

# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEACONS

## New Wine into New Wineskins – A Way Forward for the Order of Deacons

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**Reference:** Anthony Gooley, *Deacons Today* (Coventry Press, Australia, 2019)

The contention that Anthony Gooley outlines in the introduction of his book “*Deacons Today*” is “*that the permanent ministry of deacon as envisaged by the Second Vatican Council is a new wine. I believe that we are trying to pour this new wine into old wineskins.*” Post Vatican II there was no real consideration or idea as to how the Diaconate was going to be implemented throughout the Church.

The USA embraced the diaconate with much gusto although formation was a hit and miss affair from the outset. Yet today, more than 48% of deacons in the world are attributed to the Church in North America. It was not all smooth sailing for the diaconate with many critical that the deacon function was more liturgical in nature than pastoral.

The pecking order in the Church lists the Order of Deacon under that of Order of Bishop and Order of Priest. This is somewhat of a misnomer as the corresponding Order does not marry up to the retrospective Congregations. Rather it is Congregation of Bishops and Congregation of Clergy (representing both priest/deacon). The working staff at Congregation of Clergy are priest only with no deacons allocated to a staff function. So how does it effectively support and manage deacons throughout the world?

Fifty-five years on from Vatican II is it now time for us to envisage the concept of *New Wine into New Wineskins*. What of the possibility of a new and separate Congregation of Deacon rather than the current inclusion and grouping with Priest in the Congregation of Clergy? The Congregation of Clergy could literally be broken-up into Congregation of Priest and Congregation of Deacon? The current set-up of Congregation of Clergy in representing Priest and Deacon is draconian in nature, a hangover from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Prefect/Secretary of Congregation of Clergy would argue that there is no (canonical) reasons to create a new Congregation. It could be argued though that there is. The status quo of Priest and Deacon is inseparably different and diverse in nature. The priest is celibate not married, whilst the permanent deacon is involved in an intimate marriage relationship with spouse and children.

The deacon’s rightful place in the Church hierarchy should not be dubbed with a xenophobic exclusion but empowered (through the Spirit) as their own Congregation with a Prefect (Cardinal) and Secretary (Archbishop). Is a new Congregation irrational? NO. While priest numbers are falling in the world, deacon numbers are steadily increasing. The Congregation of Clergy does not suit the ever-increasing needs and management from Rome for deacons worldwide.

A new and separate congregation would help facilitate an eventual acceptance of women deacons into the Church, with an overriding support, care and management into Permanent Diaconate status. This is possibly the ongoing future of *New Wine* that needs to be poured *into New Wineskins*.

For years there has been talk about whether there should be married priest as well as over the last two years women deacons. In all honesty, there is more of a chance of women deacons than married priest being approved by Rome. A new Congregation of Deacon would enable it to finally come to fruition alongside brother deacons.

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The only way *New Wineskins* will ever have a chance of fruition is through the concerted efforts of Archdiocese/Diocese bishops in countries worldwide. The *New Wine* (deacons) will forever stagnant and regress in the Congregation of Clergy dominated by the hierarchical Order of Priest. *New Wineskins* will only be brought about if it has the backing of ALL the bishops at a National level, not just in Australia but extending to North America, Canada, UK, Europe and South America. Ideally, North America would be paramount and the driving force to galvanize bishops worldwide to rally to the cause of the Deacons.

Deacons need to step outside the shadow of the Congregation of Clergy. Whether bishops see this as pertinent or necessary, whether they will rally to the cause of the deacons, remains to be seen. All or most bishops that belong to the Congregation of Bishop need to be on board to pressure the Roman Curia on the validity of establishing a new Congregation solely for deacons. A half-hearted effort will see deacons 'Rome-locked' in the Congregation of Clergy. The Order of Deacon deserves more than just being joined to the hip of their brother priest in the Congregation of Clergy. So, will this cause of *New Wine into New Wineskins* reach the upper echelons of Rome through the combined partisanship of the bishops worldwide or go no further than just being another book written on the Diaconate?

In closing, in *Deacons Today* Anthony Gooley has written what is probably the most comprehensive book ever written on the diaconate, well researched, and an edifying read that provides the reader with a profound understanding of the diaconate. *Deacons Today* offers a clarion call for deacons and bishops alike to view the way forward of *New Wine into New Wineskins*.