



Let's talk about Women in the church

Some contemporary
thoughts

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”

Revelation 2:29

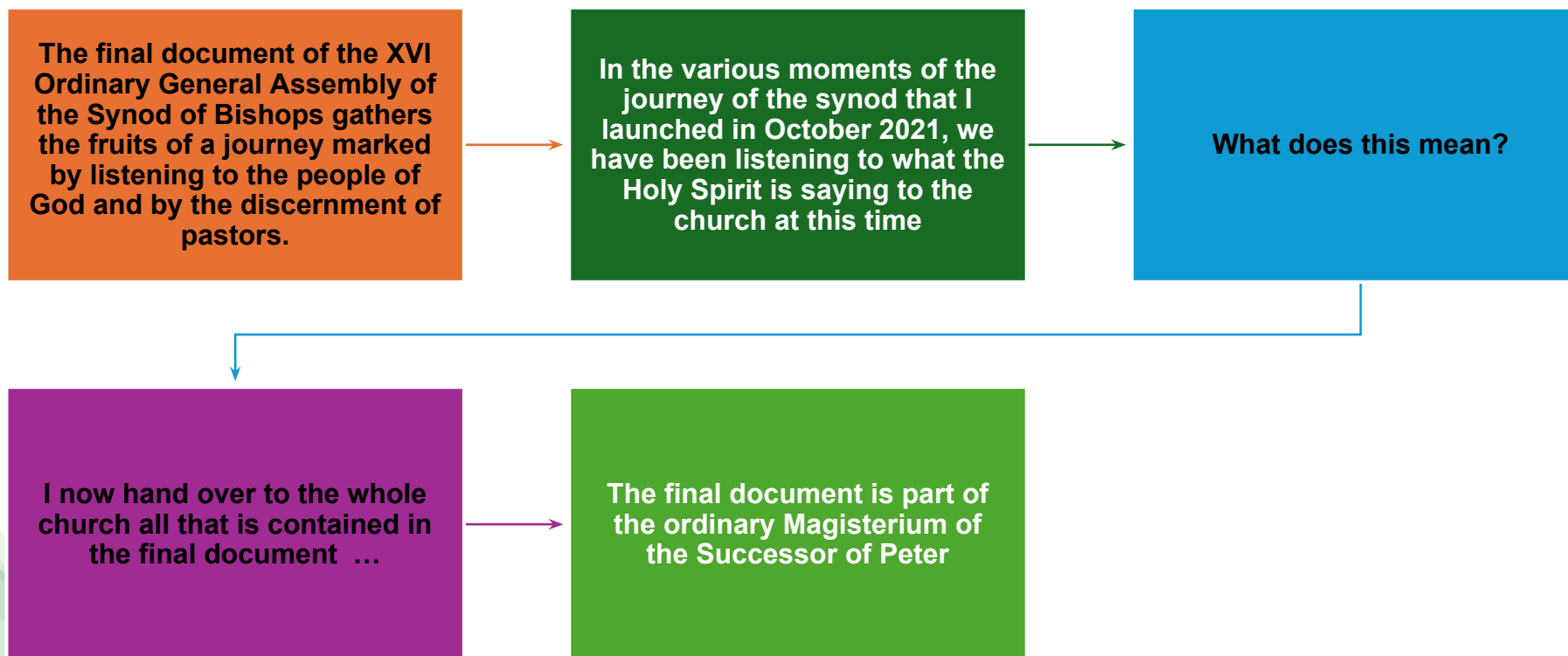
”but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!”

