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. e. g. *Didascalia* 16. The evidence of this church-order can also be linked with hagiographical material, e. g. the *Vita of St. Pelagia*; for an English translation of the Syrian version see Sebastian Brock/Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Holy Women 'of the' Syrian Orient*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 41-62.

read from the Gospel and to preach within her monastery.<sup>38</sup> It was also the monastic context where women were (sometimes) granted specific liturgical tasks which they were not allowed to perform in normal local communities. Deaconesses (whose office tended to confound with the office of the abbess during the middle ages) were entitled to act as readers, to distribute communion or to lighten incense.<sup>39</sup> Also the works of charity (e.g. visits to sick women) which were willingly conferred to women. These duties do have some ritual implications. The *Testamentum Domini*, a church-order from early 5<sup>th</sup> century Syria, allows the deaconesses to administer communion to sick women.<sup>40</sup> It was also here, in the Semitic cultural context, that the deaconess was granted the full administration of the water-rite of Holy Baptism as described above. But, according to Eastern ecclesiastical-law<sup>41</sup>, she was not allowed to perform the whole baptismal ceremony.

This permission was granted only by medieval Western canon-law, which on the whole has been less strict in linking baptismal competence and priesthood. When the general capacity to baptise (referring to laypersons and even unbaptised persons) was confirmed in medieval times, emergency baptism by women was considered as acceptable. In other matters the West stuck to a concept of gender-hierarchy as the East did. The actual administration of baptism by a woman was allowed in cases of

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<sup>38</sup> For the Syrian context see Eva M. Synek, "Kultur und Heiligkeit. Zum spirituellen Erbe des syrischen Mönchtums:" *Geist und Leben*, 66 (1993), pp. 359-381, particularly pp. 362-376.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. e. g. various Syrian sources such as the so-called "Answers from the Orient Fathers", the "Answers of Jōhannān bar Qursos to Sargīs" and the answers of Ja 'qōb of Edessa to Addai" (all sources transmitted by the West Syrian *Synodicon*). There is comparable evidence for the modern Armenian deaconess and also for the Latin world, particularly for monastic houses with strict cloisture (e. g. carthusian nuns) where women were permitted to take over liturgical ministries normally reserved to the male clergy.

<sup>40</sup> *Testamentum Domini* 2,20.

<sup>41</sup> There are comparable compromises in case of urgent necessities in the East as well; cf. Eva Maria Synek, "(K)eine katholische Alternative? Der Codex für die katholischen Ostkirchen und die Frauen," *Una Sancta*, 48 (1993), pp. 67-83. 88. But they were not formally fixed in canon-law.



most urgent necessities. That was the prescription as late as in the *Code of 1917*. Things changed significantly only with the new *Code of 1983*, which dropped most of the traditional differences between lay-men and lay-women.<sup>42</sup> According to the new law for the Latin Catholics both sexes have the same status concerning emergency-baptism, and both men and women might be endowed with general extra-ordinary baptismal competence by the bishop in regions with extreme shortage of priests (cf. canon 861 § 2 CIC).

### 3.3. The Issue of Woman Priesthood

Third historical setting: A group of male and female disciples of Jesus discuss whether one should establish an office for women. And referring to the Last Supper, it is decided that such an office could only be in works of charity, but and not in offering the Eucharist.<sup>43</sup>

There is, of course, no evidence that such a discussion took place in the first Christian generation. The quoted discourse is part of a pseudoepigraphy of obscure origin (Egypt or Syria). The author was not an apostle (or a group of apostles, suggested as by the text), but somebody, who presumably writing in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century borrowed "apostolic" authority for his concept of church-order. Female cultic competence was obviously an issue in his community. The terminology "priest/ess," "priesthood" is not used in our text. Nevertheless, an office which would grant women the power to offer the Eucharist clearly means participation in priesthood according to the main-stream understanding of Christian priesthood from late-antiquity onwards. For the development of Christian cult and women's position in it, it is important to know that the Last Supper was understood in terms a sacrificial act, which is predominately a priestly task. Here we have returned to the crucial question of female

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<sup>42</sup>Cf. Richard Puza, "Zur Stellung der Frau im alten und neuen Kirchenrecht" *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 163 (1983), pp. 109-122; idem, "Die Stellung des Laien im neuen Kirchenrecht unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Frau: Im Dienst von Kirche und Staat." *In memoriam Carl Holböck (Kirche und Recht t. 17)*, eds Franz Pototschnig and Alfred Rinnerthaler (Vienna: Verlag des Verbandes der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften Österreichs, 1985), pp. 459-479.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. the so-called "Apostolic Church Order" 24-28.

priesthood in a more "orthodox" milieu than in the setting I referred to first. There was a broad consensus established in late-antiquity, which is not only testified by *Epiphanius* and the quoted church-order, but also by other texts such as the so-called "*Apostolic Constitutions*" (another church-order from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century): Women are not allowed to offer Eucharist as they are not capable of priesthood. Female priests are only an aberration of the pagans.<sup>44</sup>

However, we already have seen there has always been some flexibility about the baptismal competence and teaching authority ("preaching" and other forms of official transmission of Christian doctrine such as missionary activities, the preparation for baptism, the education of nuns, "Sunday-school" for children and/or adults, or – in modern contexts - giving school-lessons in religion and teaching at theological seminaries and theological faculties of state-universities). When the Great Church defined these activities as priestly prerogatives in general, that does not mean that they were always strictly reserved to priests only. Even penitential discipline and the authority to exclude somebody from eucharistic community or the competence to conduct religious services and to bless was not always strictly restricted to priests. During the middle-ages nuns and particularly abbesses could share liturgical as well as juridical authority with the male clergy. It is also important that the ancient church-orders sometimes positively appreciate lay-persons' (male and female) share in formal preparation for baptism.<sup>45</sup> In the East administration of baptism became a "priestly" ministry in general, but there was also a strong tendency to grant (male) deacons at least a subsidiary role in cases of necessity. And in the West, baptism was never completely restricted to the male clergy. But both in the East and in West,

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<sup>44</sup>Cf. *Apostolic Constitutions* 3,9. In this passage the editor strongly reworked the *Didascalia*, which, in general, forbade women to baptise and to teach, but did not yet raise the fundamental question of women's participation in priesthood.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. the different versions of the so-called "Traditio Apostolica": *Testamentum Domini* 1,46 and *Apostolic Constitutions* 8,32,17.

there were considerable doubts about the administration of baptism by a woman.<sup>46</sup>

Things have changed today. The Catholic and the Orthodox hierarchies stick to the old tradition that excludes women from priesthood in general. But many protestant churches (which have developed a more or less divergent perception of office of "priesthood" since the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards) changed the criteria of admission to the office of "pastor." Also the many Anglican churches and the Old-Catholic churches (except the Polish National Church in America<sup>47</sup>), which share the tradition-rooted orthodox and catholic understanding of priesthood in principle, do not exclude women anymore.<sup>48</sup> We may therefore say that today many churches give women a more equalised status in the cultic context than in past. In a considerable number of churches they are even admitted to all cultic functions and offices in the same way as men are.

