



2007

# Is the Roman Catholic Prohibition of Female Priests Sexist?: How Catholic College Students Think about Women's Ordination and Sexism

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## Recommended Citation

Maher, M.J., Sever, L.M., & Pichler, S. (2007). Is the Roman Catholic prohibition of female priests sexist?: How Catholic college students think about women's ordination and sexism. *Journal of Religion and Society*, 9, (<http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/toc/2007.html>).

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## Is the Roman Catholic Prohibition of Female Priests Sexist?

### How Catholic College Students Think about Women's Ordination and Sexism

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#### Abstract

In April 2003, the researchers conducted a survey of undergraduate students living in residence halls at Loyola University Chicago. The majority of Catholic students in the study expressed disagreement with the statement, "Women should *not* be allowed to be clergy (priests, pastors, imams, rabbis, etc.)," and the majority of them expressed agreement with the statement, "Sexism is **wrong**." This was not a surprise to the researchers. What was surprising was the fact that the correlation of the responses by Catholics between these two statements was insignificant ( $r = -.089$ ). The researchers explored this question with focus groups made up of Loyola University Chicago campus ministers and Catholic undergraduates. Catholic college students see a relationship between Church authority and issues that touch their lives most directly, especially in the area of sexuality. They see Church authority in contrast to "the wisdom of the world" on these issues, and the majority are more likely to trust "the world." While the majority of young Catholics in the study disagreed with the exclusion of women from the priesthood and agreed that sexism is wrong, they saw no relationship between the two. One was a Church matter, with which they disagreed (as they did on many of the "Church matters"), and one was a discrimination matter, on which they followed the common trends of the larger culture, indistinctly from non-Catholics.

## Introduction

[1] This study is an examination of a phenomenon that came out of a larger survey study conducted at Loyola University Chicago in April, 2003. The researchers wanted to look at a broad range of topics facing Catholics and to see not so much *what* young Catholics think about these issues, but rather *how* they think about these issues. The survey was composed of twenty statements to which students were asked to respond with some level of agreement or disagreement. Responses were then analyzed by factor analysis, in order to look at the relationships that existed between items. Focus groups were used to analyze the results.

[2] One statistical finding jumped out at the researchers. The majority of Catholic students in the study expressed disagreement with the statement, “Women should *not* be allowed to be clergy (priests, pastors, imams, rabbis, etc.),” and the majority of them expressed agreement with the statement, “Sexism is **wrong**.” This was not a surprise to the researchers. What was surprising was the fact that the correlation of the responses by Catholics between these two statements was insignificant ( $r = -.089$ ). Finding this very difficult to understand, the researchers specifically addressed this finding to the focus groups.

[3] In this article, the researchers first give a general overview of the findings of the study. They then address findings that are related to the two statements from the survey being compared. Finally, data from the focus groups concerning the lack of relationship between the two items is presented. Because this particular question was not posed in the design of the study, and the researchers did not formulate a hypothesis, this study is descriptive.

## Review of Literature

[4] Before the Second Vatican Council of 1963-1965, U.S. Catholic culture saw itself as “other” from U.S. mainstream culture; Catholic culture was an all-encompassing ghetto and relied heavily on hierarchy, especially local priests, for authority (McNamara). In the 1950s, American Catholics depended on the priests for salvation and religious answers, and priests were seen as outside of the threatening secular world. Emphasis on guilt (hence needing sacraments) and subordination to priests (the religiously trained) were very common features of Catholics before the 1960’s (Fulton). Some argue that the Catholic hierarchy held together the Church through much of the Twentieth Century largely through conformity (D’Antonio *et al.*).

[5] The Second Vatican Council brought extensive changes to the Catholic Church, and the 1960s brought great cultural changes in the larger society. “The Church took a deeper and more thorough self-analysis than ever before of its relationship to itself, to the contemporary world and to God. In a word, it undertook a reflection on the mystery of its being, of its mysterious identity” (Nesti: vii). New looks at sexuality caused some priests to reconsider their vows and leave the priesthood (Fulton). American Catholic culture of this time was marked by the replacement of the Catholic neighborhood with the Catholic school, social unrest, questioning authority, priests leaving the priesthood, suburban middle class, and identifying more with the larger U.S. culture than with the Church (Marler). In the 1970s, priest and sociologist Andrew Greeley put forward the idea of “selective Catholicism” or “theological individualism” to describe many Catholics, especially young Catholics, who tended to distrust Church authority and pick-and-choose what Catholic teachings to abide

(McNamara; O'Brien). Greeley also introduced the concept of "communal Catholics" who like being Catholics and do not want to belong to another religion, but who also pay little attention to the institutional Church; they place greater emphasis on culture and their own experiences in moral decisions rather than the Church. This he contrasted with "ecclesial Catholics" (Hoge *et al.*). Not all Catholics embraced the changes occurring in the Church and in American society. The Second Vatican Council left deep rifts in the Church (D'Antonio *et al.*; Fulton; Hoge *et al.*; O'Brien; Oldenski).

[6] Current Catholic young adults are a generation of the suburban mainstream with a Catholic experience characterized by issues of peace and justice, parish council, and priest shortages (Marler). In 2000, the number of priests per parish was half what it was in 1966. In 1965, 549 parishes in the U.S. did not have a priest. By 2000, nearly 2,500 parishes were without a priest. More laity, especially women, are now working for the church, including running parishes (D'Antonio *et al.*). The majority of young Catholics admire priests for their dedication and believe they are doing a good job (D'Antonio *et al.*). Some argue that after the Second Vatican Council, hopes of power de-centralization in the Vatican vanished. Pope John Paul II selected conservative bishops, but a full return to conservatism is impossible because of lack of priests to execute it (Fulton). Steinfels argues that many Catholic institutions, such as universities, are becoming secularized, but also argues that authoritarian moves by the Vatican to silence theologians in American Catholic universities has given "Catholic identity" a bad name in academia. "Most observers agree that more than any other time in the past, American Catholics now have a confused sense of belonging and not belonging. . . Many young adult Catholics today appear uncertain as to whether there is anything truly distinctive about their religious identity – while the vast majority continue to identify themselves as 'Catholic' and to admire the person, if not always the policies, of Pope John Paul II" (Hoge *et al.*: 6).

