



## Presentation

### of Synodal Forum III

“Women in ministries and offices in the Church”

for the First Reading

at the Third Synodal Assembly (3-5 February 2022)

for the implementation text

“Women in sacramental ministry”

[Result of the ballot in the Forum: 18 Yes, 3 abstentions]

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## Introduction

Women have been living their charisms and proclaiming the Gospel since early Christian times: in private and in public, in families and in communities, in education and in catechesis, in everyday life and in places of need.

Due to a re-evaluation of cultic purity, the repression and removal of female members from the public sphere of the Church began at the latest from the 2nd Century onwards. The Church thus took a path in which the charisms and vocations of women were increasingly ignored and could not be used to build up the Christian community. This is also linked to a history of pain that has led to experiences of discrimination, misogynistic polemics and a lack of recognition for women with a vocation in previous centuries and up to the present day.

The question has been asked out loud for a long time, and is being asked even more frequently today: What is the significance of the New Testament tradition of the vocation also of women to proclaim the Good News of Christ for the reform of the institutional structure of the Church? A large number of scholarly theological studies have addressed this topic. The insights gained are to be respected, albeit there should be a critical examination of the respective hermeneutical preconceptions. This is due to the concern for the responsibility for the Christian faith, which has to defend itself in the forum of reason. If there is no discussion of the

arguments, and if the demand for obedience without insight takes its place, there is a danger of a split taking place in the Christian community of faith.

## **Motion**

The Synodal Assembly is requested to resolve as follows:

The reason for the existence of the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The form that the Church takes must serve this purpose. The exclusion of women from the sacramental ministry requires a justification that is amenable to human reason, whilst respecting the traditional form of God's action. Women who consider themselves to have been called, and who obviously have charisms that also recommend them for leadership in the sacramental ministry, must not be excluded. If they are so, then the Church is guilty before God in Her ministry of proclaiming the Gospel because His spiritual gifts are not respected. The theological argumentations presented so far in the available magisterial documents are therefore to be subjected to a critical review in the context of the universal Church, in which scholarly expertise is to be sought. In addition to the theological disciplines, philosophy as well as the cultural and social sciences should also be involved in the process of reflection in view of hermeneutical preconceptions.

What this means in concrete terms is that a process is to be initiated in a transparent manner in the Roman Catholic Church, with the body taking the lead that will continue the Synodal Path in Germany in the long term. A commission is to be established to deal exclusively with the issue of the sacramental ministry of people of all genders. Academic standards and spiritual concerns in the spirit of the proclamation of the Christian Gospel are to be combined. The possibility of a high international profile, and of an exchange in ecumenical dialogue, is to be ensured from the outset through the appointments that are made to the Commission. The Commission is to periodically present its findings to the public. It is to stimulate discussion processes on the subject at all levels of church life. The German Bishops' Conference is to endeavour at its various levels to ensure that the Commission's activities are received by the universal Church.

## **Reasoning**

There may be times when knowledge of faith is brought into the universal Church from a local church. It has been demonstrated in academic theology for decades that there is a significant discrepancy between the arguments that are put forward in the Roman Catholic magisterial documents that lead to the exclusion of women from sacramental ministry, and the insights gained on the basis of hermeneutical standards that are presupposed in the research and teaching of theology.

Earlier times teach us that there have been repeated occasions in the history of the Church to reconsider a doctrinal position once adopted - for example in the question of the legitimacy of slavery, attitudes towards the death penalty, the assessment of the findings of the theory of evolution, or indeed in the evaluation of freedom of conscience and religion. The knowledge of the historicity of the knowledge of a religious truth is just as familiar to theological herme-

neutics as is the insight that questioning the sources of knowledge is always guided by interests. Only an intersubjective exchange of knowledge, combined with practicing all methods, can still be convincing today in view of the complexity of the subject matter.

The daring recent beginning of a period of theological argumentation on the Synodal Path in Germany with regard to the participation of women in the sacramental ministry presupposes that the doctrinal texts currently available have not yet gone so far as to be finally binding. It should give pause for thought in the controversy surrounding this question that a large number of believers in Christ refuse to accept the assumption that only a man could preside over the Eucharistic liturgy because of his natural likeness to Jesus. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the "*sensus fidelium*" ("sense of faith of the faithful" as defined in Lumen Gentium 12) cannot err.

The magisterial documents (1976 "*Inter insigniores*" and 1994 "*Ordinatio sacerdotalis*") make use of the image of the male bridegroom Christ as an argument at the level of symbolism, in contrast to the female Church portrayed as a bride. Theological weight is lent in particular to the calling of twelve men alone to form the group of the Apostles in the Upper Room. According to this, Jesus' actions are said to follow God's will, which is said to reserve the leadership of the post-Easter Eucharistic celebrations for men alone. Counter-arguments that have been put forward in research for decades are to be discussed in the theological debate: Those who encounter the risen Jesus Christ are called to the apostolic ministry, and not all apostles belong to the group of twelve. The symbolism of the number twelve is a reference to God's lasting Covenant with the people of Israel and its twelve tribes. Exegetical studies also distinguish between the knowledge and self-awareness of the earthly Jesus and the post-Easter tradition. Who can dare to describe in a historical sense exactly how Jesus' last meal took place? Are the traditional gestures of Jesus at the meal, and the interpretation of His imminent death, not possibly more to be enhanced in theological terms than the question of whether this meal was attended by men only - with a view to establishing a structure of offices within the Church in the future? Other unanswered questions include reflections on the relationship between the formation of tradition, which already began in the New Testament, in correspondence with the gender roles of the time, which need to be reconsidered today in view of changed experiences.

The critical revision of the argumentations in the Roman Catholic magisterial documents that have been put forward can be linked to the path into the future: Conversations are to be held with baptised people in all countries and cultures, in a worldwide effort. Experiences with the official ministries of women in Christian ecumenism can be presented. Stories from and about women in ministry will be enriching. The proscription of the argumentative struggle for the participation of women in the sacramental ministry, as well as the attempts to exclude male and female representatives of specific argumentations from the space of orthodox ecclesiality, are to be brought to an end.

It is the doctrine, attested to in the Bible, namely that unity with Jesus Christ is founded in baptism, which abolishes the distinction between "male" and "female" at the level of salvation (cf. Gal 3:28). This results in a distinction, led by the Holy Spirit, between the divine ground of renewal and the earthly form of the Church, which has become historical, as the place of experiencing redeemed existence. The soteriological intention of the incarnation of

God in Jesus Christ is the guiding principle of the reflection: In following the Crucified One, the God who became man in the lowliness of earthly existence, people give their lives day after day for the proclamation of the Gospel; they enhance the hope of Easter, they heal spiritual needs, and exhort to a life of love, even towards those who are hostile. In this way, they represent Jesus Christ in their official ministry, in that they are called, despite all human weakness, to always point to His presence. With their comprehensive spiritual and theological training, they encourage all people in their ministry of proclamation to believe in Jesus Christ, to be baptised, to encounter Jesus Christ in the celebration of the sacraments, and to act in a diaconal manner.