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**WOMEN AS LECTOR AND ACOLYTE  
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**BY MERLIN RENGITH AMBROSE**

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# WOMEN AS LECTOR AND ACOLYTE

## THE AMENDMENT IN CAN. 230 §1 OF CIC 1983

BY MERLIN RENGITH AMBROSE

Abstract: Pope Francis changed canon law and liturgical norms to allow women to be formally installed as lectors and acolytes, acknowledging the gifts of each baptized person. Laity who meets the age and qualification requirements can be a lector or an acolyte under the prescribed liturgical rite. Women will be able to partake more effectively in the work of evangelization in the church if these offices, which involve stability, public recognition, and a bishop's mandate, are also granted to them. For decades, women and girls have been lectors at Mass and altar servers. Women and men were allowed to perform those functions by temporary designation under Canon 230, paragraph 2, but it was not a formally and stably instituted ministry. A study of this new amendment and its legal provision enabling women to be stably instituted as lectors and acolytes is presented in the article. Additionally, it highlights the historical development and clarifies the role of ministries in the Church.

Zusammenfassung: Papst Franziskus hat das Kirchenrecht und die liturgischen Normen geändert, um Frauen die Möglichkeit zu geben, förmlich als Lektorinnen und Akolythinnen eingesetzt zu werden. Der Laienschaft, welche die Alters- und Qualifikationsanforderungen erfüllt, kann nach dem vorgeschriebenen liturgischen Ritus das Lektorat oder Akolythat übertragen werden. Frauen können sich effektiver an der Evangelisierungsarbeit in der Kirche beteiligen, wenn ihnen diese Ämter, die mit Dauerhaftigkeit, öffentlicher Anerkennung und einem bischöflichen Mandat verbunden sind, ebenfalls verliehen werden. Seit Jahrzehnten sind Frauen und Mädchen Lektorinnen und Ministrantinnen in der Messe. Frauen und Männer durften diese Funktionen gemäß can. 230 § 2 vorübergehend ausüben, aber es handelte sich nicht um ein förmlich und dauerhaft eingerichtetes Amt. Der Lektor wird eingesetzt, um die Lesungen aus der Heiligen Schrift zu verkünden, mit Ausnahme des Evangeliums. Er darf auch die Intentionen für das allgemeine Gebet verkünden und in Ermangelung eines Psalmisten den Psalm zwischen den Lesungen rezitieren, so die Instruktion. Der Artikel befasst sich mit dieser neuen Änderung und ihrer rechtlichen Bestimmung, die es Frauen ermöglicht, dauerhaft als Lektorinnen und Akolythinnen bestellt zu werden. Außerdem wird die historische Entwicklung beleuchtet und die Rolle der Ämter in der Kirche geklärt.

### 1 Introduction

Until 11 January 2021, Holy Mother Church juridically allowed only lay men to be instituted as lectors and acolytes, without requiring them to be clerics (can. 230 §1 CIC). In practice, however, these ministries still continue to be used mostly as steps before the admission of a candidate to the diaconate or priesthood. Can. 230 §1 was the only canon in this title, i.e., the obligations and rights of the lay members of Christ's faithful (cann. 224-231), that distinguished between men and women.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, no women could be instituted as lectors or acolytes in a stable

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<sup>1</sup> All the canons in this title, except can. 230 §1, mention "lay people" (*laici* which includes men and women). Can. 230 §1 mentions only "lay men," (*virii laici*) which excludes women.

manner, though they were indeed receiving and carrying out this ministry on a temporary basis where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available (can. 230, §§ 2, 3).<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the Holy Father Pope Francis recognizing the gifts of each baptized person, irrespective of gender, ordered a change to Canon Law so that women could be formally instituted to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Pope Francis, therefore, has changed Church law officially to recognise female ministry and allow women to be instituted into roles previously reserved to men. This recent amendment in the can. 230, §1 is an official recognition and an enormous advantage for women who are already active and wish to render a greater service to the Church by virtue of these non-ordained ministries. This canonically welcome inclusion of women in these stable ministries of lector and acolyte is truly worthy of appreciation and attention.

The scope of this article is to shed light on the can. 230 §1, its origin and development, its recent modification by Pope Francis and its juridical implications and relevance for women in the stable ministries of lector and acolyte.

## 2 The Immediate Motive for the Inclusion of Women

The final document of the Special Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region, entitled *The Amazon: The New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology* states:

In the horizon of renewal outlined by the Second Vatican Council, one feels ever greater today the urgency to rediscover the co-responsibility of all the baptized in the Church, and particularly the mission of the laity. The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region (6-27 October 2019), in the fifth chapter of the final document, indicated the need to think of “new paths for Church ministries.” Not only for the Church of Amazon, but rather for the entire Church, in the variety of situations, “it is urgent for the Church in the Amazon to promote and confer ministries for men and women... It is the Church of baptized men and women that we must consolidate by promoting ministries and, above all, an awareness of baptismal dignity” (Final Document, n. 95).<sup>3</sup>

One can, therefore, easily infer that the modification in the above-mentioned canon is necessarily and urgently carried out in response to the emphasis laid down in the recent Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region. Moreover, in recent times, there have been requests formulated by experts asking for the revision of this norm of can. 230 §1, since *de facto* these same ministries are being performed already by women (readings, distribution of communion, etc.). The co-responsibility of all the baptized in the Church, in particular, that of the laity is so significant that they, with their charisms and diverse gifts, can contribute to the good of the communities and to the mission of the Church. Therefore, the emphasis laid down by the Holy Father Pope Francis and the final synodal document, *Querida Amazonia* on 2 February 2020 led to the modification of the can. 230 §1 which had juridically and originally established the teaching of *Ministeria quaedam*, reserving the ministries of Lector and Acolyte only to men.