[7] Schoenherr predicts that, while the exclusion of women from the Catholic priesthood is much more an issue of social justice and is completely out of step with the larger society, the exclusion of married men from the priesthood will be the first to go, because patriarchy is so embedded in the Church. The requirement of male celibates for ordination has caused the priest shortage. Schoenherr predicts that conservative desires for more priests will meet liberal desires for married clergy, and married clergy will come within a few decades. Ordination of women will not come for generations. Married clergy will cause a greater role for women associated with the priesthood as priests' wives.

#### *Empirical Studies in American Catholic Attitudes*

[8] Numerous studies have shown that U.S. Catholic support of women's ordination has continually increased since the 1970s (Schoenherr). From 1974 to 1993, approval of the ordination of women went from 29% to 64% (D'Antonio *et al.*).

[9] Cunneen conducted a very interesting study because it came so close on the heels of the Second Vatican Council. In the 1967 survey of U.S. Catholics, only one third of women supported women's ordination, with little variance between categories of women. Men in the survey showed greater variance in support of women's ordination: 23% of priests, 30% of single men, and 48% of married men. The majority of women did support women's deaconate ordination. Cunneen argued that as Vatican II closed, American Catholic women

were in the midst of rethinking their faith and applying their faith to their own experiences. While Vatican II opened new ways of thinking in the Church, no women were present at the council until the third session, under Pope Paul VI. Many women first felt discriminated against when laymen were initially allowed to take roles in the liturgy, but women were not. Women began to be divided between love of the Church's sacramentality and hate of the Church's bureaucracy.

[10] In 1983, McAuley and Mathieson conducted a survey of 784 graduating seniors from ten Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Washington, DC. They also conducted 80 in-depth interviews from the same pool. The majority viewed "the Church" to mean not themselves, but rather the hierarchy, which they saw as aloof. Just over half of those surveyed (51%) supported women's ordination.

[11] D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, and Meyer conducted large-scale Gallup surveys of adult American Catholics in 1987, 1993, and 1999. They found that women tended to be more religious than men and tended to attend Masses more than men. They also found that while age was a factor, more importantly, the generation of the participants impacted their responses. Over time, the respondents increased in their willingness to ordain women and increased in desire for democratic decision-making in the Church. In 1999, more than half of the Catholics approved of women's ordination. In general, "Pre-Vatican II Catholics" and "Highly Committed Catholics" were opposed to women's ordination, while younger generations supported it. There has been increased desire for the laity to have a role in Church governance by American Catholics, and many Catholics believed that they have a right to participate in Church decision-making. Over half of all subscales in the study were in favor of more democratic decision-making at all levels of the Church. Catholics have become more accepting of lay parish administrators over time, but most still do not want a reduction in the services offered by priests (such as Masses and visiting the sick).

[12] Hoge, Dinges, Johnson, and Gonzales conducted telephone surveys with 848 adolescent and young adult Catholics in the United States in 1997. In their study, they found: the majority highly favor more lay involvement in the Church and in Church decision-making; women are more active in Church and personal spirituality than men; most favored women in leadership roles in the Church.

[13] Sweeney conducted some very unique confidential survey studies of the attitudes of U.S. Catholic bishops in 1985 and 1990, both with over 50% return rates. In the 1985 survey of U.S. Catholic bishops, 28.5% approved of ordination of women to the diaconate, and 7.6% approved of women's ordination to the priesthood. Bishops under the age of 50 showed higher rates of approval for women's ordination: 55.5% to the diaconate and 11.1% to the priesthood. In the 1990 survey of U.S. and Canadian Catholic bishops, approval of ordination of women to the diaconate was 40% for U.S. bishops and 59% for Canadian bishops. Approval of ordination of women to the priesthood was 14% for U.S. bishops and 36% for Canadian bishops. Because of his research, Sweeney resigned from the Jesuits and ultimately from the priesthood under pressure.

*Arguments for Women's Ordination*

[14] Some hold the position that the ordination of women is fully within the Church's tradition, not a new concept. Byrne argues that the ordination of women would follow a Marian model of the Word of God conceived in a woman's body and brought forth to save. The ordination of women fulfills the Roman Catholic tradition, and does not require going outside the tradition. Not ordaining women now would compromise the catholicity of the Church, according to Byrne. According to Wijngaards, scripture-based arguments for the exclusion of women from ordination are not clear because *the interpretations* of scripture are in the context of patriarchal cultures. These begin early in history and are pagan, not Christian in origin. Roman culture of centralized power became Church culture, but it was imposed from without. Roman law regulated women and denied equality, based on a bias of their inferiority to men. Wijngaards points out that Pope Paul VI created a biblical commission to study the question of women's ordination. The commission concluded that the question was unresolved by scripture, but Pope Paul VI still issued *Inter Insigniores*, prohibiting women's ordination. De Cea-Naharro argues that women had full participation in the early Church (in contrast to Jewish patriarchy), but this diminished as the Church became hierarchical. Women have exercised leadership throughout Church history. St. Pierre (1994) argues that accounts of Last Supper as only male and the Apostles all male does not take into account other aspects where Jesus chose women to perform ministries. Women were in ministerial roles in the early Church that would later be assigned to "priests." St. Pierre argues that women are already doing much of the ministerial work of priests because of the priest shortage, making priests seem like "magicians" who come in to perform something detached from the life of the parish. The Canon Law Society of America concludes that women have been ordained deaconesses in the past, and that the ordination of women to the permanent diaconate is possible, and could even be desirable in the United States.

