

Root & Branch Community for Reform

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Response to Pope Francis on CBS News, 20 May:

“No” to Women Deacons.

For immediate release: 22 May, 2024.



It is with deep grief that Root & Branch note Pope Francis’s outright rejection on CBS on 20th May of Norah O’Donnell’s question, “And I’m curious, for a little girl growing up Catholic today, will she ever have the opportunity to be a deacon and participate as a clergy member in the Church?” The Pope’s unhesitating response was a blunt “No.”

He went on to elaborate: “But women have always had, I would say, the function of deaconesses without being deacons, right? Women are of great service as women”. Thus implying it’s fine for women to do the work, but simultaneously refusing them the recognition of the status of that work.

The Vatican’s own Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1975 concluded, after intensive study, that the ordination of women cannot be ruled out on the basis of Scripture. However, the Catholic Church still awaits the conclusion of the Pope’s own two Commissions into women deacons. Further, he recently removed the topic of women’s ordination to the diaconate from the concluding session of his worldwide Synod on Synodality in October 2024 and has given it to yet another Commission, so far unnamed.

Meanwhile, the equality of women is now the top concern of the faithful, along with an abhorrence of clericalism and church-related abuse. Root & Branch’s detailed research into the submissions of all 22 Dioceses of England and Wales to this Synod reveals that 91% of Catholics responding want the ordination of women. 100% want their full equality and inclusion. 100% want transparent and collaborative governance.

Pope Francis is deservedly seen as representing justice on a wide range of issues, and in these we support him wholeheartedly. But in understanding women, he remains stubbornly impervious to the plank in his eye. His Worldwide Prayer Intention for April was addressed to international governments, oblivious to its irony:

For women: for an end to the discrimination they face in various parts of the world.

“Let us not deprive women of their voice. Let us not rob all these abused women of their voice. They are exploited, marginalized. In theory, we all agree that men and women have the same dignity as persons. But this does not play out in practice”. Many might say to him in reply; you first.

Root & Branch call on all Catholics to pray for the Pope, to speak out boldly, and by our words and actions to assert our God-given equality.

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Root & Branch is a grassroots movement working for the vision outlined above by the faithful;
a safe, just and inclusive Church, where **all** may flourish and thrive.