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<sup>2</sup> Incitti, Giacomo, *Il popolo di Dio. La struttura giuridica fondamentale tra uguaglianza e diversità* (=Manuali 18), Vatican City 2007, 99.

<sup>3</sup> *Synod of Bishops, The Amazon. New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20191026\\_sinodo-amazonia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20191026_sinodo-amazonia_en.html).

### 3 The Modification of Can. 230 §1

Prior to the modification brought out by the Holy Father Pope Francis, Can. 230 §1 reads:

Lay *men* who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church.<sup>4</sup>

The rest of the canons under this title,<sup>5</sup> illustrating the obligations and rights of the lay members of Christ's faithful, use, "lay members" or "lay people," inclusive of both men and women.

But after the change brought out by the apostolic letter given as *Motu Proprio* (on his own accord/initiative) *Spiritus Domini* on 11 January 2021, the same can. 230 §1 reads:

Lay *persons* who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte. Nevertheless, the conferral of these ministries does not grant them the right to obtain support or remuneration from the Church.<sup>6</sup>

This is a significant change which includes women in the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte in *vita ecclesiae*. In the text, Pope Francis said that the move was part of an effort to better recognize the "precious contribution" women make in the Catholic Church, stressing the role of all the baptized in the Church's mission. However, in the document he also makes a clear distinction between "ordained" ministries such as the priesthood and diaconate, and ministries open to qualified laypeople by virtue of their "baptismal priesthood," which is different than that of Holy Orders.

### 4 The Meaning and Differences of „Ministries“

The Holy Father Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* affirmed the theological fact of the wealth and variety of gifts and charisms<sup>7</sup> in the Church by the reception of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. St Paul distinguishes between gifts of grace, i.e., Charisms (*charismata*) and services ("*diakoniai*" – "*ministeria*").<sup>8</sup> According to the *traditio ecclesiae*, these different forms, which the charisms assume when they are publicly recognized in view of the community and to its mission in a stable manner, are called ministries. Edward Schillebeeckx explains ministry as "the specific crystallization of a universal charisma of the Spirit" and also a "gift of the Spirit reserved for certain Christians with a function in the

<sup>4</sup> Can. 230, §1: "Viri laici, qui aetate dotibusque pollent Episcoporum conferentiae decreto statutis, per ritum liturgicum praescriptum ad ministeria lectoris et acolythi stabiliter assumi possunt; quae tamen ministeriorum collatio eisdem ius non confert ad sustentationem remunerationemve ab Ecclesia praestandam."

<sup>5</sup> Book II, Title II: The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Members of Christ's Faithful (cann. 224-231).

<sup>6</sup> Francis, *Motu proprio Spiritus Domini* (10 January 2021), in: *Communicationes* 53 (2021), 66-67; in: OR 161/7 (11 January 2021), 10: Can. 230, §1: "Laici, qui aetate dotibusque pollent Episcoporum conferentiae decreto statutis, per ritum liturgicum praescriptum ad ministeria lectoris et acolythi stabiliter assumi possunt; quae tamen ministeriorum collatio eisdem ius non confert ad sustentationem remunerationemve ab Ecclesia praestandam."

<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), in: AAS 105 (2013) 1019-1137, 1068.

<sup>8</sup> Rom. 12:4ff and 1 Cor 12:12ff.

Church”<sup>9</sup> and this is to be understood as a service which is a gift of the Spirit.<sup>10</sup> Thomas O’Meara defines ministry as “the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit’s charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to witness to serve, and realize the kingdom of God.”<sup>11</sup>

As highlighted by Pope Francis, these ministries are either grounded in ordination or commissioning. He explains that when a ministry originates from a particular sacrament, i.e., the Sacred Order, it refers to the “ordained” ministries of the bishop, the priest and the deacon, who can perform certain ministries in the Church by virtue of their ordination. On the other hand, “non-ordained/instituted” ministries are instituted in the Church and entrusted through a non-sacramental liturgical rite to a baptized person in whom specific charisms are recognized, after an appropriate journey of preparation. There are many other ecclesial services or offices, exercised by several members of the community for the good of the Church without the particular rite for the bestowal of that role.<sup>12</sup> Lector and acolyte belong to the category of non-ordained/instituted ministries.

Down the centuries, given the changing ecclesial, social and cultural situations, “ministries” have assumed diverse forms and manifestations. Nevertheless, the distinction between “lay ministries” (instituted/non-ordained ministries) and “ordained ministries” has always remained intact. “Lay ministries” are specific expressions of the priestly and the royal condition of every baptized person. The “ordained ministries” belong to certain members of the *Christifideles* (Christ’s faithful), who as bishops and priests receive the mission and capacity to act *in persona Christi capitis* or as deacons to serve the people of God in ministries of the liturgy, the word and charity.<sup>13</sup> Expressions such as baptismal/common priesthood and ordained/ministerial priesthood are used in order to highlight the above-mentioned difference. *Lumen Gentium* no. 10 enunciates that both are interrelated, participating in the one priesthood of Christ in his/her own way. Therefore, every ministry instituted must be appreciated for its intrinsic value and not simply because it fills the vacuum caused by the scarcity of clerical vocations. The lay ministers are not called to act simply as substitutions for the delegation or execution of that which is proper to the clerics but to an exercise of ecclesiastical office which is proper to them and thus allows them to respond to their fundamental vocation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Schillebeeckx, Edward, *The Church with a Human Face. A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry*, New York 1985, 81.