[15] More contemporary examples of Catholic women in leadership are important to examine. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, missionary nuns in the United States challenged both women's roles (as subordinate and domestic) and men's roles (priests as authority). Nuns and Catholic laywomen have been leaders in many U.S. social reform movements and in providing social services. Given their roles in education and health care, U.S. nuns pursued degrees in higher education, established their own systems of higher education, and in turn provided Catholic laywomen with higher education (Kane, Kenneally, and Kennelly). Wallace conducted a study of Catholic nuns and laywomen serving as primary administrators of parishes. The 1983 revised *Code of Canon Law* opened up new positions in the Church for women. Parishioners became more supportive of women's ordination and changed their attitudes about the role of women in the Church after having experienced a woman administrator. Parishioners usually were involved in hiring of the women, as opposed to priests who are assigned. Looking from the perspective of Christian denominations that ordain women, Nesbitt notes that opportunities for women's ordination come at the time of a decline in the prestige of the position, when it is less attractive to men. It follows the same model in business professions and other professions where women have begun to outnumber men.

[16] From the early days of the women's ordination movement, the argument has been made that the ordination of women in the Catholic Church is necessary as a transformative move that would change the Church throughout. Wagner reported on the first "Ordination Conference" held Thanksgiving Day, 1975, in Detroit. According to Wagner's reports on the conference, many blamed the patriarch of Western culture on exclusion of women from ordination, and believed that Christ's will was inclusion, as evidenced by the roles of women in the Gospels. The conference criticized the link of power with priesthood and did not desire a "substitute matriarchy for an existent patriarchy" (Wagner: 276). The conference linked the ordination of women with larger concerns for social justice. More recently, Condren argues that there is an intrinsic tie between the theology of the Mass as sacrifice and the exclusion of women. Sacrifice requires a victim. It is a process of scapegoating, projecting those elements of the community that the community does not like about itself onto a created other that is then excluded/sacrificed. Looking at Christian denominations that do ordain women, Nesbitt argues that female clergy transform religions, making them more liberal, especially in gender and sexuality issues.

[17] At the center of the idea of women's ordination as a transformative element within the Catholic Church is the argument that it will usher in a more democratic Church. Hunt argues that the women's ordination question has caused a questioning of the linkage between presiding at Eucharist and overall decision-making on all Church matters. McEwan and Poole argue that the Church is becoming irrelevant and needs deep reform to continue. Women's ordination is the first step in that change. Vatican II gave images of the Church as "the People of God" and "Church as Servant" which have been undermined by centralism. There is no point in ordaining women without a change in the Church that takes into account the experiences of the marginalized. This requires a re-imagining of God to include the female, according to McEwan and Poole. Citing Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, leaders in the women's ordination movement, St. Pierre argues that women could not possibly serve in a hierarchical and patriarchal system such as currently exists in the Roman Catholic priesthood. Women are about "discipleship of equals." The current structure is in contrast to the model of Jesus. It treats women unjustly and is about self-serving power. Priests are declining rapidly, which will jeopardize the sacramentality of Catholicism if women are not ordained. The Church must be about service, not about power. If the Church will survive, it needs women, according to St. Pierre. Some Catholics have taken the position that the 2002 priest sex scandal points to a need for the ordination of women and also points to an anti-Feminist culture of the Church (Jenkins; Jost; McEwan and Poole).

[18] The central argument for the ordination of women in the Catholic Church is the position that the exclusion of women is sexist. Some have argued that that secular culture is more in touch with the Holy Spirit than the Church. To continue to exclude women from ordination would be an act against the Spirit. "Not to change at this point would be to continue the institutionalization of the false interpretation in the past of the role and nature of women" (Wagner: 278). Schoenherr points out that the control of symbols as only male is based on ancient notions of women's subordinate status. To change the symbol would cause rethinking of theology of gender and sexuality. It is therefore very threatening to the hierarchy. It is intrinsically tied with sexism. Ruether sees the exclusion of women from

ordination as an example of belief in the maleness of God, despite a history of feminine Christian images of God, including Jesus, in early Christianity. Chittister states that men in authority do not *really* see women as truly human. Ancient views of women (i.e., the views of Aristotle, Plato, Aquinas) are still operating. “It is not what sexism says about women that is sinful. It is what sexism says about God that is heresy. Doesn’t sexism really imply that God is all powerful – except when it comes to women” (Chittister: 12). Fiorenza argues that the Christian message is one of radical equality. “It is ironic that in the defense of the same Roman imperial structures which crucified Jesus, Rome continues to insist that the church is not a democratic community” (60). Fiorenza further argues that the role of cardinal does not require being ordained, and that women should press for becoming cardinals, and give up on the ordination question. (Let it not be said that Catholic feminists lack a sense of humor.)

[19] The Catholic Church has long struggled with feminism. Teaching nuns and the lay movements of the 1950s encouraged Catholic girls and young women to reject feminism. The Catholic hierarchy and leading Catholic laywomen openly opposed the Equal Rights Amendment. The 1970s saw development of Catholic feminism in women’s religious orders. The Second Vatican Council’s emphasis away from hierarchy caused nuns to rethink their roles and ushered in feminism. Birth control and abortion are areas where the Church has seen itself as very distinct from feminism (Kane, Kenneally, and Kennelly). Rosado-Nunes points out that “human rights” was an Enlightenment concept that sought to break from Catholic concepts, and the Church was strongly opposed to the idea of human rights in the nineteenth century. The Catholic emphasis on human nature was in conflict with the Enlightenment emphasis on individual freedom, and the Church focused on women’s nature over women’s rights. The world is moving to include women’s rights as human rights, including reproductive rights. According to Rosado-Nunes, the Catholic Church can align itself with feminists on some social causes but reproductive rights are a major problem. Carmody used the analogy of the Cross to illustrate that being Catholic and being feminist are two crosses, or “double Cross.” “Catholic feminism” is the marriage of sacramental religion and commitment to women’s equality. The greatest challenges are ordination and abortion. Carmody argues that Catholic feminists have been betrayed (“double-crossed”) by the Church hierarchy on ordination and by secular feminism on abortion, because the secular feminist movement has placed abortion as a central cause.