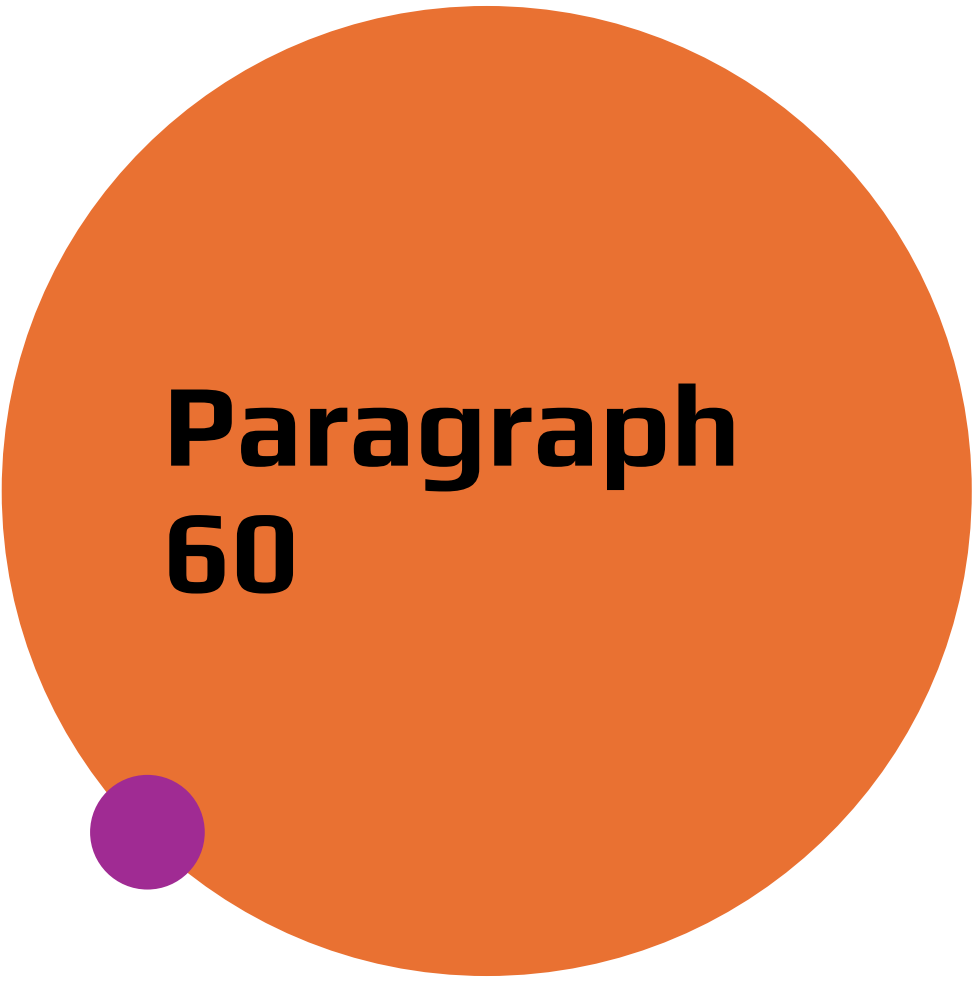
Acts 5: 39

The Synod: A gift to the church from Pope Francis



A new way of being/ doing church!





Paragraph 60

- **“Women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation and place in all the various areas of the Church’s life. This is to the detriment of serving the Church’s shared mission”**





As women in the church

- What are you/ we hearing? observing? witnessing?
- Where do we find joy/ consolation?
- What do we find frustrating?
- Where is your sense of calling?
- Where is your voice/ our voice?
- How can you and others flourish?

