



Women and the Priesthood

A symposium

Jane Varner Malhotra, Mary E. Hunt, Teresa Delgado, Alice McDermott

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How have you seen women's contributions curtailed or marginalized in the Church? Do your experiences align with those described by the symposium authors?

2. How have you dealt with any disagreements you have with the Church, or with the sense that the Church hasn't lived up to its ideals? Do you ever feel, as McDermott does, that your participation is a kind of "collusion"? In response, have you chosen to stay, to leave, or to be less involved?

3. Do you agree with Malhotra that we could "more fully express" the sacraments if women could also administer them? What would this mean? Does that suggest that they aren't fully expressed now?

4. Hunt writes that the Church "has rendered itself all but irrelevant" by excluding women from the priesthood. In what way does "relevance" matter? And what can we learn from extra-institutional organizations?

5. Do you agree with Delgado that "women's spirituality resides in prayer, acts of charity, and movements for justice"? Is there such a thing as women's spirituality, and, if so, how should we try to define it?

6. Several authors reference certain kinds of roles carved out for women by men. Malhotra speaks of "motherly duties" and polishing the chalices, Hunt references Pope Francis's insistence that women have a "much more important role than priesthood," and McDermott recalls a monsignor's joke about how the mother's group really has all the power. Do these roles and the way we talk about them deflect from a real problem?

7. What arguments exist for only allowing men to be ordained to the priesthood? Do any have merit? Do you agree with McDermott that the all-male clergy is an "outward sign of inner corruption" in the Church?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Mary Kate Holman, "Priesthood, Reimagined," May 2021: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/priesthood-reimagined>

Susan Bigelow Reynolds, "Are We Protagonists Yet?," December 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/women-church-synod-francis-catholic>

Frank Brennan, "A Good Start for the Synod..." November 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/good-start-synod>