[20] Maloney states that the term “feminism” has gained such flexibility and power, even conservative movements now embrace it. Through interviews with self-identified “Catholic feminists,” Mahoney outlined three major movements. *Holistic feminism* contrasts itself with 1970s secular feminism. Using the Bible and Thomas Aquinas, women are primarily seen as wife and mother. Images of the Church as bride and Christ as the bridegroom are central. The Church is not challenged on its teachings. *Moderate feminism* challenges the hierarchical and patriarchal nature of the Church. Theology is grounded in women’s experiences. Focus is on sexism in all aspects in the larger society. It relies on Catholic social teaching applied to the experiences of women. The image of the Church as “the People of God” is central. There is not a great emphasis on sexuality/reproductive issues. *Reconstructive feminism* focuses greatly on sexuality and reproductive issues. It draws on Church teaching on human rights and the primacy of conscience and seeks to change Catholic reproductive teaching to be in line with progressive Catholic social teaching.



[21] Several scholars have pointed to the accomplishments of feminism within the Church. Hunt points to the development of feminist Church history, influence in ministries at the local level, the ministry of laywomen in parishes, and women's ordination in Protestant churches. Feminism still forces the question of the nature of the Church as hierarchy versus "People of God." Ashe argues that Catholic feminists, while not penetrating the hierarchy, have achieved great influence at the parish level and in the public discourse of the Church. Feminism has shaped the discussion in the Church on ethics, language, ministry, and leadership. Troch points out the importance of feminine images of God that Catholic feminism has developed. Feminist theologians have reconstructed both the definition of human and the depiction of the divine, according to Ashe.

*The Church Hierarchy's Arguments against Women's Ordination*

[22] The Catholic Church's official positions against the ordination of women are presented in two documents: the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Inter Insigniores* (1976) and Pope John Paul II's *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994). The U.S. Catholic bishops also issued *Theological Reflections on the Ordination of Women* in 1973. Other theologians are cited in this section where they agree and explain the Church's positions.

[23] The strongest argument against the ordination of women is the position that Jesus established the ordained priesthood through the Twelve Apostles, and he selected only men. Jesus could have selected women as Apostles, but he did not (Pope John Paul II 1988). The Church does not have the authority to ordain women, because to do so would be going against Jesus' will. The Church has always reserved ordination for men (Pope John Paul II 1994). The central reason is following the will of Jesus and the Apostles, who never practiced women's ordination. Jesus clearly welcomed women in contrast to the local culture, and clearly did not include them in the Twelve Apostles, obviously not as a result of cultural influence. There were other religions in the region with priestesses, so the idea was not completely foreign. The Church's norm conforms to God's plan. The Church has never ordained women; early Christian examples that did were heretical. Women who think they have a vocation to priesthood do not really; having an attraction and having a Calling by God are not the same thing (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1976). While still head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pope Benedict XVI stated that an exclusively male clergy has always been the tradition, East and West, based on the Twelve Apostles as normative. It is the will of Christ, and the Church cannot usurp that authority from him. It is not the role of the historian to interpret scripture for the Church, but the role of the hierarchy to interpret scripture. This should not be an ecumenical problem, since the Roman Church is being true to the tradition (Ratzinger 1998a).

[24] Other theologians have taken up the hierarchy's position on this. Von Balthazar argues that if God had intended women to be priests, Jesus would have indicated so. The Eastern Christian tradition has always had male priesthood as in the Roman Church. Eastern Christianity goes back to the early Church, in contrast to Protestantism, which is a deviation of the true tradition. Moll argues that Jesus established a male hierarchy and gives God a masculine identity ("Father"). Early Christian traditions that ordained women were heretical. The Church does not believe that it has the authority to ordain women, because to do so would be to go against the will of Jesus, according to Moll.

[25] While the argument that the Church cannot ordain women because Jesus did not is considered sufficient by the hierarchy, there are attempts to explain why this is the case. The most cited explanation is that Women do not reflect the image of Jesus in the context of the sacrament of the Eucharist. *Inter Insigniores* states that Christ is the bridegroom to the Church, and the Church is the bride to Christ. Christ's maleness is essential, not accidental. Von Balthazar takes up this theme and argues that this male-to-female/God-to-Church relationship is immutable and not subject to change. The Church "cannot change herself at will, but must accept herself the way she was born" (154). Moll argues that feminism, a secular movement, is inappropriately being applied to theology. Fessio uses analogies of the Trinity, Creation, Mary, and the Church to argue that there is an inherent difference between male and female, as created by God, and women cannot be in ministries associated with the sacrifice of the Mass. The Church must protect the unique role of women.

[26] The Catholic hierarchy argues that, for the above reasons, exclusion of women from ordination is not sexist, and the Church is opposed to sexism. *Inter Insigniores* urges the Church to overcome discrimination against women in society. It points out that women have been important in the Church, even as Doctors of the Church. Jesus clearly welcomed women in contrast to the local culture. Priesthood is not a right, and the Church does not function as social institutions governed by human decisions. It is governed by the will of God. Women are called to different things than men in the Church, but they are not lesser things. *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* states that the role of women in the Church is extremely important, but does not include ordination. Pope John Paul II elsewhere encouraged women to be active in Church leadership, except as ordained ministers (1995b). He encouraged everyone, especially governments, to integrate women politically and economically. Mary was the ultimate example of womanhood, but her status as "queen" was tied to her status as *Servant* of the Lord. Christ chose only men to be "icons" in the Church through ministerial priesthood, which is not saying that women are bad because they are not priests, just as the laity in general are not bad because they are not priests – all share in the common priesthood of baptism. Priesthood is service, not power. "One can also appreciate that the presence of a certain diversity of roles is in no way prejudicial to women, provided that this diversity is not the result of an arbitrary imposition, but is rather an expression of what is specific to being male and female" (1995a: article 11). In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II used the analogies of virgin, mother, and wife as roles of the Church to God and roles of women in society.