<sup>10</sup> Schillebeeckx, Edward, *Ministry. Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*, New York 1981, 31.

<sup>11</sup> O’Meara, Thomas, *Theology of Ministry*, Mahwah 1983, 142.

<sup>12</sup> Francis, *Spiritus Domini* (note 6).

<sup>13</sup> Benedict XVI., *Apostolic Letter Omnium in mentem* (26 October 2009), art. 2, in: *AAS* 102 (2010) 8-10, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Rayappan, *Arulselvam*, *Involvement of Laity in the Teaching Office of the Church*, in: *Canonical Studies* 32 (2018) 85-105, 96.

## 5 A Quick Glance at *Fontes* and *Schema* of Can. 230 §1

### 5.1 *Fontes* of Can. 230, §1

Motu proprio *Ministeria quaedam*<sup>15</sup> introduced a disciplinary reform, subsequently implemented by the CIC 1983.<sup>16</sup> The sources of can. 230 are specifically nos. 2, 3, 4, 7, 12 of the Motu Proprio *Ministeria Quaedam*.

- No. 2 indicates, “Those orders which to this time have been called minor, will now be called ministries;”<sup>17</sup>
- No. 3 prescribes, “The ministries can also be entrusted to the lay faithful, in such a way that they are no longer considered as reserved to candidates to the sacrament of Orders;”<sup>18</sup>
- No. 4 stipulates, “The ministries retained by the whole Latin Church to accommodate today’s needs are two, namely lector and acolyte...;”<sup>19</sup>
- No. 7 states, “The institution of the lector and of the acolyte according to the respected tradition of the Church, is reserved to men;”<sup>20</sup>
- No. 12 mentions, “the conferral of the ministries does not give the right to remuneration by the Church.”<sup>21</sup>

The spirit of the can. 230 §1, therefore, is a total absorption of the Motu proprio *Ministeria Quaedam* through which reception of “lay ministries” was regulated and preceded in a preparatory manner the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, although other suitable male faithful were also conferred with such ministries. Therefore, the restriction of stable ministries of lector and acolyte only to men dates back to no. 7 of *Ministeria Quaedam*. This restriction was probably due to the close connection with orders<sup>22</sup> since they were, in fact, known as minor orders.

### 5.2 Exclusion of Women in *Ministeria Quaedam*

Motu proprio *Ministeria Quaedam* restructured the clerical state, abolished the four minor orders in the Latin Church and established the lay ministries of lector and acolyte for men. Women were excluded from the ministries of lector and acolyte, though the Motu proprio itself represents a sharp departure from tradition with respect to the structure of the clerical state. This departure is presented as the Church’s prerogative in the face of pastoral need. However, no reasons are given for departing from tradition in the organization of the clerical state and the establishment of lay ministries and maintaining tradition in the exclusion of women from lay ministries. The direction of the reform, led by Pope Paul VI, has been faithfully incorporated into the *ius vigens*,

<sup>15</sup> Paul VI., Motu Proprio *Ministeria Quaedam* (15. August 1972), in: AAS 64 (1972) 529-534.

<sup>16</sup> Sabbaresse, Luigi, Canon Law. An Overview (=Manuali 54), Vatican City 2017, 69.

<sup>17</sup> Paul VI, *Ministeria Quaedam* (note 15), 531: “Ordines, qui hucusque minores vocabantur, ‘ministeria’ in posterum dicendi sunt.”

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.: “Ministeria christifidelibus laicis committi possunt, ita ut candidatis ad sacramentum Ordinis reservata non habeantur.”

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.: 532: “Ministeria in tota Ecclesia Latina servanda, hodiernis necessitatibus accommodata, duo sunt, Lectoris nempe et Acolythi.”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: 533: “Institutio Lectoris et Acolythi, iuxta venerabilem traditionem Ecclesiae, viris reservatur.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.: “Collatio ministeriorum ius non confert ad sustentationem vel remunerationem ab Ecclesia praestandas.”

<sup>22</sup> González, Javier, Rights and Participation of the Laity in the Life of the Church, in: Philippine Canonical Forum 2 (2000) 61-97, 72; González, Javier, Lay Ministries, Manila 32000, 9.

whether in a stable manner (can. 230 §1) or as a requisite for ordination as a deacon (can. 1035). One needs to acknowledge the fact that this incorporation did not occur easily, for there were several discussions regarding the inclusion of women during the revision of the Code in its *coetus studiorum* (study group) of various *schemata*, all of which proved to be fruitless.