#### 4. The Current Situation

Within the traditional churches one might distinguish three groups according to women's status in the cultic context:

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<sup>46</sup>Cf., e.g., Tertullian, *De baptismo* 17; *Satuta Ecclesiae antiqua*, canon 41; *Collectio Vetus Gallica* 21,10.

<sup>47</sup>Cf., e.g., High Wycombe, "Die Weihe von Frauen innerhalb der Utrechter Union: Eine polnisch-nationalkatholische Perspektive" *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 86 (1996), pp. 105-121. - Other churches of the Union of Utrecht do not (yet ?) ordain women themselves but accept that their sister-churches decided to do so.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. the surveys of Denise Buser/Adrian Loretan (eds), "Gleichstellung der Geschlechter und die Kirchen. Ein Beitrag zur menschenrechtlichen und ökumenischen Diskussion" (*Freiburger Veröffentlichungen zum Religionsrecht* t. 3) (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1999) and Dorothea Reininger, *Diakonat der Frau in der einen Kirche: Diskussionen, Entscheidungen und pastoral-praktische Erfahrungen in der christlichen Ökumene und ihr Beitrag zur römisch-katholischen Diskussion*, (Ostfildern, Germany: Schwabenverlag, 1999), e.g. For recent literature in English (focussing on the American context) see Mary-Paula Walsh, "Feminism and Christian Tradition. An Annotated Bibliography and Critical Introduction to the Literature," *Bibliographies and Indexes in Religious Studies* t. 51 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999).

1. The *Orthodox Churches* (Byzantine as well as oriental Orthodox).

2. The *Catholic Church*, mainly the *Roman Catholic Church*. It should be noted here that the Eastern ("Oriental") Catholic Churches<sup>49</sup> more in tune with the Orthodox Churches than with the Latin Catholics as far as liturgical matters are concerned.<sup>50</sup>

3. The "*New*" *Western Churches*<sup>51</sup> which developed in modern times: They came into existence as specific Churches under quite different

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<sup>49</sup>In general, the Eastern Catholic Churches are held to keep to their old liturgical traditions or to restore them respectively. Only a few liturgical issues were settled for all eastern catholic churches in their newly codified, so-called "universal" law, particularly questions of sacramental discipline. Though one cannot claim a general tendency to harmonise eastern and western law in these questions, one has to take into consideration that there were preliminary decisions by the Second Vatican Council that had to be transformed into current law of both, western and eastern churches. The Council's general vote against discrimination is most important in our context (Lumen Gentium 32, cf. canon 208 Codex Iuris Canonici/1983 and canon 11 Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium). Thus the regulation for emergency baptism by lay-persons provided by the Code for the Eastern Catholic Churches (1990) has finally broken with traditional gender-prejudices (cf. canon 677 § 2). Cf. my article quoted in note 42.

<sup>50</sup>In general, the ascription to a Catholic Church *sui iuris* (Latin or Oriental) depends on baptism (also for converts though there are some divergences between the Latin and Eastern Code). Persons who have fulfilled their 14<sup>th</sup> year are free to chose the church where they want to be baptised. As for minor children the Codes rule that they should be ascribed to their parents' church (or if the parents are not Christian, to the church of the person in charge of their religious education). If father and mother belong to different ritual churches they have to chose, if they do not come to terms, the child goes after the father. In connection with marriage it is possible to change one's ritual church (in general, such changes require pontifical permission): According to canon 111 § 1 of the Latin Code from 1983 this permission to join the partner's church is not gendered anymore while the Code for the Eastern Churches keeps more confident to traditional gender-distinction: canon 33 of the Eastern Code provides this possibility for women only; besides, children's ascription to the father's church is openly favoured by the Eastern Code though another parental decision rests possible.

<sup>51</sup>Here I am only dealing with traditional Churches, not with the so called Christian "sects", i. e. different groups with a Christian background or at least some Christian connotation.

historical circumstances (Anglican-Presbyterian, Protestant, Old/Christ Catholic) and have quite different theological concepts (e. g. ecclesiological perception, understanding of ministries, sacramental theology, etc.).

#### **4.1. The Orthodox Churches**

All Orthodox Churches consider the ancient canons of the first millennium as their fundamental ecclesiastical law. Of course, there had always been tension between traditional heritage and actual situations. So all Orthodox Churches had to develop strategies in order to keep the old order intact, but at the same adapt to new situations by means of interpretative techniques. Liturgical order and Canon-law are not seen as separate in the Orthodox world, but closely connected as they were in Early Christianity, when the first Church-orders were collections of liturgical formulas and regulations on other canonical issues. So it is no wonder that the Orthodox communities are also very conservative in their liturgy in the sense that they are the truest to their liturgical heritage as it was fixed in ancient and early medieval times. In general, one would not change liturgical texts as one would not change canons. But the composition of new texts was also necessary e.g. new hymns have to be composed in order to celebrate a new saint. It is also possible that one might skip some parts of a ritual, as one might renounce the actual application of a particular canon. But one would not dare to alter important parts of a ritual action, as the western churches did to some extent.<sup>52</sup> In this general context, it is no wonder that it is very hard to overcome traditional liturgical restrictions for women in the eastern churches than in the western churches. For many westerners the orthodox liturgy seems extremely static at the first glimpse. But when looking into detail, one can nevertheless detect a considerable ritual variety - not only between the different eastern rites but also within one and the same tradition. Thus the churches which share the Byzantine tradition have common liturgical books, but, there is a great plurality of musical traditions, liturgical

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<sup>52</sup>E.g., one sticks to the tradition of baptism by immersion (instead of infusion, which has become common in the West during medieval times) and to the common celebration of the sacrament of initiation (baptism, anointing ["confirmation"] and first participation in Eucharist).

languages, duration of services, rubrics and application of rubrics. This is very relevant for the gender-issue: churches did not want to alter or amend the traditional law, but at the same time there was room for some flexibility.

So the traditional ritual taboos for women are to be evaluated individually. The prohibition to enter the sanctuary<sup>53</sup>, had exceptions in many situations, particularly within the monastic milieu, and is not observed anymore in all local communities today. In general only newly baptised boys are taken into the sanctuary behind the Iconostasis, but in some regions it has become practice to do so with girls as well. Some flexibility can also be observed concerning the menstrual taboo.<sup>54</sup> Though has rested general praxis to keep confident to the canonical heritage that does not allow bleeding women are not allowed to receive Holy Communion (except the case a woman is in danger to die) as the traditional canon law demands it, the traditional ban for these women from entering the church is often not maintained. A great change can also be observed with regard to the traditional gender-separation in the church and to dress-codes (whether women wearing trousers or short skirts are allowed to enter a church or monastery or not, and whether they are expected to cover their head).