[27] While head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pope Benedict XVI asserted that new tendencies to seek equality of the sexes by destroying their individual identities has caused this question in the last century. Priesthood is not about power and decision-making, but rather about service and submission to God (Ratzinger 1998a). He also stated that the priesthood is a sacrament, not a career. If it were a career, women would have an equal right to it. It is a sacrament instituted by Christ, and therefore must follow Christ's norms. No one has a *right* to ordination (Ratzinger 1998b).

[28] The U.S. Catholic bishops have reflected the argument that exclusion of women from ordination is not sexist. Jesus is an example against sexism, and sexism is a sin. However, distinctions between the sexes are not the same as cultural, ethnic, and racial differences. The Church simply does not have the authority to ordain women. The priesthood is about

service, not about power. “The fact that the call to ministerial priesthood is addressed to men is not an arbitrary act, nor is it rooted in a view that women are inferior as persons” (Ad Hoc Committee for a pastoral Response to Women’s Concerns, National Conference of Catholic Bishops: article 122). They later encouraged women to take on more opportunities for leadership in the Church that are available to them and called on all Catholics to promote progress on women’s roles in the Church (Committee on Women in Society and in the Church, National Conference of Catholic Bishops).

[29] Some theologians have also taken the position that the issue is not about sexism. Moll argues that men and women are equal under God, but with different roles. The Church has spoken out against sexism and is not sexist. Feminism, including Catholic feminist movements, has tried to deny women their true identity as women, and therefore deny them their true humanity, which is unjust, according to Moll. Trapp argues that women simply *cannot* be priests. This is not sexism, and to give attention to it as sexism draws attention away from real sexism that can be solved. It therefore distracts resources away from the liberation of women. The Church should focus on raising up the dignity of lay ministry, so that women ministers do not feel “second class.” Ashley states that the American democratic idea of justice deals with treating all equally, but the Catholic idea of justice means serving all equally, which means those with special gifts play special roles in order to serve the common good; therefore, hierarchy is necessary. Jesus established hierarchy within the Church, and hierarchy is essentially male, as the priest must show the maleness of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God intended different roles for men and women, because God created male and female. Why would God create two sexes if they were to serve the same roles? Male and female roles are not higher or lower, but just different. Connell points out that women are not excluded from priesthood totally; they are part of the common priesthood of all the baptized. They participate in a variety of ministries in the Church by virtue of their baptisms. Women can represent Christ, but not in the sacramental context. Albrecht argues that the Church is protecting the right of women to be true women by not making them priests. Women should model Mary, who is the perfect woman, and who was not a priest. The Church should also squelch egalitarian movements in her institutions, which are pushing women out of their true role, according to Albrecht.

[30] One of the most striking aspects of the Catholic hierarchy’s position on this issue was the position taken by Pope John Paul II that the issue is beyond debate. “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. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.” (1994: article 4). The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stated that the position is an infallible teaching from the Second Vatican Council “. . . to be held always, everywhere, and by all, as belonging to the deposit of the faith” (1998a). Pope Benedict XVI has stated that the issue is a question of doctrine, not of Church practice, and that there is no more possibility of debate (Ratzinger 1998a).

### Survey Data Collection

[31] The focus of the survey was students' responses to twenty statements on social issues within the Church and society. The researchers developed these statements largely through a focus group of University Ministry staff and through some informal polling of students conducted at on-campus Catholic Masses in January, 2003. The researchers made a decision to keep wording of the survey items very broad because the focus of the study was on how students categorized the issues in the survey. For example, one item read, "Homosexuality is **wrong**." The Catholic Church makes a distinction between homosexual behavior and homosexual orientation. The researchers intentionally did not make this distinction, but wrote the item with broad wording to see how students would respond and what relationships with other items would emerge.

[32] The researchers field-tested their instrument for clarity with ten Loyola students. Respondents selected from five response options on a Likert-type scale: "strongly agree," "agree," "unsure," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." Field-testing revealed that a very large number of students chose the "unsure" option. When asked, they explained that the questions were difficult because they "depended on the situation." Seeking greater variability in responses, the researchers decided to remove this response option and add the options of "somewhat agree" and "somewhat disagree" (total of six response options) and to add the following instructions to the survey: "We realize that for many people, answers to these questions depend upon a variety of circumstances. Please select the answer that best describes your opinion in most cases under the most common circumstances."

[33] On April 13, 2003, Resident Assistants ("RA's") at Loyola University Chicago's residence halls distributed and collected the survey to undergraduate students at their "floor meetings." While the survey was distributed to all students, a clear intention of the study was to understand how Catholic students thought about these issues. Under the guidance of the university's Institutional Review Board, instructions were provided for RA's to insure confidentiality for the students. Students sealed their responses in individual envelopes that they then placed in large envelopes, which the RA's sealed and turned into the Residence Life Office, where the researchers collected them. RA's also clarified that students could choose not to participate in the study and gave them instructions on how to do so easily. Each student was also provided with a cover letter explaining this process. Because the target population of the study was traditional undergraduates, the survey instructions requested that students not participate in the study if they were graduate students, under the age of 18, or over the age of 23. Based on the population of those living in residence halls, the majority of the students would have been freshmen, with sophomores making up most of the rest. Very few respondents would have been juniors or seniors.

[34] The response rate to the survey was very high. When the study was initiated, 2,188 undergraduates lived in Loyola's residence halls. Based on the attendance rate at the meetings and the participation rate of the RA's, a potential pool of approximately 1,088 residents was available. A total of 764 surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 70.2%.