Three recent reports of significance

**For a Synodal Church,
Communion,
participation and
Mission Section 60**

**The Petrocchi
Commission/
report**

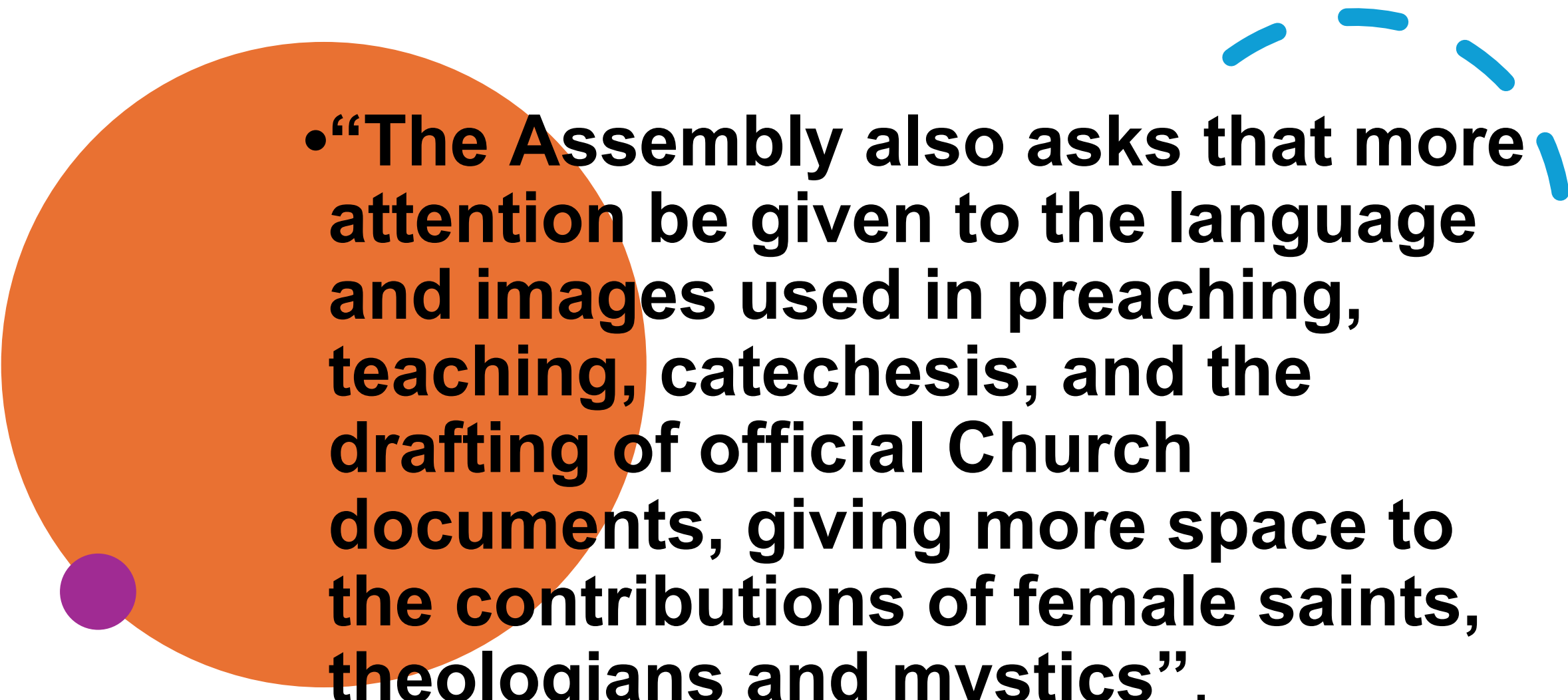
**On women's
participation in the life
and leadership of the
Church. The
final report of Study
Group 5**

For a Synodal Church, Communion, participation and Mission

- **“Women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation and place in all the various areas of the Church’s life.**
- **Women make up the majority of church goers and are often the first witnesses to the faith in families.**
- **Women contribute to theological research and are present in positions of responsibility in Church institutions, in diocesan curia and the Roman Curia. There are women who hold positions of authority and are leaders of their communities”.** (Section 60, pg. 41)

- **“Additionally, the question of women’s access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue. The Assembly also asks that more attention be given to the language and images used in preaching, teaching, catechesis, and the drafting of official Church documents, giving more space to the contributions of female saints, theologians and mystics”.**

(For a Synodal Church, Communion, participation and Mission, Section 60, pg 41)

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(For a Synodal Church, Communion, participation and Mission, Section 60, pg 41)