Further, plurality must be stressed with regard to women's active participation in liturgical service. On the one hand this issue is linked to the general question of liturgical participation of the laity. This depends on many factors irrespective of genders. E.g. whether the liturgy uses a dead language or a language that allows people to follow prayer-texts and to participate in acclamations and singing. The question whether a church is willing to accept liturgical services by women depends also on the particular traditions, on the practical needs, as well as on the question to what extent a local church is willing to accept inspiration from other churches and secular role models. In the latter respect one can often observe differences between communities of one common tradition. E.g., it would be more likely that a Greek bishop in the USA would bless a

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<sup>53</sup>Cf. canon 44 Laodicea; examples for historic exceptions are provided by Berger (note 5), pp. 57-59.

<sup>54</sup>For literature see note 12.

female reader than in Greece. Women's admission to liturgical services seems comparably easy in the Armenian-Apostolic Church, because this Church has a strong tradition of female deacons and sub-deacons in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup> As far as I know at the moment there is more than one ordained women in the Armenian Church, and they are permitted to do all services which the male colleagues are doing. In other churches in which the office of the female deacon has fallen in disuse<sup>56</sup>. But some of the traditional tasks of the deaconess such as baptismal assistance (in the rare cases where baptism has to be administered to a grown-up girl or an adult woman) have become the duty of the priest's wife.<sup>57</sup> Another traditional job for women is preparing the bread for liturgical usage. In Russia women entrusted with this ministry are called *proscurnici*.<sup>58</sup> Traditionally they were chosen from clergy-families (daughters or widows of priests), and until 1869 they were counted with the clergy. The office is

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Kristin Arat, "Die Diakonisse der armenischen Kirche in kanonischer Sicht: Handes Amsorya." *Zeitschrift für armenische Philologie*, 1-12 (1987), pp. 153-189 and Abel Oghlukian, *The Deaconess in the Armenian Church. A Brief Survey* (New Rochelle, New York, 1994).

<sup>56</sup>Comprehensive studies on the historical office of deaconess were provided by Robert Gryson, *Le ministère des femmes dans l'Église ancienne, Recherches et Synthèses. Section d'Histoire T. 4* (Gembloux: Éditions J. Duculot, 1972) and Aimé G. Martimort, "Les diaconesses. Essai historique, Bibliotheca "Ephemerides Liturgicae."" *Subsidia* t. 24 (Rome: Edizione Liturgica, 1982). Though Martimort's evaluation of the historical evidence is not beyond criticism in various respects, the book rests very helpful as a collection of sources. From an orthodox perspective see, e.g., Evangelos Theodorou: *Theologia* (A), 25 (1954), pp. 430-469, pp. 576-601; 26 (1955) pp. 57-76 (also various summaries in English and German). Matushka E. Gvosdev, *The Female Diaconate: An Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing, 1991). I was not yet able to check the recent book of Constantina Peppas, *Die Töchter der Kirche Christi und die Frohe Botschaft des Sohnes Gottes. Eine Studie über die aktive Präsenz der Frauen und ihre besonderen Dienste im Frühchristentum und in Gemeinden der ungeteilten Alten Kirche*, (Katerini: Epektasi, 1998).

<sup>57</sup>Cf., e.g., the current edition of the baptismal ritual of the Syrian-Orthodox Church: *The Sacrament of Holy Baptism According to the Ancient Rite of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch* (1994), p. 9.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. E. Speranskaja, "Frauen im Dienst der Kirche. Ein kirchengeschichtlicher Abriß," *Stimmen der Orthodoxie*, 10 (1989), pp. 2-4, p. 3.

often seen as a partial heritage of the institution of the female diaconate which, as it seems, never had been adopted by the church of the Rus' as such. Other "heirs" of the ancient deaconess are the nuns: For long they have been granted some of the tasks of deacons, at least for the monastic context. E.g. they assist the priest when there is no male deacon at hand, lighten candles or take around the incense. It is also common that they act as readers and singers. Today there is a discussion going on whether one should try a revitalisation and reintroduction of a real female clergy.<sup>59</sup> Some bishops have already taken the first step in this direction, e.g. at the beginning of this century, Saint Nectarius of Aegina and again, some years ago, the reigning Archbishop of Greece. He ordained a nun as (sub) deaconess in order to administer Holy Communion to the sisters of her monastery which was located in a lonely place and therefore can only seldom be visited by a priest.<sup>60</sup> But the admission of women to liturgical tasks, which go beyond the limits of the jobs which nuns have been used to take over when necessary during the last centuries, seem extremely controversial. Nor is the expansion of monastic usage to parish-life beyond criticism.

Nonetheless one can find female readers in parishes today, particularly when there is a shortage of male candidates<sup>61</sup> (but sometimes also as a reply to western modernity invading orthodox communities). More common are female singers, not only in parishes of the Syrian Orthodox Church, which has a particular tradition for female singers<sup>62</sup>, but also in those churches which traditionally allowed only men to the choir. Churches which run school and academies for liturgical music admit also girls in these institutions. This especially true in Russia, where such

<sup>59</sup>Cf. Reininger's above quoted comprehensive study on the institution of female deacons (note 49) and Eva M. Synek, "Der Frauendiakonot der Alten Kirche und seine Rezeption durch die orthodoxen Kirchen. Lösungsansätze für die katholische Ordinationsdiskussion," *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 48 (1999), pp. 3-21.

<sup>60</sup>Information of Prof. Spyros Troianos, Athens.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. Speranskaja (note 59), p. 2, who tries to justify the Russian usage which developed during the times of persecution from early Church-History.

<sup>62</sup>Cf., e.g., Ja'qob of Serug, *Life of St. Ephrem* (partial English translation in Sebastian Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns on Paradises*, [Crestwood, New York: , 1990, 22-25]).



schools seem also to serve for the recruitment of wives for the male clergy. In some parishes of Byzantine tradition, I could observe women taking care of candles, collecting money or serving the so-called *antidoron* (blessed bread, sometimes distributed together with wine at the end of the Eucharistic celebration). There are no general regulations for such liturgical tasks. So women's co-operation and participation depend on the willingness of the local churches. Other new practices as the introduction of altar-girls, which caused long discussions in the Catholic Church, though the question has now been settled in favour of the girls, are problematic in the Orthodox world. Everything which is more than a slight modification of traditional usage, is sharply rejected by the Church authorities and also by many of the faithful.