### Statistical Analysis

[35] Responses were compared by sex (t-test significant difference at  $\leq .05$  level) and by religion (Kruskal-Wallis Test significant difference at  $\leq .05$  level) (see Table 1). While Table 1 reports the total percentage indicating some form of agreement with the statements (that is, those selecting one of the options of “strongly agree,” “agree,” or “somewhat agree”), all six response options were used in conducting the T-Test and Kruskal-Wallis Test for significant variance. For the statement, “Women should *not* be allowed to be clergy (priests, pastors, imams, rabbis, etc.),” responses showed statistically significant difference when compared by religion, by sex, and when comparing Catholic females to Catholic males. Catholics were more likely than any other group to agree with the statement. Males were more likely than females to agree with the statement, and Catholic males were more likely than Catholic females to agree with the statement. For the statement, “Sexism is **wrong**,” there was no statistically significant difference when compared by religion, by sex, and when comparing Catholic females to Catholic males. The correlation of the responses by Catholics between these two statements was insignificant ( $r = -.089$ ). On all items in the Discrimination Factor (racism, sexism, and religious discrimination), there were no statistically significant differences between Catholics and non-Catholics.

[36] The researchers then conducted a factor analysis of all twenty items. Given the content of the survey and the relatively small number of non-Catholic respondents, the decision was made to only conduct the factor analysis based on Catholic students. In order to determine the underlying factor structure of the twenty items in the instrument, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal components analysis with varimax rotation. Before doing so, the researchers assessed the data to ensure that it met the basic assumptions of factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .833, and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant, indicating that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. Upon factor extraction, five components had eigenvalues that were above 1.0, but inspection of the scree plot indicated that four factors would best fit the data. Accordingly, four factors were rotated (see Table 2).

[37] When determining which items to retain, the researchers observed two criteria: first that the item loaded at .30 or above on its respective factor, and second that the factor was interpretable. The four factors explained 55.18% of the variance in the data, and most items had a factor loading above 5.0. The researchers did not hypothesize *a priori* how items would cluster since the items represented a variety of different social issues. Upon examination of the four factors, however, it became clear that the item groupings were conceptually meaningful, forming distinct subscales.

[38] Each of the subscales was correlated in order to ensure that they were statistically meaningful and that there was not too much construct overlap between the scales. Upon examination of the correlation matrix, which is reported in Table 3, it can be seen that the intercorrelations between subscales ranged from almost no correlation to being moderately correlated, and were generally non-significant, indicating that the subscales are non-redundant and individually meaningful.

[39] Once the latent factor structure of the data was determined, the researchers measured the internal consistency of the survey instrument as well as the four subscales that emerged.

The overall scale was measured with very good reliability,  $\alpha = .84$ . The Sexuality and Authority Factor also demonstrated exceptional reliability,  $\alpha = .87$ . The reliability of the Social Justice Factor was  $\alpha = .64$ . The reliability of the Discrimination Factor was  $\alpha = .68$ , and the reliability of the View of Peers Factor was  $\alpha = .76$ .

[40] Although these internal consistency estimates indicate the instrument is highly reliable overall, and that the four subscales can be measured with acceptable to good reliability, the researchers decided to get a more complete picture of the instrument's reliability by having a second sample of students complete the items twice over a two-week period. As can be seen from the test-retest reliability coefficients from this sample (Table 4), the instrument and its subscales can be measured with exceptional reliability over time. The overall scale and three of its subscales had coefficients that ranged from .668 to .929, each significant at the .01 level. The test-retest coefficient for the Discrimination Factor, however, was less impressive,  $r = .280$ .

### **Focus Groups Data Collection**

[41] In March 2004, the researchers conducted three focus groups in order to better understand the results of the survey study. All sessions were audiotaped. One focus group was composed of nine members of the Loyola Ministry staff (five female and four male), and two were composed of Catholic undergraduate students (twelve student participants total, eleven female and one male) recruited through advertising by Ministry. Under the guidance of the university's Institutional Review Board, participants were advised of the difficulty in confidentiality posed by focus groups. Students were not asked how they would (or did) respond to any of the survey items, but were asked to speculate about the response patterns in the data. It should be noted that the factors were not named at the time of the focus groups; they were referred to simply as "factor A," "factor B," and so on.

#### *Sexuality and Authority Factor*

[42] Overwhelmingly, the focus groups stated that these are issues on which the Catholic Church has very definite positions that are widely known. Catholics are taught the Church's positions on these issues early on in Catholic schools and youth groups. Some stated that these are "foundational" positions for Catholics. Those who answer that they trust the leadership and believe it is important to follow the rules of their religion will likely agree with all the rest of these statements in this factor. It was also noted that these are issues faced almost daily by Catholics (in contrast to the Social Justice Factor) and are controversial topics both in society and in the Church. The "disagree" stances reflect positions of society in general; those who disagree with these statements may identify more with the larger society, and those who agree feel they are counter-cultural. It was also speculated that some who disagree would say that they were more informed by science. Some of the Ministry staff believed that given the age of the students, there might be a general trend to rebel against authority, which might "mellow" with age. Some of the students also made this observation, but also believed that younger students were more likely to relate the items in this factor together, while possibly older students' responses would have more variance and not form a single factor.

[43] When asked why males tended to agree on the items in the Sexuality and Authority Factor more than females, the focus groups noted that females are more affected by some of the issues than males. Some also stated that females are more likely to question Church authority and perceive Church rules as created by men. According to some, males prefer concrete answers to complex questions. Some also stated that males are more likely to be sexist.

[44] When asked to give a name to the “agree” group, responses included: conservative, by the book, traditionally strict, orthodox, good Catholics, faithful, uninformed, unenlightened, and authority-driven. When asked to give a name to the “disagree” group, responses included: New Age, selective beliefs, pick-and-choose, liberal, progressive, unsatisfied with the Church, unorthodox, progressive, not active in their religion, not feeling compelled to follow authority, and mainstream American.

#### *Discrimination Factor*

[45] Because the responses for the three items in this factor were so skewed, the Discrimination Factor was discussed a bit differently. The majority of students indicated, “strongly agree” on at least two of the three items and did not indicate any level of disagreement with any of the items. The focus groups were asked to not discuss distinctions between those who agree and those who disagree, but rather those who indicated “strongly agree” on almost all items and those who indicated some level of agreement, but not overwhelmingly “strongly agree” on all three.

