

# Women's Ordination

by Sebastian R. Fama

The Church's position on the ordination of women is not the product of prejudice or male chauvinism. Furthermore, the Catholic Church is not a human institution and as such its teachings are not subject to the whims of any human being, male or female. While her members are all capable of sinning, the Church, as an institution, can only teach what her founder wills her to teach. And the simple fact is that God chose men to be priests. This in no way implies that men are superior to women. It is merely a case of being chosen for different roles.

Are men inferior to women because they cannot bear children? Of course not. On occasion, God, who is perfectly just, determines that men and women are to have different roles. That is not sexism, that's diversity. Hence the Church rejects the radical feminist notion that women have no worth unless they are exactly like men.

It is not a question of ability. Women are the leaders of religious orders, television networks, retreat houses, schools, and charities. The Church recognizes that women are just as talented and capable as men. But the primary function of a priest is to be a priest – to offer sacrifice to God. Priests in the Old and New Testaments were exclusively male. Jesus chose twelve males to be His apostles and ultimately, they became His first priests (Luke 22:7-23). And they likewise chose male priests. If Jesus wanted women to be priests, He would have chosen some thus setting the precedent.

Some counter that Jesus was limited by cultural norms. But is that even possible? He did several things that went against the customs of His day. For instance, He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42). At that time Jewish men did not speak with women in public. And yet Jesus did. Jesus also allowed "a sinful woman" to wash his feet in the house of a Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). The Pharisees saw this as nothing short of scandalous. Of course, none of this bothered Jesus because Jesus always did the right thing. What others thought was never a consideration. If He did not hold back when confronted by the Pharisees, why would anyone think He would hold back when instructing His Apostles? Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth (John 16:13). Did the Holy Spirit forget to tell them about women priests?

In his "Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone" (*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*), Pope John Paul II noted the following: "The fact that **the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, received neither the mission proper to the Apostles nor the ministerial priesthood** clearly shows that the non-admission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe (no. 3).

The Church does not choose priests; rather, God calls them. The Church merely ratifies or authenticates a vocation. Only those who are called to the priesthood should be priests. This would exclude not only women but most men as well. Some women have said they feel called to the priesthood. But if they truly were, we would have women priests. The idea that a group of men can stop God from accomplishing His will in someone's life is ludicrous. **The only one who can prevent God's will from being accomplished in your life is you.**

Was Moses able to free the Israelites from Egypt because Pharaoh feared him? No – he was able to do it because God called him, and he said yes. At first, he refused, claiming that he was ill suited. He worried about his credibility with the people and his lack of eloquence as a speaker. But God told Moses that He would be with him (Exodus Chapters 3-4). **God called Moses for a purpose, Moses said yes and then God made it happen.** If God calls a woman to the priesthood and she says yes, God will make it happen. The fact that we have not had any women priests in the last two thousand years means one of two things. **Either God has not called any women to the priesthood or He did and they all said no.**

Some recall that there were deaconesses in the Early Church. They reason that if women were allowed to be members of the clergy at that time they should also be allowed now. But the early deaconesses were not members of the clergy. As Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis wrote: "It is true that in the Church there is an order of

deaconesses, but not for being priestess, nor for any kind of work of administration, but for the sake of the dignity of the female sex, either at the time of Baptism, or of examining the sick or suffering, so that the naked body of a female may not be seen by men administrating sacred rites, but by the deaconess" (*Panarion* 79:3 [A.D. 376]).

If God were calling women to the priesthood, would it not be reasonable to expect that He would have called some of the women who were closest to Him? And yet when we examine the writings of women like St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton we do not find any claims of being called to the priesthood. We only find loyalty to God and His Church.

Proponents of women's ordination will often try to counter this point by referring to the writings of St. Therese of Lisieux. Here was a woman of great sanctity, they claim, who felt called to the priesthood. But is that really the case? The claim stems from a passage in her autobiography "*The Story of a Soul*." She writes:

I feel as if I were called to be a fighter, a priest, an apostle, a doctor, a martyr; as if I could never satisfy the needs of my nature without **performing, for Your sake, every kind of heroic action at once**. I feel as if I'd got the courage to be a Crusader, a Pontifical Zouave, dying on the battlefield in defense of the Church. And at the same time, I want to be a priest; how lovingly I would carry You in my hands when you came down from heaven at my call; how lovingly I'd bestow You on men's souls! And yet, with all this desire to be a priest, I've nothing but admiration and envy for the humility of St. Francis; I would willingly imitate him in refusing the honor of the priesthood.

As has been pointed out by others, some of these desires are contradictory. St. Therese herself refers to them a few lines later as "fond imaginations" or as we might say, fantasies. Musings that obviously were not meant to be taken literally. In the same book she also said:

I would like to travel all over the world, making your name known and planting your cross on heathen soil; only I should not be content with one particular mission, I would want to be preaching the gospel on all five continents and in the most distant islands, all at once. And even then, it would not do, carrying on my mission for a limited number of years; I should want to have been a missionary ever since the creation, and go on being a missionary till the world came to an end.

Do you suppose she also felt called by God to be a missionary on every continent simultaneously from the beginning of creation until the end of time? She was simply telling her Lord that she wished she could do everything that could ever be done to bring the world to Him. This is the language of love not theology. Later on, she says:

Love, in fact, is the vocation which includes all others; it is a universe of its own, comprising all time and space — it's eternal. Beside myself with joy, I cried out 'Jesus, my Love! **I've found my vocation, and my vocation is love! I had discovered where it is that I belong in the Church, the place God has appointed for me.** To be nothing else than love, deep down in the heart of Mother Church; that is to be everything at once — my dream was not a dream after all.

That hardly sounds like a woman who felt cheated out of her "true vocation." Here she is acknowledging that she was what she was supposed to be. She was living the life she was called to live.

The most vocal of those who disagree with the Church on this issue also disagree with the Church on many other issues. And of course, this raises the question; why would they want to be part of a religion that they think is false? The obvious answer is that they do not. Their purpose is to attack and destroy.

So that there would be no ambiguity on this issue, Pope John Paul II said the following in his encyclical *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*: "**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**" (no. 4). In other words, the matter is closed.