

WHY CAN'T WOMEN BE PRIESTS?

PART 2

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Didn't Paul say that there is neither Jew nor Greek, servant nor free, male nor female, since we are all in Christ? So why should our gender matter to God? We should all have equal rights.

Whenever a verse is paraphrased to defend a particular position, take the time to find that passage and read it in context. When Paul wrote about there being neither male nor female in Christ (Gal. 3:28), he is discussing our justification through faith, not our roles in the Church. Even in 1 Corinthians 12, when Paul speaks about there being Jews, Greeks, slaves, and free being baptized into the one body of Christ, he mentions that within this one body, there are different parts:

"There are varieties of service, but the same Lord . . . All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. . . . If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. . . . If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles . . . Are all apostles?" (1 Cor. 12:5-29).

So, while Paul acknowledges the universality of God's plan for salvation, he's clear that there are different roles within the body of Christ. Men and woman are equal in the eyes of God, but this equality is not synonymous with sameness. They play different roles within the Church, as there are different instruments within an orchestra. Just as the instruments are arranged for a symphony, God has "arranged the organs of the body" (1 Cor. 12:18), and we are not to reconstruct the design that he has established.

Since God is the one who has appointed the different roles within the Church, no one can claim a right to any position within the body of Christ. This is especially the case with sacraments. No one—male or female—has a "right" to be a priest. It is not like a governmental office that anyone can run for. It is a sacrament, and no one has a title to grace. It is an unmerited gift from Christ.

This may strike some as unfair, but realize that God has given women other gifts that he has not given to men. For example, women bring the body of Christ (souls) into the world one birth at a time. Men do not have this privilege. Priests bring the body of Christ (Eucharist) into the world one Mass at a time—a gift reserved to them, acting in the person of Christ.

Didn't the early Christians ordain women?

If you walk into any secular (and perhaps even Catholic) bookstore, you'll inevitably run across any number of books that claim to have unearthed ancient evidence in favor of the Catholic Church ordaining women to the priesthood. The average Catholic might not know where to

begin when refuting these texts, but a review of what the Church Fathers said on the matter is a good place to start.

Some early Christian women belonged to orders of virgins, widows, and deaconesses, which are all forerunners of modern nuns. However, none of these orders were ordained to the priesthood. Since there were sects in the first centuries, especially within Gnosticism, that allowed women to become priestesses, the Church Fathers took the question under consideration but rejected the idea as incompatible with the faith.

But isn't it possible that the Church could come around on this issue?

Certain aspects of the sacraments may change over time, such as the language of the liturgy or the manner in which penance is received. However, male-only ordination is something that has never changed, nor can it ever be changed. The Church's attitude may appear archaic, but it is one of fidelity to a universal tradition in both the East and the West, extending throughout the history of the Church.

In 1994, Pope John Paul II declared, "Although the teaching that priestly ordination is to be reserved to men alone has been preserved by the constant and universal Tradition of the Church and firmly taught by the Magisterium in its more recent documents, at the present time in some places it is nonetheless considered still open to debate, or the Church's judgment that women are not to be admitted to ordination is considered to have a merely disciplinary force. Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Luke 22:32), I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful" (*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* 4).

One year after this was written, the Church ruled that this teaching "requires definitive assent, since, founded on the written Word of God, and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the Tradition of the Church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium (cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* 25:2)."

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