[46] According to the focus groups, all these items deal with equality, judgments, persecution, racism, discrimination, and stereotypes. None of the items have a reasonable alternative to agreement, and there is no justifiable benefit to disagreement. They noted that these are issues dealt with at universities and that Loyola has a very diverse population, giving these issues “a face.” The participants remarked that these are things that have been dealt with throughout history, and people are sure that the answers are right now. Society no longer tolerates disagreement with these statements. Even if a person is a racist, s/he is not going to admit it – even on paper. At the same time, the focus groups speculated that while people know it is socially unacceptable to discriminate, they wondered if people really think about it and if they always practice equality (including unconscious discrimination). They stated that people would respond on this in strong agreement, even if their own actions do not reflect this. More specific questions on issues of discrimination would have more varied responses, according to the focus groups. Some participants in the focus groups stated that those who do not strongly agree with the majority of the items are “either lunatics or very thoughtful.” They are willing to go against cultural norms and are more interested in being honest about the integrity of their own behavior. Possibly they do not see these issues as “black-and-white” or they may see “two sides to everything,” such as sexism being allowed because of religious beliefs (e.g. Catholic prohibition against women’s ordination providing “justified discrimination”).

[47] When asked to give a name to the “strongly agree” group, responses included: idealistic, realistic, thoughtless, indiscriminate, and mainstream Americans. When asked to give a name to the “less than strongly agree” group, responses included: realistic, thoughtful, ignorant, and white supremacists.

*Lack of Correlation between the Women's Ordination Item and the Sexism Item*

[48] When the researchers posed the question to the focus group participants why there was no relationship between the item on women's ordination and the item on sexism, the participants agreed that most Catholics simply don't see women's ordination as an issue of sexism. One student shared, "The reason that there isn't any statistical relationship between the two statements is because a lot of people do not see the issue in the Church as sexist." Another student stated, "If you look at the Catholic Church and how women are not allowed to be ordained, so there could be people who, like in everyday life, like in jobs they believe this is not acceptable, but like in the doctrine of the Catholic Church, where they're not allowed to be ordained, so they see another side that has nothing to do with being discriminatory in a bad way, but just like, 'That's the way it is.'" Along these same lines, one student shared, "Or for some, sexism in the Catholic Church could be justified." A campus minister offered the interpretation that considering the Church sexist might be too difficult for some: "They're thinking about it to say, 'sexism is wrong,' but to say, 'Oh my God, my whole Church is wrong,' that's a huge paradigm shift to make, and that can be a difficult question to answer because there are all these underlying factors that they have to answer to."

[49] One reason given that many Catholics do not see the issue as one of sexism was a perception that religion is outside the boundaries of discussions where sexism could be applied. One student shared, "I don't think people think of it as sexism, but they think of it as cultural, tradition, part of the religion." Another student stated, "I think because people see a difference between sexism and church law, and they don't see Church law as sexist." And another student stated, "I think a lot of people see the Church outside the boundaries of sexism, I guess. You read in scriptures, it says women can't be at the pulpit, so it's sort of beyond this kind of stuff. I'm for women's ordination, but I guess I just see God in more ways. So if someone, like a woman, is really compelled to be in leadership in the Church, they should. But I don't see it as an issue of sexism. The person has been given a gift, and it's wrong to deny that gift from them. I guess in a sense it is sexism, but I just see 'sexism' in a different light."

[50] In a few cases, focus group participants were familiar with some of the reasons the Catholic hierarchy gives for not ordaining women. One campus minister shared, "Those who believe that they should follow the Church have bought the argument that a male-only priesthood has nothing to do with sexism. I think it's socially unacceptable to be in a favor of sexism, but it's not socially unacceptable, especially in certain conservative circles, to be in favor of 'a complementarity of the sexes,' and that's what the Church has argued is the reason, the reason women cannot be priests." One student shared, "I know like the Church is considered to be female, and as a priest you marry the Church, so like I heard Cardinal George once, when somebody asked him that question, and he said it went along with the homosexual issue, that was part of it because the Church is considered female and as a priest you marry the Church. 'Sexism' constantly has a bad connotation. It's never positive or constructive."

[51] Focus group participants did see the lack of women clergy having an effect on female survey respondents trusting in central Church teachings. One campus minister shared, "I



also think that it is true about there being a link between authority and sex. I would think it might play a factor in women's disagreement with this, and who are the people making these rules? And guess what, none of them look like them. So maybe there's an inherent skepticism of the rules that men are making for them, and maybe male students are more likely to identify with the rule-makers, and therefore believe that their interests are at heart." A student shared, "Some people feel that because they (women and married people) are not allowed to be in the priesthood, that limits the priesthood to a specific group, unmarried males, and some people say, 'How can these people speak about artificial birth control?' or 'How can these people speak about women's issues?' So I think, I think it's related because some people would more trust the leadership if it was more representative of the laity."

### Conclusions

[52] The focus group participants several times made reference to a type of thinking that contrasted what "the world" teaches (including science, human experiences, and contemporary American culture) with what the Church teaches. In short, views on women's ordination and other issues for which the Church's position is most clearly known seem to rest on a conflict that young Catholics see as "authority of the Church versus wisdom of the world." In the area of sexism and other forms of discrimination, Catholics show no difference from non-Catholics; the "wisdom of the world" seems to be the strong factor.

[53] While the majority of young Catholics in the study disagreed with the exclusion of women from the priesthood and agreed that sexism is wrong, they saw no relationship between the two. One was a Church matter, with which they disagreed (as they did on many of the "Church matters"), and one was a discrimination matter, on which they followed the common trends of the larger culture, indistinctly from non-Catholics.