While the western churches have learned to cope with the request for equal rights for both sexes, it is comparatively a new problem for the Orthodox churches. During the past few years this problem gained much attention due to various factors, such as the re-organisation of social patterns in traditionally Orthodox countries, the expansion of Orthodox life into the western diaspora and the ecumenical contacts with western churches. The rising numbers of female theologians, and to some extent, also the fact that converts to Orthodoxy want to be comfortable with their faith life in Orthodoxy without losing their western social life. In fact, inner-orthodox discussion on various issues has already been started and traditional practices are cautiously modified in favour of women here and there. But on the whole, efforts to promote an egalitarian status for women are rare in the Orthodox world compared with western standards. The secular concept of equal rights causes suspicion in the Orthodox hierarchies.<sup>63</sup> The official doctrine is to stress that men and women are certainly equal as far as human-dignity, redemption in Christ, and the call to sainthood, are concerned. But at the same time one is uneasy when certain qualities ascribed to men on the basis of gender. In general, active roles are seen as more fitting for men, passive roles for women, though

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<sup>63</sup>Cf. e.g., Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World: A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press: 1994). - This book was quite successful also in western Christianity.

hagiography offers alternative role-models as well.<sup>64</sup> Until now only a small number of theologians dared to stress the ambiguity of traditional theological doctrine on women, as it is expressed by the Church Fathers and the liturgical texts.<sup>65</sup>

A further point is that church-authorities tend to reduce the request for a more equalised status of women to the demand of women's ordination, particularly to the demand of priestly ordination.<sup>66</sup> There is reason for doing so. First, ritual ministry is more intensively linked to priesthood in the East than in the West. I shall return to this point in the next section. Second, there are not many Orthodox faithful asking for women's participation in priesthood. The issue was mainly introduced to the orthodox agenda from "outside" through some theologians... "that women's access to sacramental ministry is beginning to arise in Orthodox churches [...] as an internal problem."<sup>67</sup> Orthodoxy's main argument against women's ordination was and is tradition.<sup>68</sup> Additional arguments

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<sup>64</sup>Cf. e.g. Eva M. Synek, "Heilige Frauen der frühen Christenheit. Zu den Frauenbildern in hagiographischen Texten des christlichen Ostens," *Das östliche Christentum*, new series, t. 43 (Würzburg: Augustinus, 1994).

<sup>65</sup>Cf. e.g. Verna Harrison, Eva Katafygiotu-Topping (both American) and the Romanian scholar A. Manolache.

<sup>66</sup>Female diaconate is a different issue. But some theologians as Ioannis Karmiris, e.g., see diaconoate as a part of priestly ministry. Consequently, for them the question of priestesses and (ordained) deaconesses is one and the same. For a summary of the discussion see Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, "The Characteristic and Nature of the Order of the Deaconess," Thomas Hopko (ed.), *Women and the Priesthood*, (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981), pp. 75-95.

<sup>67</sup>Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Women: The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 515-519, p. 518. Behr-Sigel herself is one of those Orthodox theologians for whom the question of the admission of women to ministerial priesthood is open for discussion. Cf. also her study "Le ministère de la femme dans l'Église" (Paris: Cerf, 1987) (also available in English).

<sup>68</sup>Cf. Thomas Hopko, "On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood:" idem, (note 67), pp. 97-134. - As I argued above the canonical tradition is obviously clear concerning priesthood. As far as the deaconess is concerned, the argument for tradition would be in favour of the ordination of women instead, a point often stressed by the Greek lay-theologian Evangelos Theodorou. The option for the restoration of a female diaconate is included in the so called Rhode-document (1988),

such as the symbolic representation of Christ during the Eucharistic celebration are borrowed from the Catholic Church.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the theological interpretation of the priesthood in terms of divine vocation to service and suffering serves the *status quo*. Nobody can claim a "right" to such an office nor would it be reasonable to do so: The Greek-Orthodox theologian Eva Adamziloglu, recently argued: "If, however, the Orthodox woman lives consciously her own liturgical tradition, which is for both beginners and advanced in spiritual life, concerning the question of the ordination of women, she could speak spontaneously: No more sacrifice!"<sup>70</sup> There is, of course, a remarkable tendency within Greek theology to make a difference between the actual approval of women's ordination and the question of absolute dogmatic (im)possibility. This standpoint has sometimes been questioned during the last years.<sup>71</sup>

It seems that sometimes the issue of ordination of women helps church-authorities to escape from other important issues which really

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a theological document on the ecclesiastical status of women in those Orthodox Churches which are sharing the Byzantine tradition. The document is the result of a theological meeting within the process of preparation for an All-Orthodox Synod and was published by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. So it can somehow claim "official" character. It is not only in favour of female deacons but also of female readers, subdeacons and teachers.

<sup>69</sup>There are of course some Orthodox theologians, who have put the finger on this point. Particularly John Erickson argued that the symbolic argument does not find much support in Orthodoxy's genuine teaching on priesthood and Eucharist. Cf. John H. Erickson, *The Priesthood in Patristic Teaching: idem, The Challenge of Our Past* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991), pp. 53-64; idem, *The Problem of Priestly Ordination of Women* (Panel-Discussion): *Kanon*, 14 (1998), pp. 148-151.

<sup>70</sup>Eva Adamziloglu, "Is Feminist Theology Possible in the Greek Orthodox Tradition?:" *Yearbook of the European Society of Women in Theological Research*, 4 (1996), pp. 18-27, p. 26.

<sup>71</sup>It seems that this change of mind is a fruit of the intensive dialogue with the Old-Catholic Church: cf. the documentation "Bild Christi und Geschlecht. 'Gemeinsame Überlegungen' und Referate der Orthodox-Alt-katholischen Konsultation zur Stellung der Frau in der Kirche und zur Frauenordination als ökumenischem Problem", eds Urs von Arx and Anastasios Kallis (Bern: Stämpfli, 1988 = *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, t. 88/2).

would matter within their own communities. There is a great range of ecclesiastical ministries other than priesthood, which needs attention, e.g. the revitalisation of the ancient ministry of deaconess, female lectors, singers, acolytes, etc. There are a lot of other issues, which are to be addressed to, such as theological education, ecclesiastical teaching on womanhood, partnership, family and doctrines and directives expressed by the wedding-ceremony and the services for women in and after child-birth. Also discussion on the traditional exclusion from the sacraments due to ritual impurity (during menstruation and after child-birth) important to a rising number of Orthodox women. Orthodox women's conferences regularly raise these issues. The following recommendation was formulated at a recent conference in Istanbul (1997):

The perception and interpretation of some of the rules pertaining to liturgical life need to be addressed. Regarding the sacramental practices of our Church, we ask for a re-evaluation of various practices, for example, the presentation of infants and the 40 day rule for childbirth, certain prayers, for example, the prayer for miscarriage, abortions and post-partum mothers, and rules pertaining to liturgical life, for example, menstruation. 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 woman and her redemption in Christ Jesus. We realise that the practices in the various local communities may differ.