The Petrocchi Commission Report

- Key points
- The commission chaired by Cardinal Giuseppe Petrocchi, Archbishop emeritus of L'Aquila, Italy included a seven-page letter/report sent to Pope Leo XIV on 18 September, and which is now being made public at the Pope's request.
- "It rules out admitting women to the diaconate understood as a degree of the sacrament of Holy Orders but says that it is not currently possible 'to formulate a definitive judgment, as in the case of priestly ordination.' "

7 in favour : 1 against

Vatican News,. 2025.

www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-12/petrocchi-commission-female-diaconate-no-judgment-not-definitive.html

Votes

“The masculinity of Christ, and therefore the masculinity of those who receive Holy Orders, is not accidental but is an integral part of sacramental identity, preserving the divine order of salvation in Christ. To alter this reality would not be a simple adjustment of ministry but a rupture of the nuptial meaning of salvation.”

5 in favour: 5 against

Vatican News,. 2025.

www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-12/petrocchi-commission-female-diaconate-no-judgment-not-definitive.html

Petrocchi,. G. C. 2025. Summary of the Study Commission on the Diaconate of Women

Votes

- **“women’s access to ministries instituted for the service of the community might be expanded (...) thus ensuring adequate ecclesial recognition of the diakonia of the baptized, particularly of women. Such recognition will be a prophetic sign especially where women still suffer situations of gender discrimination”.**

9 in favour :1 against

Vatican News,. 2025.

www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-12/petrocchi-commission-female-diaconate-no-judgment-not-definitive.html

Petrocchi,. G. C. 2025. Summary of the Study Commission on the Diaconate of Women

Final comments

- **“For this reason, according to the Cardinal, it is essential, for continued study, to undertake “a rigorous and wide-ranging critical examination focused on the diaconate in itself—that is, on its sacramental identity and its ecclesial mission—clarifying certain structural and pastoral aspects that are currently not fully defined.” Indeed, there are entire continents in which the diaconal ministry is “almost non existent” and others where it is active with functions often “coinciding with roles proper to lay ministries or to altar servers in the liturgy.”**

Vatican News,. 2025.

[www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-12/petrocchi-commission-female-diaconate-](https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-12/petrocchi-commission-female-diaconate-no-judgment-not-definitive.html)

[no-judgment-not-definitive.html](https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-12/petrocchi-commission-female-diaconate-no-judgment-not-definitive.html)

Petrocchi,. G. C. 2025. Summary of the Study Commission on the Diaconate of Women



On women's participation in the life and leadership of the Church. The Final report of Study Group 5

- **Written in three parts**
- **Part 1: History of Study group 5 and approaches/ methodology used in writing the final report.**
- **Part 2: A detailed Synthesis of the themes emerging from the synodal deepening**

Synod of Bishops,. 2026. On women's participation in the life and leadership of the church. Executive Summary of the Final Report of Study Group 5.

www.synod.va/en/the-synodal-process/phase-3-the-implementation/the-study-groups/final-reports/group-5.html

Part 3: Appendix X

Women in the Old and New Testaments

Significant Women in the History of the Church

Current Testimonies of Women Participating in the Leadership of the Church

The Marian Principle and the Petrine Principle

Ecclesial *Postestas*

The Contribution of Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV on the Role of Women in the Life and Leadership of the Church

Honoring a promise

“Yet all this, like the clear midday light that sharpens every shadow, also serves to make even more evident how much remains to be done for the promotion of the vocation of women in the Church”. (Para 3)