### 5.3 *Coetus Studiorum* on the Schema Development of Can. 230 §1

The first schema *De populo Dei* of 1978 differed very slightly from can. 230 of *ius vigen*s. In the discussion of the development of the can. 230 of CIC 1983, the use of “ministry” was never at issue, rather the restriction of instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to “laymen” was the bone of contention.<sup>23</sup> The *coetus studiorum* was unable to reach a decision to include women in the stably instituted ministries such as lector and acolyte.<sup>24</sup> In the discussion, Mons. Secretary posed the question whether ministries should be instituted or conferred on women as well; but such a decision could not be taken without first consulting the Sacred Congregation for Worship. The first consultor preferred the text as it was with the expression, ‘laymen’ (*virii laici*) and not just ‘lay’ (*laici*) which would also include women. The third consultor noted that the Sacred Congregation for Worship had not proposed anything about this subject and therefore stressed the need of approving the text as it was without including women in the stably instituted ministries. Therefore, there was no need to consult the Holy Congregation for Divine Worship.<sup>25</sup> In later discussions on the 1980 *Schema*, these same questions were raised again. The *Coetus studiorum* maintained the exclusion of women from stably instituted ministries of lector and acolyte by virtue of *Ministeria Quaedam*<sup>26</sup> and the final text promulgated in CIC 1983 was devoid of women in the above-mentioned ministries.

### 5.4 Lector and Acolyte: No Longer Minor Orders but Ministries

According to CIC 1917, lector and acolyte were minor orders reserved only to the priestly candidate in the seminary. This implied that only those who were aspiring to become priests could receive them as steps towards ordination (can. 949 of CIC 1917). Moreover, since one was considered to be a cleric from the first tonsure, the minor orders such as porter, lector, exorcist and acolyte, which were conferred subsequently, were also considered to be the participation of the sacred order or category of clerics. Later, in line with the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic letter given as *motu proprio Ministeria Quaedam*,<sup>27</sup> felt the need for recognizing the gifts of the laity and involve them more directly in the mission of the Church. He reviewed these “minor orders,”<sup>28</sup> adapting them to the needs of the times. As mentioned in *Motu proprio Spiritus Domini*, this adaptation, however, must not be interpreted as surpassing prior doctrine,

<sup>23</sup> Second Report of the CLSA Task Force on Schema Canonum, Libri II, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> In: *Communicationes* 13 (1981) 321.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., “Mons. Segretario pone qui la questione di altri ministri da istituirsì o da conferirsì anche alle donne, ma non si può prendere una tale decisione senza prima consultare la S. Congregazione per il culto. Il primo consultore preferisce il testo com’è con l’espressione ‘virii laici’ e non solamente ‘laici’ che comprenderebbe anche le donne. Il terzo consultore nota che la S. Congregazione per il culto non ha proposto niente circa questa materia, pertanto dimostra di approvare il testo com’è. Non c’è bisogno quindi di consultare la S. Congregazione per il Culto divino.”

<sup>26</sup> In: *Communicationes* 14 (1982) 177: “§1 deleantur verba ‘Virii’... R. Animadversio recipe non potest, quia in hac § agitur de collatione ministerium lectoris et acolythi, quae reservatur (M.P. *Ministeria Quaedam*, n. VII)...”

<sup>27</sup> *Paul VI.*, *Ministeria Quaedam* (note 15).

<sup>28</sup> Minor orders were Porter, Lector, Exorcist and Acolyte.

but as the implementation of the dynamism that characterizes the nature of the Church, always called with the aid of the Spirit of Truth to respond to the challenges of every era, in obedience to Revelation.<sup>29</sup> The adaptation of Pope Paul VI entailed the restriction of the notion of cleric only to deacon, priests and bishops. The other minor orders, such as lector and acolyte were now to be called as “ministries”,<sup>30</sup> entrusted to the laymen and minor orders, such as porter and exorcist were suppressed by Motu proprio *Ministeria Quaedam*.

## 6 Baptism as Foundation for the Laity's Role in *Tria-Munera*

Due to the emphasis laid by a number of assemblies of Synods of Bishops on the need for a deepening the subject of “lay ministries” doctrinally in order to respond to the signs and needs of the times, several doctrinal developments have taken place as means of offering appropriate support to the role of evangelization.<sup>31</sup> These developments have highlighted how certain ministries instituted by the Church are based on the common condition of being baptized and the common priesthood received in the sacrament of baptism, which differs essentially from the ordained ministry received in the Sacrament of Holy Orders.<sup>32</sup> Lay people, due to their incorporation into Christ and the Church by baptism, are called to the *consecratio mundi* (consecration of the world) which differs from the task of anyone who belongs, through the sacrament, to the ministerial ranks.<sup>33</sup>

With the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1983, women and men are recognized as members of the Christian faithful, baptized in Jesus Christ, incorporated into the Church. This membership bestows upon them duties and rights in accordance with their status (can. 96). Moreover, in virtue of baptism, each member of the faithful participates in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ (can. 204). Through their rebirth in Christ, all faithful are graced with a genuine equality of dignity and action so that they can contribute, each according to their distinct condition and office, to the fulfilment of the body of Christ (can. 208).<sup>34</sup> The Second Vatican Council had already reiterated this sacramental basis found in Christian ministries, stating that “from the fact of their union with Christ, the head, flows the laymen’s right and duty to be apostles. Inserted as they are in the Mystical Body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, it is by the Lord Himself that they are assigned to the apostolate.”<sup>35</sup> It is, therefore, due to the baptismal privilege that one is invited fundamentally to ministry.<sup>36</sup> A consolidated practice in the Latin Church has also confirmed that

<sup>29</sup> Francis, Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on access of women to the ministries of Lector and Acolyte (11. January 2021), at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/01/11/210112b.html>

<sup>30</sup> Braga, C., *Ministeria Quaedam*, in: *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 87 (1973) 191-214; in: *Notitiae* 9 (1973) 18-33.