Another point that matters are role-models:<sup>72</sup> e.g., the Istanbul conference argued for the "incorporation of the lives of the martyrs

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<sup>72</sup>Cf. the rising number of hagiographic collections focussing on female saints, e.g., the Greek series ed. by Dimitrios G. Tsamis (Thessaloniki: Adelphotitas "Agia Makrina", 1990ss) or in English Eva Catafygiotu Topping, *Saints and Sisterhood. The Lives of Forty Eight Holy Women. Menologion or Month-by-Month Listing and Study of Women Saints on the Orthodox Calendar*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Life & Light Publishing Company, 1990). For a more scientific collection see Alice-Mary Talbot (ed.), *Holy Women of Byzantium. Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation, Byzantine Saints' Lives in English Translation* t. 1 (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996).

and the new experiences of people of this century in the hymnography of the Church."<sup>73</sup>

#### 4. 2. The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church has become more and more comfortable with the idea of modifying the old laws by means of new legislation since medieval times. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also the concept of codified law as developed in modern Continental Europe was adopted by the Church. The first Catholic Code for the Latin Catholic Church was published in 1917, followed by a partial codification for the Eastern (so-called "Oriental" Catholic Churches). After the *Second Vatican Council* (1962-1965) one felt that the law had to be updated.<sup>74</sup> Basic documents of the law in force now are the *Latin Code 1983* and the *Code for the Eastern Catholic Churches 1990*. The last Council had accepted the challenge of modern times in many aspects. Though the status of women was not yet a main issue in the 1960s, the Fathers voted against discrimination against women and for equal rights. In chapter four, article 32 of *Lumen gentium*, the Constitution on the Church, one reads that there is no inequality with regard to race or nation, social condition or sex. The Fathers referred to *Gal. 3,28*, the Pauline baptismal formula, that I quoted at the beginning of my paper. This biblically sanctioned general option for equality could serve as a starting-point for many changes in Catholic canon-law.<sup>75</sup> As far as liturgy is concerned only some basic issues were settled in the new Codes. Law and liturgy are seen as separate entities in the western tradition. *Canon 2 of the Latin Code (CIC)* and *canon 3 of the Oriental Code (CCEO)* ruled that in general the Codes would not touch upon liturgy. Consequently, various uncertainties in liturgical matters did occur, particularly in the Latin tradition. The Council did not only sanction

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<sup>73</sup>Cf. MaryMartha, 5 (1997), p. 49.

<sup>74</sup>For intermediate regulations concerning our topic cf., e.g., Klaus-Bernd Müller, "Die liturgischen Dienste der Frau in der nachkonziliaren Reform," *Liturgisches Jahrbuch*, 28 (1978), pp. 170-173.

<sup>75</sup>Cf. Klaus Lüdicke, *Die Stellung der Frau in der Liturgie nach geltendem Kirchenrecht*, Berger/Gerhards (note 12), pp. 396-383, particularly p. 372s; Eduard Nagel, "Ein erwachendes Bewußtsein. Frauen in offiziellen Texten und Dokumenten zur Liturgie" *Heiliger Dienst*, 51 (1997), pp. 55-69.

liturgical reforms but initiated further revisions of texts and rituals. I have already touched upon the current efforts to create a more inclusive liturgical language.<sup>76</sup> Another current question was the altar-girls. Traditional ritual taboos in this matter have officially been dropped by Catholic theology (at least insofar as the Latin Church is concerned<sup>77</sup>). There were arguments for and against alter-girls. In 1994<sup>78</sup> the basic rule of non-discrimination won the battle in an authentic interpretation of *canon 230 CIC*.

Another important precondition for liturgical changes in favour of women is connected with the concept of sacred powers. I raised this issue when dealing with baptismal competence. The Catholic Church sticks to women's exclusion from priesthood as the Orthodox Churches do (cf. *canon 1024 CIC and canon 754 CCEO*). The difference is only that a significant number of faithful could imagine a change or would even approve it. But the theological discussion was recently answered by the Apostolic letter "*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*" (1994). The Pope insists on a

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<sup>76</sup>For recent studies in English cf. the bibliography of Walsh, pp. 238ss; in German: e.g., Teresa Berger, "Zum Ringen um eine (auch) frauengerechte Liturgie," *Una Sancta*, 48 (1993), pp. 209-217 or Balthasar Fischer, "Inklusive Sprache" im Gottesdienst. Eine berechtigte Forderung?, Berger/Gerhards (note 12), pp. 369-384; Ursula Schachl-Raber, "Wenn Frauen und Männer beten ... Impulse für eine gerechte Sprache für Frauen und Männer in der Liturgie", *Heiliger Dienst*, 51 (1997), pp. 24-41.

<sup>77</sup>There are starting-points for the modern revision of traditional prejudices in the Western medieval canonical heritage but also in the Eastern traditions (cf. the already mentioned church-orders *Didascalia*, *Apostolic Constitutions* and *Testamentum Domini*); most famous are Pope Gregory's replies to St. Augustine: cf. Stephanie Hollis, *The Conversionary Dynamic: More Laws for Times Like These: eadem, Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), pp. 15-45.

<sup>78</sup>For a summary of this discussion cf., e.g., John H. Huels, "Female Altar Servers: The Legal Issues," *Worship*, 57 (1983), pp. 513-525, Ludger Müller, "Gilt das Verbot der Ministrantinnen noch?," *Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht*, 155 (1986), pp. 126-137, or Lüdicke (note 76), pp. 380-382, whose argumentation anticipated the final Roman decision.

definite rejection of all efforts to change traditional doctrine on this issue.<sup>79</sup> The standpoint was already summarised in the "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood" (1976)<sup>80</sup>. Biblical arguments, heritage and tradition are used by both Catholic and Orthodox authorities similar tones. Liturgical symbolism serves as an additional argument against women's participation in ministerial priesthood: Official Catholic documents argue that in his official function (particularly when offering Eucharist) the priest acts "*in persona Christi capitis*." Only an ordained man can represent Christ "to the point of being his very image." Nonetheless many issues which are linked to the crucial question of women's admission to priesthood within the eastern traditions are comparatively simple to solve in the western Latin context. The reason is that western tradition does not link priesthood and sacramental authority as strongly as the medieval Christian East. On the whole, women's current liturgical status in the Catholic Church is almost as complicated as for the Orthodox world. Even when speaking about the *Latin tradition* only, the practice is everything but homogenous. There are a lot of differences in local communities all over the world. The so-called universal law of the Church is more flexible than it is often claimed to be.