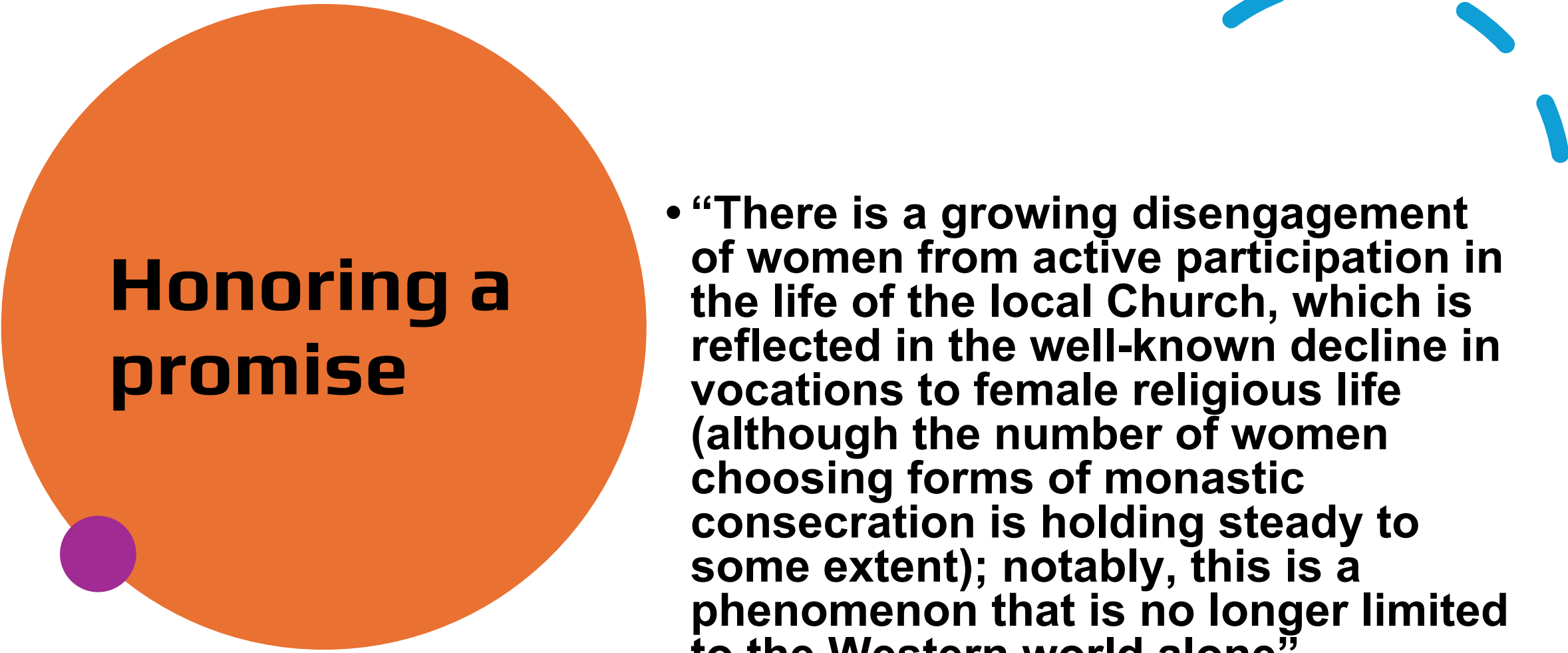
“And this realization has generated a specific discomfort among many women concerning their participation in the life of the communities to which they belong, particularly when ecclesial realities are compared with the civil societies of many of the countries in which they live”.

(Para 3)

Honoring a promise

“The most evident is the increasing number of women—both younger and older—who simply no longer identify themselves as being Catholic”.

(Para 3)



Honoring a promise

- **“There is a growing disengagement of women from active participation in the life of the local Church, which is reflected in the well-known decline in vocations to female religious life (although the number of women choosing forms of monastic consecration is holding steady to some extent); notably, this is a phenomenon that is no longer limited to the Western world alone”.**
- **(Para 3)**

Honoring a promise

- “Another aspect of this discomfort is the ever-stronger call, on the part of many women who are very actively engaged in pastoral activity or who are experts in theology and canon law, to review the currently existing forms of ecclesial leadership to make them more accessible to women. One thinks of the question of access to the sacrament of Holy Orders, the possibility of establishing new ministries with specific characteristics for the service of the People of God, giving the homily during community celebrations, and finally, the delicate question concerning the specific nature of entrusting the governance of a community or of particular diocesan offices to suitably qualified women”.