<sup>31</sup> Francis, *Spiritus Domini* (note 6).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Kizito, Leonard, *Lay People and Tria Munera Christi. A Study from Can. 204, 1 to Instructio Ecclesiae De Mysterio*, Vatican City 2002, 128.

<sup>34</sup> Salachas, Demetrios / Sabbarese, Luigi, *Chierici e ministero sacro nel Codice latino e orientale. Prospettive interecclesiali*, Vatican City 2004, 43.

<sup>35</sup> AA. no. 3; LG. no. 33

<sup>36</sup> I diritti fondamentali del Cristiano nella Chiesa e nella Società, Atti del IV Congresso internazionale di Diritto Canonico, Fribourgo, 6-11 October 1980. Hg. v. Eugenio Corecco / Niklaus Herzog / Angelo Scola, Milano 1981, 221-240.



these lay ministries, being based on the Sacrament of Baptism, may be entrusted to all the faithful who are suitable.

## 7 A Glimpse at the Role of Women in *Tria-Munera*

Though the Code does not explicitly designate the *tria-munera* (threefold functions) only to women, the terms such as “lay persons” or “persons” include both woman and men. The principle of equality affirmed in can. 208 by virtue of baptism leads to the incorporation into Christ and participation in *tria-munera Christi*.<sup>37</sup> The following are some of the important canonical provisions where men and women have equal rights to carry out the *tria-munera ad normam iuris*.

### 7.1 Teaching Office

In certain cases, can. 766 permits lay persons, both men and women, to preach in a church or oratory without prejudice to the prescriptions for the homily in can. 767 §1 which reserves the homily only to priests and deacons. In case sacred ministers are unavailable, lay people, women included, can supply certain of their functions, such as the ministry of the Word, preside over liturgical prayers, confer baptisms and distribute Holy Communion in accord with can. 230 §3. Can. 830 §§1 and 2 includes the laity among the censors chosen by the local ordinary for judging books. Though this does not directly concern the context of the parish, lay theologians, i.e. women and men who teach theological disciplines in ecclesiastical institutes or seminaries with the mandate from the competent authority could be also considered as participating in the *munus docendi* (teaching office) (can. 229 §3).<sup>38</sup>

### 7.2 Governing Office

The canonical provision for the cooperation of lay people in *potestas regiminis* (power of governance) is a great innovation (can. 129 §2). Lay persons who are suited can be admitted to certain ecclesiastical offices (can. 228), can be, after the proper education, part of councils as experts and/or advisors in lieu of can. 228 §2 and may exercise the office of chancellor or vice chancellor in the diocesan curia (can. 482). Likewise, lay persons may serve as diocesan notaries (cann. 482 §3; 483 §1).<sup>39</sup> Likewise, a lay person, if in possession of at least a licentiate in canon law, can be appointed as a judge in a collegiate tribunal (can. 1421 §2 and §3) and can also serve as auditors (can. 1428 §2), as assessors as advisers (can. 1424), as *ponens* or *relator* (can. 1429), as promoter of justice (can. 1430) or defender of the bond (can. 1435). Furthermore, they can also be appointed to parish councils (can. 536 §1), to the parish finance committee (can. 537) and, due to the shortage of priests, the Ordinary can appoint lay persons as administrators of public juridical persons subject to him (can. 1279 §2). Finally, lay persons may also be designated to represent the Apostolic See as a delegate or observer at international councils, conferences or meetings (can. 363 §2).

<sup>37</sup> Lara, C., Some General Reflections on the Rights and Duties of the Christian Faithful, in: *Studia Canonica* 20 (1986) 31; Ghirlanda, G, Il laico nella Chiesa secondo il nuovo codice di diritto canonico, in: *La civiltà Cattolica* 3 (1983) 531.

<sup>38</sup> In: *Communicationes* 14 (1982) 177.

<sup>39</sup> In cases which could involve the reputation of a priest, the notary must be a priest (can. 483, §2).

### 7.3 Sanctifying Office

Can. 834 §1 indicates that the Church fulfils *munus sanctificandi* (sanctifying office) in a special way in the sacred liturgy, which is the exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. Can. 835 clearly prescribes several functions linked with *munus sanctificandi* which are shared hierarchically in the Church, particularly by bishops, priests and deacons *ad normam iuris* and Christian faithful *suo modo* (in his/her own way). As we mentioned, by virtue of baptism and common priesthood, the faithful can participate in the liturgical celebration and share in *munus sanctificandi*.

In the absence of an ordinary minister, can. 861 §2 allows any lay person with the right intention to lawfully confer baptism. In accord with can. 230 §2 a lay person can receive a temporary deputation as lector in liturgical functions and can serve as commentator and cantor. In 1992, the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts permitted female altar servers.<sup>40</sup> In a letter, dated 15 March 1994 from the Congregation of Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments advised Presidents of Episcopal Conferences that each ordinary would make a prudential judgment on the matter in his own diocese.<sup>41</sup> In accordance with cann. 230, §3; 910, §2, a lay person can be committed as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. In the absence of priests and deacons, the local ordinary can even delegate lay persons to assist at marriages if such an option is granted by the Holy See (can. 1112). Women, who are appropriately equipped with the required qualities, may with the permission of their bishop administer certain sacramentals (can. 1168). The possibility for lay persons to be officiant at marriage celebrations is another sphere where the common priesthood, bestowed at baptism, is manifested and exercised (can. 1112 §1).<sup>42</sup> Other than a priest or deacon, a properly instructed lay person, preferably an acolyte could be the ideal person to assist a priest who is ill or elderly, unable to stand, while celebrating the Eucharistic Sacrifice (can. 930 §2).