Apart from women's exclusion from ordained ministry, the *Latin Code* imposed practically no liturgical discrimination for women. There is only one exception between roles of male and female lay persons in the churches: *Canon 230 § 1 of the Latin Code* echoes the old concept of

<sup>79</sup>Cf. Gerhard L. Müller (ed), *Frauen in der Kirche – Eigensein und Mitverantwortung*, (Würzburg: Echter, 1999). - The Pope did not say anything definite on the question of female deacons. Many local churches would be in favour of admitting women to the clergy by diaconale ordination: cf. *Diakoniat. Ein Amt für Frauen in der Kirche – Ein frauengerechtes Amt?*, eds Peter Hünermann et al. (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 1997), particularly the historic survey (pp. 304-366) "Der Streit um den Diakoniat der Frau – Zur Geschichte vor und nach dem Zweiten Vatikanum" provided by Friederike Kukula and Ilse Schüllner.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. , e.g., Hervé Legrand, "Die Frage der Frauenordination aus der Sicht katholischer Theologie. "Inter Insigniores" nach zehn Jahren;" *Warum keine Ordination der Frau? Unterschiedliche Einstellungen in den christlichen Kirchen*, eds Elisabeth Gössmann and Dietmar Bader, (München: Katholische Akademie Freiburg and Steiner, 1987), pp. 89-111.

minor orders (which were abolished for the Latin Church in the 1960s): It decrees that for some ministries – lector (reader) and acolyte (adult serving the priest at the altar in a more official way as altar-boys/girls do) – liturgical installation is possible, though not necessary. Such liturgical installation is for men only:

Lay men who possess the age and qualification determined by decree of the conference of bishops can be installed on a stable basis in the ministries of lector and acolyte in accord with the prescribed liturgical rite” (*Canon 230 § 1 CIC*).

But men and women are equally admitted to all liturgical functions for which ordination is not a precondition. *Canon 230 §§ 2 and Canon 3 CIC* read:

Lay persons can fulfil the function of lector during liturgical actions by temporary deputation; likewise all lay persons can fulfill the functions of commentator or cantor or other functions, in accordance with the norm of law.

When the necessity of the Church warrants it and when ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can also supply for certain of their offices, namely, to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion in accord with the prescription of law.

The Code permits women’s participation in all lay ministries, e.g. reader, cantor, and commentator. But no bishop is forced to admit women. Other tasks are usually reserved to the clergy but might be conferred to lay persons if necessary, e.g., the bishop might allow lay-persons, male and female, to administer Holy Communion, to lead services (except a full Eucharistic Service) and burials. In cases of extreme shortage of ordained clergymen, he might even give them the extraordinary authority to confer baptism (cf. *canon 230 § 3 and canon 861 § 2 CIC*<sup>81</sup>) and delegate them

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<sup>81</sup>There is some evidence for comparable solutions already in medieval times. So it is said that Liudger, the first bishop of the German town Münster (†809), who worked as missionary in Frisland, advised a trustworthy lay-man to baptise sick



to assist marriages (cf. *canon 1112 CIC*). But again, there is no obligation to chose any women for such ministries. Decisions are depending on the ordinary's pastoral evaluation of the situation of his diocese. Is there any need for women's liturgical ministry? Are there qualified women? Would their service find social acceptance? As far as the delegation of lay-persons to assist marriages is concerned there are also legal restrictions: First, the conference of bishops must vote favorably to allow individual bishops to do so. Second, the bishop must ask the permission of the Holy See. Particular law rests often quite ambiguous when referring to female ministries. E.g. in my own diocese (Vienna, Austria) some lay men and women were appointed to celebrate burials. But women are only allowed to do the job in such cases where the relatives of the deceased declare that they are comfortable with a woman.

The situation is different for the *Eastern Catholic Churches*. When defining sacred powers, the legislator tried to keep loyal to traditional eastern concepts. E.g., the competency to assist marriages is strictly restricted to priests. But in some respect the Eastern Code is not as exclusive as some old oriental canons seem to be. Lay persons can receive a mandate to teach or preach according to *canon 596 CCEO*, in liturgical contexts (disregarding Eucharistic celebration).<sup>82</sup> *Canon 677 § 2 CCEO* explicitly provides for emergency-baptism by lay-persons (male and female). But the Code does not provide any general endowment of lay-persons with extra baptismal competency.

Another important point is that the general abolishment of minor orders for the Roman Catholic Church is not necessarily shared by the Eastern Catholic Churches. The Code leaves the question of "other ministries," besides the triad of episcopate-presbyterate-(male)-diaconate (which are reserved to men according to *canon 754 CCEO*), to the discretion of particular law of each church (cf. *canon 327 CCEO*). So George Nedungatt argued that this would allow to "institute or restitute the

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children in the house of their parents when he himself was absent. Cf. Altfrid, *Vita S. Liudgeri*, 1,26.

<sup>82</sup>This norm might be seen as contradicting canon 64 of the Council in Trullo, but in fact lay-participation in the teaching ministry is quite common in the Byzantine-Orthodox Churches as well.

ministry of deaconess"<sup>83</sup> by particular law (though not as a "higher order"). No norm fights against liturgical installation. But I do not know any case where in fact a Catholic bishop did institute a deaconess during the last years.

#### 4.3. The Protestant Churches

When dealing with the Protestant Churches the origin of which are to be sought in the reform-movements of early-modern times, one has to keep in mind that the classification of "protestant" covers an enormous plurality. Not all so-called "protestant" churches share the same theological approach to the definition of "ministry" and sacramental structure.<sup>84</sup> There are the Lutherans who keep relatively close to the Catholic understanding of ecclesiastical ministry, while some "free churches" seem to be very far from it. Many protestants share the idea that every baptised person is entitled to do everything which is necessary in the Church, though, of course, regulations are needed to grant holy orders. So ordination is more likely to be considered as a matter of church-order only, and not of doctrine, as in the Orthodox or Catholic churches. It is understood as the formal delegation of ministry. In some churches this perception of ordination is echoed by regulations for vicars, who in general are, theologians who serve in parishes as part of their training before the ordination as pastors: Today, vicars are often formally allowed to preach as well as to administer sacraments. Luther himself made a remarkable difference between baptism which he considered as most important for salvation, and Lord's Supper ("Eucharist").<sup>85</sup> He was quite conservative

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<sup>83</sup>Cf. George Nedungatt, "Authority of Order and Power of Governance," *Kanon*, 14 (1998), pp. 66-91, p. 80; also: Severin Lederhilger, "Diakonat der Frau – Kirchenrechtliche Konsequenzen," *Theologisch-Praktische Quartalschrift*, 144 (1996), pp. 362-375 (pp. 363s).

