

## **Address to FutureChurch upon receiving the Fr. Trivison Award**

I would like to thank you for the honour you have chosen to bestow upon me this evening. I understand that it is because of my initial intervention at last October's general assembly of the Synod of Bishops. In that intervention, as you point out, I suggested that we study the possibility of ordaining women to the permanent diaconate in the Church. This is an issue that you have been promoting for some time, and to have a bishop speak about it in such a venue was an encouragement for you. I recognize in this award an expression of thanks for that encouragement. Of course, you have been further encouraged, as I was, by Pope Francis's response to another group's intervention on the same issue. I refer of course to the request by the International Union of Superiors General and voiced by their president, Sister Carmen Sammut, that the question be studied in the Church. Pope Francis agreed, and has now set up a commission to undertake that study. So your award should have gone to Sister Carmen or to Pope Francis himself. I guess you chose me because I'm just across the border. Be that as it may, I am honoured and I thank you for this.

I would like to make two points. The first is about the broader issues I raised in my intervention at the Synod. People have asked me why I decided to dedicate my three minutes to the question of women deacons when the Synod was about the family. In fact, my intervention was not dedicated to this issue.

In the months preceding the Synod, I changed my mind quite a few times before deciding which issue to address. I had whittled my choices down to three : the impact of social media on family life, the scourge of pornography on the web and its devastating consequences for healthy, holy sexuality, and the ongoing victimization of so many women within their marriages. The balanced was tipped to the latter when I read a report from the World Health Organization revealing that, still today, close to one third of all women will be subjected to violence at the hands of their spouse during their married life. This statistic is astounding and unacceptable. I felt I needed to bring this to the attention of my brother Bishops and invite them to address this pressing issue in our deliberations. This was the central topic of my intervention.

However, I felt that we could not really speak with credibility on this issue if we were not willing within our own Church structures to recognize and celebrate the inherent dignity of all women. So I suggested we seek ways to

listen to the voices of women in our reflections on scripture, in our governance structures and, finally, by studying the possibility of ordaining women to the permanent diaconate.

I believe we can do this without touching on the doctrinal issue of access to the priesthood, which in my opinion is another question. The media pounced on the last sentence of my three-minute intervention and basically ignored the rest. And I have to admit I feel some sadness because of this.

So this evening, as I accept your award, I would ask you to turn your minds and hearts with me to all those women who do not worry so much about whether they can be deacons as about whether they can avoid another argument with their husband, another fight and another beating. I echo Pope Francis's call that we not be turned in so much on our own inner issues as a Church that we forget the more burning problems with which so many of our sisters and brothers are struggling. I would thank you for this.

The second point I'd like to make is this. A number of people have asked me in the past few days if I know who Future Church is. They have pointed to a number of positions you have taken or initiatives you have undertaken that run counter to the Church's teaching, particularly on the issue of the access of women to the priesthood. I honestly replied that I don't know your organization very well, and that I would not agree with everything they told me you are about.

Nevertheless, like Pope Francis, I believe in building bridges. I believe in dialogue. I might not agree with everything you espouse, and you might not agree with everything I do, yet it is important that in the Church we never stop reaching out to each other and working together for the greater good whenever we can. We are bound by the same faith in Jesus-Christ as the Incarnate Son of God, by a common desire to see his Gospel spread to all the world, and by a shared love for the Church, his Body and Bride. So it is in that spirit of bridge-building and dialogue that I humbly accept your award, as a token of my respect for each one of you, and as a common pledge all of us will continue to speak to one another, pray with one another and walk with one another on the pilgrimage of life. Again, I thank you.