(Para 3)

Cardinal Hollerich



- **“Big steps are being taken regarding role of women in the church”**
- **Study group 5 report supports greater inclusion for women in the church**
- **“I cannot imagine, in the long term, how a Church can survive, if half of the People of God suffer because they have no access to ordained ministry.”**
- **Appointment of women to senior positions important**
- **Women involved in formation**



**“Makes me
sad as a
pastor”**

Finally, reflecting on pastoral concerns expressed by younger generations, he said, “I feel that, not just women who have studied theology, but when I am with young people, I can feel that many of the girls of our youth are sad because they feel that they are not completely recognised by the Church. “

“And that,” he concluded, “makes me sad as a pastor.”

Catholic women in leadership

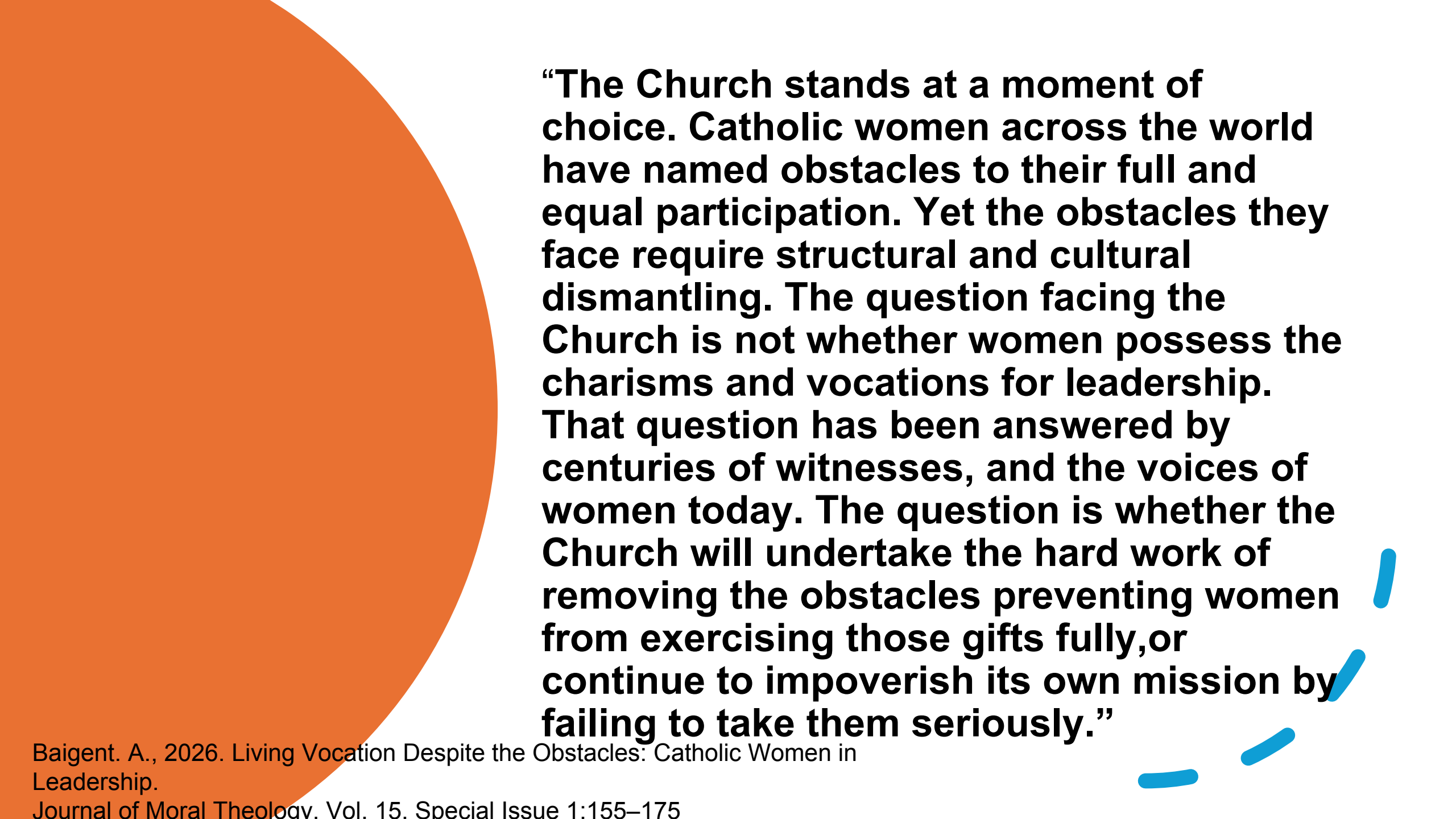
“Among the clearest voices to arise from the Synod process are those of Catholic women. The national syntheses and the Working Document of the Continental Stage captured experiences of inequities of power, mistreatment (particularly of women religious) and the sidelining of women’s voices within Church structures, as well as the social realities of violence and impoverishment”