<sup>84</sup>Cf., e.g., Hans-Jürgen Feldmann/Volker Gäckle, "Amt," *Evangelische Lexikon für Theologie und Gemeinde* t. 1, eds Helmut Burkhardt and Uwe Swarat (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1992), pp. 59-64; Gerhard Hennig/Karl-Heinz Voigt, "Ordination," *ibid.* t. 3 (1994), pp. 1482-1484.

<sup>85</sup>See: Christine Globig, *Frauenordination im Kontext lutherischer Ekklesiologie. Ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994); John Vikström, *Die Frau und das geistliche Amt – eine Frage der*

insofar as Lord's Supper was concerned. According to him one should not celebrate it without an ordained minister, but, of course, his general perception of ministry and sacraments could lead to the opinion that "emergency-Eucharist" would not be less valid than "emergency-baptism." Following Tertullian he argued that baptism would be valid irrespective of the minister. As we could see this perception of emergency-baptism was not "new," because medieval western canon-law allowed it. There was neither a significant change in Lutheran theology regarding the specific question of women's participation in ministry: On the one hand, women had been granted baptismal-capacity for emergency cases already before Luther<sup>86</sup>, on the other hand, they remained excluded from ministry (including public teaching-competency and the regular administration of sacraments) also in protestant communities. When the women's question became topical in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, protestant theologians proposed many arguments against women's ordination, and consequently, equality in liturgical ministry, as the Catholic Church did.

But for Protestantism there were many reasons for a re-evaluation: The general perception of ministry is one of them. Secondly, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards protestant communities have developed a great flexibility in handling ecclesiastical tradition in general and traditions concerning liturgical life in particular. There are communities which keep close to the catholic liturgy and have regular eucharistic celebrations. In general, they also share a more "catholic" understanding of "ministry." But traditionally the service of word (reading from scriptures, preaching, singing of the whole assembly) is of paramount importance in the Protestant circles. So for many Protestant theologians women's traditional exclusion from sacred orders was even less important than the question whether the Bible allows women to teach.

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*Ethik oder eine Frage des Glaubens und der Konstitution der Kirche? Überlegungen aus der Sicht lutherischer Theologie*, Gössmann/Bader (note 81), pp. 73-88.

<sup>86</sup>Some evidence for western medieval developments was collected by Cordula Nolte, "Conversio und Christianitas. Frauen in der Christianisierung vom 5. bis 8. Jahrhundert," *Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* t. 41 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1995), pp. 136-151.

The question whether women could become pastors came up at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as women were admitted to theological studies for the first time, particularly in the English speaking areas<sup>87</sup> and in the Lutheran Churches in Germany.<sup>88</sup> Women who had passed theological examinations started to work for their Church but, in general, were not yet authorized for sacramental administration nor for preaching during the community-service. There was not much difference between such Protestant women and their Catholic sisters who started to work as "parish-assistants." But there were already some important exceptions: A small number of women was ordained to full ministry already before the Second World War, e.g., the Congregational Church, in the Unitarian Church and the Baptist Church.<sup>89</sup> This development was caused by the general shortage of male clergy due to the war. More and more women - though most of them not yet ordained<sup>90</sup> - took over the full responsibility for a community. Things were slowly legalised after the War. Though there was (and still is) some resistance against the ordination of women, in many Protestant Churches women's ordination became very common during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today most Lutheran and Reformed churches (and also some "free churches," e.g. Baptist and Methodist) have ordained women who share all competencies with their male colleagues. At the same time there are local communities which would not accept a female pastor, and, there are also male pastors who are

<sup>87</sup>Cf., e.g., Elaine Kaye, "A Turning-Point in the Ministry of Women: The Ordination of the First Woman to the Christian Ministry in England in September 1917," *Women in the Church, Studies in Church History* t. 27, eds W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 509-512.

<sup>88</sup>Cf., e.g., Peter Bläser, "Liturgische Dienste und die Ordinationen von Frauen in nichtkatholischen Kirchen;" *Liturgisches Jahrbuch*, 28 (1978), pp. 156-169; E. Reichle, *Frauenordination. Studie zur Geschichte des Theologinnen-Berufes in den evangelischen Kirchen Deutschlands (BRD), Frauen auf neuen Wegen. Studien und Problembereiche zur Situation der Frauen in Gesellschaft und Kirche, Kennzeichen* t. 3, eds C. Pinl et al. (Gelnhausen: , 1978), pp. 103-180; *Der Streit um die Frauenordination in der Bekennenden Kirche: Quellentexte zu ihrer Geschichte im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, eds Dagmar Herbrecht, Ilse Härter and Hannelore Erhart (Neunkirchen-Vluyn: Neunkirchener Verlag, 1997), pp. 4-67 (with sources).

<sup>89</sup>Cf. Kaye (note 88), passim (with literature).

<sup>90</sup>Cf., e.g., Herbrecht/Härter/Erhart (note 89), passim (particularly pp. 391ss).

not willing to work together with a female colleague.<sup>91</sup> The resulting pastoral problems are not so great as one might suspect: In general, protestant ministers are not sent to a community by a higher authority, but they are elected. As far as I know, in Austria, for instance, normally women will not even apply for the job when they know that the local community is not willing to engage them. On the other hand, today many communities are very happy with their female pastors. There is an obvious inter-dependence of the promotion of equality in the ecclesiastical and in the secular sphere. The Synod of the Lutheran Church of Sweden – a church well inculturated in the Scandinavian World where secular efforts for establishing equal rights for women and men have been most successful in comparison with other European countries – recently dealt a severe blow to the opponents to women's ordination: 1997 it decided that future candidates for the post of pastor will be admitted only if they accept the legality of ordination for both sexes.<sup>92</sup>

On the other hand, current developments also show that the fact that a Church once opened priestly ministry for women is not necessarily an everlasting decision. So 1995 the Lutheran Church of Latvia – women's ordination had been introduced 1957 - cancelled the admission of female theologians to ordination. This decision of the Lutheran Church of Latvia makes are thing clear: Growing convergencies in the perception of ministry and sacraments can improve relations with the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. And they may lead back to a more traditional role-distribution among men and women.<sup>93</sup>

But most churches which have started to ordain women in general evaluate their experiences as positive. Thus in many Protestant ecclesiastical circles gender is no longer a main issue insofar as ministry is concerned. This, of course, does not mean that all gender-questions are

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<sup>91</sup>For dissenting arguments see, e.g., "Wer 'verläßt den Boden der in der evangelischen Kirche geltenden Lehre'? Zur EKD-Stellungnahme von 1992 'Frauenordination und Bischofsamt'", eds Kirchliche Sammlung um Bibel und Bekenntnis in Braunschweig (Gr. Oesingen: Lutherische Buchhandlung Harms: 1995).