After the modification of can. 230, §1, the Church allows not only men but also women to be fully involved in the ministries of lector and acolyte, instituted in a stable manner. It is opportune to examine more in detail these particular forms of ministry as it pertains to the scope of the article.

## 8 Juridical Implications of Can. 230 §1

### 8.1 Duties of the Stably Instituted Lector

The duties of the lector are neatly elucidated in no. 5 of *Minsteria Quaedam*.

The office of the lector, and it is proper to him, is to read the word of God in the liturgical assembly. The reader is appointed for a function proper to him, that of reading the word of God in the liturgical assembly. Accordingly, he is to proclaim the readings from sacred Scripture, except for the gospel in the Mass and other sacred celebrations; he is to recite the psalm between the reading when there is no psalmist; he is to present the intentions for the general intercession in the absence of a deacon or cantor; he is to direct the

<sup>40</sup> Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of the Legislative Texts, Responsio ad propositum dubium Regarding Female Altar Servers (30. June 1992), in: AAS 86 (1994) 541f., 541.

<sup>41</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of Sacraments, Circular Letter to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences, Prot. No. 2482/93 (15. March 1994), in: Notitiae 30 (1994), 333-335.

<sup>42</sup> To know more about the evolution of this particular possibility for the lay persons to be the officiant at marriages, cf. *Vadamthala, Alex*, Offices and Ministries of the Laity in the Church, in: Canonical Studies 14 (2000) 67-69.

singing and the participation by the faithful; he is to instruct the faithful for the worthy reception of the sacraments. He may also, insofar as may be necessary, take care of preparing other faithful who are appointed on a temporary basis to read the Scriptures in liturgical celebrations. That he may more fittingly and perfectly fulfil these functions, he is to meditate assiduously on sacred Scripture. Aware of the office he has undertaken, the reader is to make every effort and employ suitable means to acquire that increasingly warm and living love and knowledge of Scripture that will make him a more perfect disciple of the Lord.<sup>43</sup>

The ministry of the lector, whether woman or man, who is instituted in a stable manner, comprises the proclamation of the word of God, animation of the liturgy and the preparation of the faithful to receive the Sacrament in a worthy manner, i.e., the catechetical formation.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the stable ministry is not confined solely to liturgical celebrations: for instance, it is part of the ministry of the lector to proclaim the word of God, to provide catechetical instruction and to prepare the faithful for the reception of the sacraments.

## 8.2 Duties of the Stably Instituted Acolyte

The motu proprio *Ministeria Quaedam* very clearly expounds the duties and obligations of the acolyte. No. 6 of *Ministeria Quaedam* states:

An acolyte is appointed to assist the deacon and to minister to the priest. It is his duty therefore to attend to the service of the altar, to assist the deacon and the priest in the liturgical celebrations, especially in the celebration of Mass. It also falls to him to distribute Holy Communion, as an extraordinary minister, whenever the ministers listed in the Code of Canon Law are not present, or are themselves unable to distribute Holy Communion because of sickness, or old age, or because they have to perform some other pastoral function or when the number of the communicants would otherwise be considerable enough to prolong the celebration of the Mass unduly. It is also permissible to entrust to him, in similar extraordinary circumstances, the task of exposing the Blessed Sacrament for the veneration of the faithful and of replacing it subsequently. He may not, however, bless the people. He may also, as the need arises, instruct those faithful who are temporarily appointed to assist the priest and the deacon by carrying the missal, the cross or the candles or by performing other similar duties in liturgical celebrations.<sup>45</sup>

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**43** *Paul VI.*, *Ministeria Quaedam* (note 15), 532, no. 5: "Lector instituitur ad munus, quod est ei proprium, legendi in coetu liturgico verbum Dei. Quapropter in Missa et in aliis sacris actionibus, lectiones (non autem Evangelium) e Sacra Scriptura proferat; deficiente psalmista, psalmum inter lectiones recitet; intentiones orationis universalis enuntiet, ubi diaconus vel cantor praesto non sint; cantum moderetur et populi fidelis participationem dirigat; fideles ad Sacramenta digne recipienda instituat. Poterit quoque — quatenus opus sit — praeparationem curare aliorum fidelium, qui ex temporanea deputatione in actionibus liturgicis Sacram Scripturam legant. Quo autem aptius atque perfectius hisce muneribus fungatur, Sacras Scripturas assidue meditetur. Lector suscepti officii conscius, omni ope contendat atque apta subsidia adhibeat, quo plenius in dies sibi acquirat suavem et vivum Sacrae Scripturae affectum 7 atque cognitionem, quibus perfectior fiat Domini discipulus."

**44** *Sabbarese, Luigi*, *I fedeli costituiti popolo di Dio*. Commento al Codice di Diritto Canonico libro II, parte I, Vatican City 2000, 70.