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Table 1. Percentage Expressing Agreement with Statements from 2003 Spring Ministry Survey  
Summary of Population Variables

Statement	Total N=764	Male N=164	Female N=600	Catholic Males N=102	Catholic Females N=389	Catholics N=491	Non- Catholic Christians N=117	Other Religious N=49	Non- Religious N=105
1. I believe it is important to very strictly follow the official laws and teachings of my religion.	65.6%	76.1%	62.8%	79.6%	60.5%	64.3%	75.7%	77.1%	NA (N<30)
2. I trust and respect the leadership of my religion.	85.1%	82.7%	85.7%	84.5%	87.8%	86.3%	86.2%	89.6%	NA (N<30)
3. I believe it is important to attend public worship services regularly.	71.2%	73.6%	70.6%	79.8%	72.6%	74.1%	74.1%	63.8%	NA (N<30)
4. Abortion is wrong.	57.7%	65.6%	55.5%	78.4%	64.7%	67.6%	51.7%	43.8%	23.8%
5. War is wrong.	60.9%	56.4%	62.1%	54.9%	61.1%	59.8%	66.4%	62.5%	60.0%
6. Not serving the poor is wrong.	78.7%	77.4%	79.0%	81.4%	81.1%	81.1%	71.6%	79.2%	74.3%
7. Women should <i>not</i> be allowed to be clergy (priests, pastors, imams, rabbis, etc.).	17.2%	29.0%	14.0%	37.3%	15.1%	19.7%	17.1%	12.8%	7.8%
8. Homosexuality is wrong.	18.3%	36.3%	13.4%	34.3%	12.7%	17.2%	36.2%	14.9%	4.8%
9. Having sex before being married is wrong.	28.1%	34.4%	26.4%	39.0%	26.0%	28.7%	37.1%	42.6%	8.6%
10. Capital punishment (the death penalty) is wrong.	59.9%	55.9%	61.0%	61.8%	61.4%	61.5%	53.4%	56.3%	61.5%
11. I believe that many people in my age group are lacking in morals.	66.4%	66.5%	66.4%	66.3%	67.5%	67.3%	72.6%	72.9%	51.5%
12. Divorce is wrong.	35.0%	47.2%	31.6%	56.4%	35.9%	40.2%	34.2%	36.7%	11.5%
13. Racial discrimination is wrong.	94.1%	91.4%	94.8%	93.1%	94.3%	94.1%	94.9%	95.9%	92.4%
14. Discrimination based on religion is wrong.	93.8%	90.8%	94.7%	93.1%	93.1%	93.1%	97.4%	95.9%	92.4%
15. Clergy (priests, pastors, imams, rabbis, etc.) should <i>not</i> be allowed to marry.	24.2%	29.6%	22.7%	38.2%	29.1%	31.0%	7.0%	23.4%	11.9%
16. I believe that many people in my age group are lacking in religious faith.	71.0%	73.1%	70.5%	78.0%	74.0%	74.8%	50.9%	77.1%	49.5%
17. Euthanasia (mercy killing) is wrong.	56.1%	57.6%	55.6%	69.4%	62.9%	64.3%	89.6%	42.6%	30.1%
18. Harming nature's environment is wrong.	93.1%	89.4%	94.1%	92.0%	94.0%	93.6%	89.6%	100.0%	91.3%
19. Using artificial birth control (the pill, condoms, etc.) is wrong.	11.8%	18.4%	10.0%	24.8%	11.6%	14.3%	7.7%	16.3%	2.9%
20. Sexism is wrong.	87.3%	86.2%	87.6%	88.0%	86.4%	86.7%	87.8%	89.1%	88.5%

*Table 2. Rotated Factor Matrix, Factor Loading, Communality*

Factor	Statements in Factor	1	2	3	4	Com
Sexuality and Authority Factor	I believe it is important to very strictly follow the official laws and teachings of my religion.	.666				.525
	I trust and respect the leadership of my religion.	.574				.383
	I believe it is important to attend public worship services regularly.	.637				.545
	Abortion is <b>wrong</b> .	.597				.479
	Women should <i>not</i> be allowed to be clergy (priests, pastors, imams, rabbis, etc.).	.701				.516
	Homosexuality is <b>wrong</b> .	.677				.429
	Having sex before being married is <b>wrong</b> .	.707				.609
	Divorce is <b>wrong</b> .	.628				.562
	Clergy (priests, pastors, imams, rabbis, etc.) should <i>not</i> be allowed to marry.	.694				.595
	Euthanasia (mercy killing) is <b>wrong</b> .	.546				.592
Using artificial birth control (the pill, condoms, etc.) is <b>wrong</b> .	.747				.732	
Social Justice Factor	War is <b>wrong</b> .		.702			.436
	<i>Not</i> serving the poor is <b>wrong</b> .		.636			.829
	Capital punishment (the death penalty) is <b>wrong</b> .		.677			.841
	Harming nature's environment is <b>wrong</b> .		.480			.545
Discrimination Factor	Racial discrimination is <b>wrong</b> .			.901		.723
	Discrimination based on religion is <b>wrong</b> .			.902		.440
	Sexism is <b>wrong</b> .			.390		.364
View of Peers Factor	I believe that many people in my age group are lacking in morals.				.801	.596
	I believe that many people in my age group are lacking in religious faith.				.816	.294

Note: Extraction method: Principal components analysis; Rotation method: Varimax.

*Table 3. Subscale Means, Standard Deviations, Intercorrelations, and Reliabilities*

	M	SD	Sexuality and Authority Factor	Social Justice Factor	Discrimination Factor	View of Peers Factor
Sexuality and Authority Factor	3.72	.92	(.87)			
Social Justice Factor	2.73	.91	.240	(.64)		
Discrimination Factor	1.71	.99	.032	.351*	(.68)	
View of Peers Factor	2.99	1.05	.380*	.018	.084	(.76)

\*p < .01



*Table 4. Test-Retest Reliability Coefficients*

	Reliability	p
Religious Beliefs Scale	.774	.01
Sexuality and Authority Factor	.929	.01
Social Justice Factor	.688	.01
Discrimination Factor	.280	(ns)
View of Peers Factor	.849	.01