<sup>92</sup>Cf. epd/Österreich no. 74 (30.10.1997), pp. 9-10.

<sup>93</sup>Cf., e.g., epd/Österreich no. 33 (27.4.1995), p. 5 and no. 39 (18.5.1995), p. 6.

solved: Protestant Churches, for example, share the Catholic (and partly also Orthodox) discussion on liturgical texts: inclusive language, female role-models and gender-images are hot issues which some times ecclesiastical boundaries.

#### 4. 4. Anglican and Old Catholic Churches

Unlike Protestant Churches, the Anglican and Old Catholic Churches share a more traditional concept of Holy Orders. Some liturgical reforms, e.g., the substitution of Latin by vernacular language, which are now generally accepted in the Western churches, were anticipated not only in Protestant communities but also in the Anglican Community and by the churches which joined the Union of Utrecht ("Old Catholic Churches"). But in most liturgical and doctrinal questions Anglicans and Old-Catholics have adhered to the traditional Catholic positions. Until recently they also shared Catholic (and Orthodox) objections to women's ordination. As late as 1976 (the same year when the Catholic "*Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*" was published) the International Bishops Conference of the Old-Catholic Churches declared its objection to women's ordination. The Old-Catholic bishops explicitly referred to Jesus (appointment of 12 men to apostolic ministry) and to the tradition of both, eastern and western churches, to restrict sacramental ordination (deacon, presbyter, bishop) to men only.<sup>94</sup> It is amazing that this statement implied the historical institution of deaconesses as non-sacramental. Until now not even the Catholic Church has gone thus far in its official declarations on the question of female participation in Holy Orders. As is well known, things nevertheless changed drastically during the following years. 1982 the International Bishops Conference permitted the revitalisation of female diaconate.<sup>95</sup> Subsequently, a new formula for the ordination of female deacons was created. The German Church

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<sup>94</sup>Cf. Urs Küry, "Die Altkatholische Kirche. Ihre Geschichte, ihre Lehre, ihre Anliegen," *Die Kirchen der Welt* t. 3 (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, <sup>2</sup>1978), pp. 460-461.

<sup>95</sup>Cf. Angela Berlis, "Diakonin soll sie sein ...! Die Frauenordination im Gespräch der (alt-katholischen) Kirche;" *Christus Spes. Liturgie und Glaube im ökumenischen Kontext, Festschrift für Bischof Sigisbert Kraft*, eds Angela Berlis and Klaus-Diether Gerth (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994), pp. 47-62.

interpreted the decision of 1982 as an over ruling the decision of 1976, and started thinking of the possibility of admitting women to priesthood. There were also critical voices within the Old-Catholic community. Nonetheless, first ordinations of deaconesses took place 1987.

The recent decision of the majority of Old Catholic Churches to open all orders for women, cannot be understood without an evaluative glimpse on the developments in the Anglican Community; because Anglicans and Old Catholics have an intimate inter-ecclesiastical relationship (including mutual admission to the sacraments).<sup>96</sup> The first ordination of an Anglican woman to priesthood had happened in Hongkong as early as 1944. Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century women's diaconate had been revitalised in the Church of England. This ministry then fulfilled a function, which was similar to that of Catholic nuns who have committed themselves to works of charity. In course of time it developed to a ministry which resembled much to the modern institution of Catholic pastoral-assistants (lay-persons of both sexes who take over various pastoral responsibilities which often include also liturgical tasks). From the very beginning (1862) Anglican deaconesses were initiated in a liturgical rite. But the quality of this ceremony – benediction, ordination in the strict sense or whatever – was controversial.<sup>97</sup> The already mentioned first ordination of a woman to priesthood was even more than just controversial: Before long, this woman priest had to resign. Nonetheless, the question of the admission of women to priesthood returned in the post-war period, particularly in the context of overseas missionary and in North America. The General Synod of Church of England, had already declared in 1975 that "there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood." When the first women were ordained priests during the 1970s, many Anglican bishops

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<sup>96</sup>Cf. Anne Jensen, "Ist Frauenordination ein ökumenisches Problem? Zu den jüngsten Entwicklungen in den anglikanischen, altkatholischen und orthodoxen Kirchen" *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 84 (1994), pp. 210-228; Gillian Evans, *Models of Communion: ibid.*, 87 (1997), pp. 67-76

<sup>97</sup>During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Lambeth Conference (head-organisation of Anglican Churches) recommended to elevate the institution of deaconesses to the rank of canonical order for various times. But only since 1987 the deaconesses of the Church of England have definitely been ordained as "deacons". Women who had already been deaconesses before were reordained.

considered them as illicit but valid.<sup>98</sup> The particular developments in various local Anglican churches were ratified by general decisions of the Lambeth Conference. Though the issue has been controversial until now, the Anglican majority has continued to open all ministries for women. Resistance has faded in various Old Catholic Churches as I already mentioned when dealing with the institution of female diaconate.<sup>99</sup> After a long process of preparation women were ordained as priests in the Church of England in 1992 for the first time. This decision was almost immediately followed by the Old Catholic Church of Germany which as the first Church in the Union of Utrecht proceeded to confer priestly ordination to women in 1996.

To sum up: Since the 1970s women have been admitted to all grades of ordained ministry (including episcopal ministry which was first conferred to a woman in 1989 in the Episcopal Church of the United States of America) many churches of the Anglican Community. So the liturgical status of men and women has become fundamentally equal. Many Protestant Churches did the same. But unlike Protestant Churches, the Anglican Churches share a more traditional understanding of ministry and sacraments with Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Some Churches of the Union of Utrecht did ordain women to priesthood in the 1990s, although the great majority of Old Catholic bishops strictly had rejected Anglican promotion of women to priesthood started in the 1970s. The problems are not solved yet though it seems that Inter-Anglican and Old-Catholic dissent to women's admission to ordained ministry is diminishing, one cannot speak of general acceptance. The issue has caused a remarkable flow of conversions from Anglican dissidents to Catholicism (partly also to Orthodoxy). Besides, it has almost caused the breaking of the Union of Utrecht's.

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<sup>98</sup>Cf., e.g., the theological expert "Report on the Validity of the Philadelphia Ordination" *The Ordination of Women*, eds Michael P. Hamilton and Nancy S. Montgomery (New York: Morehouse-Barlow 1975), pp. 179-195; for further literature on the inter-Anglican discourse see Jensen (note 97), p. 220.

<sup>99</sup>Cf. the documentation of Old-Catholic dissent and consent to women's ordination in the Journal *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*.