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Pope's Quotes: The indispensable contribution of women

Dennis Coday | Nov. 26, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

Highlights from Pope Francis? apostolic exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium (?The Joy of the Gospel?) [1] issued today. Women's ordination to the priesthood "is not open to discussion," Francis writes, and this presents a great challenge for discovering what the possible role of women in leadership in the church is.

> 103. The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess. I think, for example, of the special concern which women show to others, which finds a particular, even if not exclusive, expression in motherhood. I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because ?the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace? and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures.
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> 104. Demands that the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity, present the Church with profound and challenging questions which cannot be lightly evaded. The reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion, but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general. It must be remembered that when we speak of sacramental power ?we are in the realm of function, not that of dignity or holiness?. The ministerial priesthood is one means employed by Jesus for the service of his people, yet our great dignity derives from baptism, which is accessible to all. The configuration of the priest to Christ the head ? namely, as the principal source of grace ? does not imply an exaltation which would set him above others. In the Church, functions ?do not favour the superiority of some vis-à-vis the others?.[74] Indeed, a woman, Mary, is more important than the bishops. Even when the function of ministerial priesthood is considered ?hierarchical?, it must be remembered that ?it is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ?s members?.[75] Its key and axis is not power understood as domination, but the power to administer the sacrament of the Eucharist; this is the origin of its authority, which is always a service to God?s people. This presents a great challenge for pastors and theologians, who are in a position to recognize more fully what this entails with regard to the possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church?s life.

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[1] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html