

WHY CAN'T WOMEN BE PRIESTS?

PART 1

St. Peter Catholic Church † Faith Fact † September 2016

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ISSUE: Why doesn't the Church allow women to be priests? I know plenty of women who could give a more moving homily and be more understanding in the confessional.

DISCUSSION: There aren't many issues within apologetics that require as much sensitivity as this one. In a culture where opening the door for a woman can be seen as an act of misogyny, it's no surprise that male-only ordination strikes some as sexist on the Church's behalf.

It can't be denied that there are women who could be more moving orators than some priests and provide more consolation within the confessional. But the debate over ordination is not over who could be a better priest but over who could be a priest at all.

So, if a woman's abilities are not in question, what's keeping the Church from ordaining her? For one, it should be noted that Jesus did not ordain any women. He selected all of his apostles, and none were women.

Some say that he was bound by the cultural norms of his era to suppress the roles of women, but no one has been able to prove that this was his motive. Furthermore, this accuses Jesus of sexism and it paints an inaccurate portrait of Christ, who had no qualms about shattering the cultural norms regarding interaction with women (Matt. 9:20; Luke 7:37; John 4:27). The idea of priestesses was not unknown to him, since it was a common practice in religions of his time and culture, though not Judaism. (If Jesus had wanted women as priestesses, he would have had the ideal candidate in Mary. Here was a woman who could have spoken the words of consecration literally: "This is my body. This is my blood.")

There were other roles that Christ had in mind for women. For example, they played a key role in the spread of the Gospel, being the first to spread the news of the risen Christ. They were also allowed to pray and prophecy in church (1 Cor. 11:1-16), but they were not to assume the function of teaching in the Christian assembly (1 Cor. 14:34-38; 1 Tim. 2:1-14), which was restricted to the clergy.

Two thousand years later, no one—including the pope—has the authority to change the designs of the Church that Christ instituted. Specifically, the Church is unable to change the substance of a sacrament. For example, a person cannot be baptized in wine, nor may a substance other than bread be used for the consecration at Mass. If invalid matter is used, then the sacrament does not take place. Likewise, since the priest acts in the person of Christ, the Church has no authority to confer the sacrament on those who are unable to represent the male Jesus Christ.

EXCERPT FROM: Jason Evert. "Why Can't Women Be Priests?" *This Rock* (San Diego: Catholic Answers Inc., January 2002). <http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/apologetics/why-can-t-women-be-priests.html>.