Baigent. A., 2026. Living Vocation Despite the Obstacles: Catholic Women in Leadership.

Journal of Moral Theology, Vol. 15, Special Issue 1:155–175



- **Significant steps (albeit small)**
- **Lived experience of women at the synod, experts and voting members is obstacle after obstacle**
- **Women's participation in the structure of the church is not only a western or middleclass concern**
- **Those most committed to the synod process were women**
- **Obstacles experienced by senior women**
- **Re imagining vocation for women**
- **Lack of formation opportunities for women**
- **Lack of role models/ mentors**
- **A paradox at the heart of Catholic women's vocations**



“The Church stands at a moment of choice. Catholic women across the world have named obstacles to their full and equal participation. Yet the obstacles they face require structural and cultural dismantling. The question facing the Church is not whether women possess the charisms and vocations for leadership. That question has been answered by centuries of witnesses, and the voices of women today. The question is whether the Church will undertake the hard work of removing the obstacles preventing women from exercising those gifts fully, or continue to impoverish its own mission by failing to take them seriously.”

Baigent. A., 2026. Living Vocation Despite the Obstacles: Catholic Women in Leadership.

Journal of Moral Theology, Vol. 15, Special Issue 1:155–175

The minefield of synodality: does "hearing" mean "listening"?

Thomas O'Loughlin
2021

- **There is a basic fact of human communication at issue here: if you enter a process of dialogue, and then do not accept the conclusion arrived at within the debate, then you lose that dialogue partner.**
- **Listening is not the same as hearing. Listening involves openness to change.**





Taking a woman's vocation seriously

**Promoting women to positions of leadership
within the church,**

**“cannot satisfy a yearning that is fundamentally
sacramental”**

(Dodd, L., 2026. Ought I explain? Leave it a parting note? I did neither: I switched off the lights and left. The Tablet. 21st March. Pg5)

Women in Leadership

- **Recent examples of women promoted to senior leadership positions in the church hierarchy, the Roman Curia and church leadership.**
- **Northampton Diocese female CEO and female Head of Finance.**
- **Bishops' Conference of Scotland appointed its first female General Secretary in 2025.**
- **Pope Leo appointed Maria Montserrat Alvarado, current President and Chief Operating Officer of EWTN News, as Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, effective from 1 November 2026.**

Pope Francis

Synod of Bishops, 2024. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission Final Document.

https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-

Not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium.

Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it.

Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to the traditions and local needs.

This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth (Jn 16:13).

(Synod of Bishops, 2024: 7)

Overall thoughts

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Language of equal dignity

Importance of Baptism

Leadership model

Innovation around new ministries ...
including Lector and Acolyte

Handing over decision making to
local leaders, bishops, communities



Mary Magdalene

“Scripture attests to the prominent role of many women in the history of salvation. One woman, Mary Magdalene, was entrusted with the first proclamation of the Resurrection”.



The mystic of the peripheries by Madeleine Delbrêl