**45** *Paul VI.*, *Ministeria Quaedam* (note 15), 532, no. 6: "Acolythus instituitur, ut Diaconum adiuvet ac Sacerdoti ministret. Eius igitur est servitium altaris curare, Diacono atque Sacerdoti opitulari in liturgicis actionibus, praesertim in Missae celebratione; eiusdem praeterea, qua ministri extraordinarii, est Sanctam Communionem distribuere, quoties ministri, de quibus in can. 845 C.I.C., desunt vel propter adversam valetudinem, provectam aetatem vel aliud pastorale ministerium impediuntur aut quoties numerus fidelium ad Sacram Mensam accedentium tam ingens est, ut Missae celebratio nimis protrahatur. Iisdem in extraordinariis adiunctis ei mandari licebit, ut SS. Eucharistiae Sacramentum fidelium adorationi publice exponat ac postea reponat; non autem ut populo benedicat. Poterit quoque — quatenus opus sit — aliorum fidelium institutionem curare, qui ex temporanea deputatione sacerdoti vel diacono in liturgicis actionibus opitulantur, missale, crucem, cereos etc. deferendo vel alia huiusmodi officia exercendo. Quae munera dignius exsequetur, si SS. Eucharistiam flagrantiore in dies pietate participet, de ipsa enutriatur eiusque altiore cognitionem adipiscatur. Acolythus, servitio altaris peculiari modo destinatus, ea omnia, quae ad publicum cultum divinum pertinent, discat, eorumque intimum et spirituale sensum percipere studeat, ita ut cotidie se totum offerat Deo atque omnibus gravitate et reverentia exemplo sit in templo sacro, necnon Christi corpus mysticum seu populum Dei, praesertim vero debiles et infirmos, sincero amore prosequatur."

The stable ministry of acolyte comprises the service at the altar. The acolyte can be called to distribute communion like an extraordinary minister before the other lay people (can. 910 §2). In peculiar situations, the acolyte is the extraordinary minister of the Eucharist and can be called on to distribute holy communion, to expose and repose the Blessed Sacrament without benediction (can. 943) or can even be instructed to have special care for the sick.

### 8.3 Instituted Through Prescribed Liturgical Rite

The word “instituted” (non-ordained) in can. 230 §1 implies stability and indicates that those instituted are not considered ordained, which by itself belongs to clerics. Moreover, it is unlike can. 230 §2 which prescribes the provision for only temporary designation according to which one may receive the role of lector, commentator, or cantor for a limited period. Moreover, “institution” marks the difference between sacred ordination, which takes place by the imposition of hands, and ministries of lector and acolyte which are conferred in a stable manner through a prescribed liturgical rite.<sup>46</sup> Instituted lectors and acolytes acquire a stability in ministry and this stability goes beyond the exercise of their function during liturgical celebrations. Admission to these ministries must be in keeping with the guidelines of the local episcopal conference and usually involve a rite of institution.

On the rite of institution of lectors and acolytes, the *Pontificale Romanum*<sup>47</sup> says that it is done by the Bishop or by the major superior of the religious clerical institutes during the mass or in the course of the celebration of the Word of God.<sup>48</sup> The institution of ministries of lector and acolyte are performed by different rites.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, through the institution to exercise these ministries the hierarchical authorization is given,<sup>50</sup> without giving any entitlement to financial remuneration or support.

### 8.4 Requirements Prescribed by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India

It is the responsibility of the Bishops’ Conference to outline the appropriate criteria for the discernment and preparation of men and women candidates for these two ministries (can. 230 §1). The episcopal conference must prescribe the requirements for the stable ministries of lector

<sup>46</sup> Izzi, *Claudia*, La partecipazione del fedele laico al munus sanctificandi. I ministeri liturgici laicali, Rome 2001, 99.

<sup>47</sup> Pontificale Romanum, De institutione lectorum et acolythorum. De admissione inter candidatos ad Diaconatum et Presbyteratum, De sacro caelibatu amplectendo, no. 1, Vatican City 1972, 19-24.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>49</sup> The Rite for the Institution of Lector: After the proclamation of the Gospel, the bishop sits with the mitre. The deacon or the priest, who is responsible, calls the candidate by name to which each he/she responds “present” and approaches the bishop, making the sign of reverence to him and everyone takes his/her seat. The Bishop after delivering the homily invites the congregation the prayer which is followed by a brief silence and a concluding prayer by the Bishop. The candidates come forward individually to the Bishop who hands over to them the Sacred Scripture, reciting the formula of the rite. The Mass continues as usual, if the institution of the ministry of lector takes place during the Mass. Otherwise, the Bishop concludes the ceremony blessing the congregation and dismissing it in the usual way, if the institution takes place in the celebration of the liturgy of the Word; The Rite for the Institution of Acolyte: The beginning of the rite of institution of acolyte is identical to that of lector up to the prayer after the homily. Thereafter, the candidates come forward one by one to the Bishop who gives them the sacred vessels with the bread and the wine to be consecrated saying the formula of the rite after which the new acolyte, or in the event of many, some of the new acolytes, present the patens with the bread and the chalice with wine during the offering of the gifts. For further details, such as the *formulae* of the rite and others, cf. Pontificale Romanum (note 47), nos. 3-8, 19-24; For the English transl. of the rites, cf. *International Commission on English in the Liturgy*, Ceremonial of Bishops, Minnesota 1989, 218-223.

<sup>50</sup> Rinere, *Elissa*, The Term “Ministry” as Applied to the Laity in the Documents of Vatican II, Post-Conciliar Documents of the Apostolic See, and the 1983 Code of Canon Law, Washington D.C 1986, 285.

and acolyte, including significant elements such as age and talents, i.e., the criteria which define the fitness of their candidates and the theological and doctrinal preparation as canon prescribes.

Therefore, as required by *ius vigens*, the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India has sketched out the following requirements:

The requirements for the conferral of the stable ministry of lector and acolyte are:

- They should ordinarily have completed 21 years of age;
- They should have the needed human maturity, genuine piety, right intention and be acceptable to the community;
- They should have the desire to serve in the pastoral ministry and be available for service in the diocese;
- They should undergo an adequate doctrinal and liturgical formation to be determined by their Ordinary;
- The lector must be able not only to read the word of God but also to explain it, without prejudice to can. 767 §1. The acolyte must not only serve at the altar but also be a liturgical animator. Both of them must be true evangelizers and be capable of being leaders at prayer and meetings.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, besides the common requirements such as age and maturity, piety and intention, the Ordinary of each diocese has to determine and design the doctrinal and liturgical formation of those who are keenly eager to become instituted in a stable manner as lectors and acolytes.

### 8.5 Are Ministry and Office Similar?

It should be noted that a ministry differs from an “office” established *ad normam iuris* (can. 145). One who acts as a minister in this case may change from one parish or community to the next without needing an additional ceremony for installation. However, one who holds an office is much more limited in exercising his or her responsibilities. For example, one who is the pastor of one parish may not exercise the same powers and responsibilities in another parish without a proper appointment.<sup>52</sup>

## 9 Women Included Only in Non-Ordained Ministries

The inclusion of women in the ministries of lector and acolyte is to be very clearly understood. The relaxation of the reservation to men applies only to the non-ordained ministries and not to the ordained ministry, i.e., priesthood. The position of the Church regarding non-admission of women to the priesthood continues to be valid. With regard to the ordained ministries, the Holy Father Pope Francis, in his letter,<sup>53</sup> published with the *motu proprio Spiritus Domini*, to Cardinal Ladaria, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, quoted his predecessor Saint John Paul II who said that the Church “does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly

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<sup>51</sup> *Conference of Catholic Bishops of India* (LR), *Complementary Legislations to the Code of Canon Law*, New Delhi 1995, 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Barr, Diane*, Canon 230, in: *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, 298-301, 300.

<sup>53</sup> *Francis*, *Spiritus Domini* (note 6).

ordination."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the inclusion of women to non-ordained ministries, such as lector and acolyte, cannot be misunderstood as inclusion of women to ordained ministries. With regard to women's ordination, the Church has repeatedly and clearly clarified that the Church does not consider herself authorized to admit women to ordained ministries.<sup>55</sup>

## 10 Conclusion

Through the modification of the can. 230 §1, the Holy Father Pope Francis categorically recognizes and codifies the service already carried out by many women across the world. Although these ministries carried out by women have been common practice for years in many countries, this change in Canon Law means that Bishops will no longer have the power to prevent women within their diocese from taking on the said roles. Albeit not extremely radical, it is highly significant that the Church is recognising accepted practices of Catholics around the world and making doctrinal steps to be more inclusive. The relaxation of the reservation of the above-mentioned ministries only to men could help to better manifest the common baptismal dignity of the members of the people of God, particularly that of women.

Moreover, the decision of the Church to offer both men and women the noble opportunity to enter the stable ministries of lector and acolyte, through a liturgical act of institution, will certainly augment the recognition of their precious and priceless contribution to the life and mission of the Church. The willingness to institute women for these ministries through prescribed liturgical rite renders more effective in the Church their noble participation in the Church's mission of evangelization. The non-sacramental character of the liturgical rite which institutes women is affirmed, and it is to be strictly and clearly understood that these ministries are not to be regarded as steps towards women ordination.

Bishops and the parish priests are to ensure that all the ministers, both men and women, play their role with due diligence and preparation. The Holy Father Pope Francis has taken audacious steps in promoting and empowering women in the Church and there are several initiatives taken by him to nominate women in various offices in Roman Curia. Although the canon does not allow lay persons to act solely on their own initiative, bishops can promote women and men to carry out the ministries of lector and acolyte for the edification of the Church and to the proclamation of the Gospel. Hopefully, we will see more women involved in the liturgy of the holy Mass. It is

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<sup>54</sup> *John Paul II.*, Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* (22 May 1994), in: AAS 86 (1994) 545-548; English transl. in: *Origins* 24 (1994-1995) 49-52: "Quae quidem Declaratio huius doctrinae rationes fundamentales, a Paulo VI propositas, repetit et explicat, atque concludit Ecclesiam auctoritatem sibi non agnoscere admittendi mulieres ad sacerdotalem ordinationem;" Cf. *Congregation for Doctrine of Faith*, Declaration Regarding the Question of Admission of Women to Ministerial Priesthood (15 October 1976), in: AAS 69 (1977) 98-116; *Paul VI*, Rescriptum ad litteras Suae Gratiae Rev.mi Doctoris F.D. Googan, Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis, De sacerdotali mulierum ministerio (30 November 1975), in: AAS 68 (1976) 599-600: "Ipsa retinet non esse admittendam ordinationem mulierum ad sacerdotium ob rationes fundamentales. Quae rationes complectuntur: exemplum Christi in Sacra Scriptura memoratum, qui tantummodo inter viros elegit suos Apostolos; constantem Ecclesiae usum, quae Christum imitata est in solis viris eligendis; eiusque vivum magisterium, quod congruenter statuit mulierum exclusionem a sacerdotio convenire cum consilio Dei pro sua Ecclesia." English transl. "She holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood for very fundamental reasons. These reasons include: the example recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among men; the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with the God's plan for his Church."

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

incumbent upon the pastors to leave no stone unturned in order to realize the spirit of the modification of can. 230 §1 and *mens legislatoris*.