

# A woman's talent is to listen, says the Vatican.

Level 3 | Advanced

## 1 Key Vocabulary

Fill the gaps using these key words from the text:

<i>humility</i>	<i>cardinal (n)</i>	<i>attribute (n)</i>	<i>rhetoric</i>
<i>adversary</i>	<i>lethal</i>	<i>blur (vb)</i>	<i>knee-jerk</i>

1. If something is described as \_\_\_\_\_, it is very dangerous and can kill you.
2. If something \_\_\_\_\_, it becomes difficult to see it clearly often because its edges are not clear.
3. A \_\_\_\_\_ response is one that is immediate and not carefully considered.
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a priest with a very high position in the Catholic Church.
5. Behaving with \_\_\_\_\_ shows that you do not think you are better or more important than other people.
6. An \_\_\_\_\_ is a quality or feature of someone or something.
7. An \_\_\_\_\_ is an enemy or an opponent.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ is a style of speaking or writing that is intended to influence people.

## 2 What do you think?

The text is about the Catholic Church's view of the nature of women in society. The Vatican lists 6 typical characteristics of women. Which 6 of these 10 characteristics do you think it chose?

- |               |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. listening  | 2. organising   |
| 3. competing  | 4. welcoming    |
| 5. humility   | 6. strength     |
| 7. aggression | 8. faithfulness |
| 9. praise     | 10. waiting     |

Now look in the first paragraph of the text and check your answers.

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## A woman's talent is to listen

John Hooper and Jo Revill in Rome.

The Vatican has depicted what it claims are women's characteristic traits: "Listening, welcoming, humility, faithfulness, praise and waiting." In its most important statement on the role of women in almost a decade, the Roman Catholic Church said these virtues of the Virgin Mary were ones women displayed "with particular intensity and naturalness".

The 37-page statement was written by the Pope's leading theologian, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. As a statement of official doctrine, it would have been read, and very likely amended, by the Pope himself before publication.

The document, which will prompt a fierce debate about the attributes of women, added: "Although a certain type of feminist rhetoric makes demands 'for ourselves', women preserve the deep intuition of the goodness in their lives of those actions that elicit life, and contribute to the growth and protection [of others]. This intuition is linked to women's physical capacity to give life. Whether lived out or remaining potential, this capacity is a reality that structures the female personality in a profound way."

In his *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*, Cardinal Ratzinger takes aim at "currents of thought that are often at variance with the authentic advancement of women". Chief among these is a tendency to "emphasise strongly conditions of subordination in order to give rise to antagonism". It implied that "women, in order to be themselves, must make themselves the adversaries of men". Such confrontational thinking was "leading to

harmful confusion . . . which has its most immediate and lethal effects in the structure of the family".

Gender war encouraged a perilous blurring of the distinctions. "To avoid the domination of one sex or the other, their differences tend to be denied, viewed as mere effects of historical and cultural conditioning." Such a view ignored qualities that arose from a woman's unique ability to give birth. This "allows her to acquire maturity very quickly, and gives a sense of the seriousness of life and of its responsibilities. A sense and a respect for what is concrete develop in her, opposed to abstractions which are so often fatal for the existence of individuals and society". The cardinal uses the document to argue that, because they have something unique to contribute, "women should be present in the world of work and in the organisation of society".

The comments drew a mixed reaction from feminists and women writers. Erin Pizzey, founder of the international women's refuge movement, said: "I don't think the Catholic Church, whose priests and bishops cannot marry, is in a position to make such statements."

But Catherine Pepinster, editor of the British Catholic journal *The Tablet*, said the comments would resonate with many women. "For feminists to rubbish it is a knee-jerk response. It does make a distinction between the sexes, but it also points out that women have a big role to play in society."

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### 3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer

1. What does the document regard as the main influence on the female personality?
  - a. A deep intuition of goodness.
  - b. The physical capacity to give life.
  - c. Being the adversaries of men.
2. What does the document regard as the source of "harmful confusion"?
  - a. The idea that women must make themselves the adversaries of men.
  - b. Confrontational thinking.
  - c. The structure of the family.
3. What, according to the document, allows women to become mature very quickly?
  - a. Gender war.
  - b. Their ability to give birth.
  - c. A sense of the seriousness of life.
4. Why, according to the cardinal, should women be present in the world of work?
  - a. Because they are good organisers.
  - b. Because they have the ability to give birth.
  - c. Because they have something unique to contribute.
5. Why does the founder of the international women's refuge movement disagree with the document?
  - a. Because she doesn't think Catholic priests are in a position to make statements about women.
  - b. Because it does not make a distinction between the sexes.
  - c. Because her reaction is simply a knee-jerk response.

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## 4 Collocations

Match the adjectives in the left-hand column with the nouns in the right-hand column. Look in the text to check your answers.

- |                    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. characteristic  | a. intuition         |
| 2. official        | b. ability           |
| 3. fierce          | c. traits            |
| 4. deep            | d. thinking          |
| 5. confrontational | e. doctrine          |
| 6. knee-jerk       | f. effect            |
| 7. lethal          | g. reaction/response |
| 8. unique          | h. debate            |

## 5 Chunks

Complete the chunks by adding a preposition. Look in the text to check your answers.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ a profound way
2. at variance \_\_\_\_\_ something
3. to give rise \_\_\_\_\_ something
4. a blurring \_\_\_\_\_ the distinctions
5. to arise \_\_\_\_\_ something
6. to be \_\_\_\_\_ a position to do something
7. to contribute \_\_\_\_\_ something
8. to take aim \_\_\_\_\_ something

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## 6 Grammar focus - reported speech

Look at this example from the text:

*The Roman Catholic Church said these virtues were ones women displayed "with particular intensity and naturalness".*

The direct words were:

*"These virtues are ones women display with particular intensity and naturalness."*

Rewrite these statements from the text in reported speech:

1. This intuition is linked to women's physical capacity to give life.
2. I don't think the Catholic Church is in a position to make such statements.
3. It also points out that women have a big role to play in society.
4. A woman's unique ability to give birth allows her to acquire maturity very quickly.
5. The gender war encourages a perilous blurring of the distinctions.
6. Differences between the sexes tend to be ignored.

## 7 Discussion

Look again at the list of qualities in Exercise 2. Add some more qualities that apply to women in general. Now make a list of qualities that apply to men.

Do you agree that there are fundamental character differences between men and women?

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## Key

### 1 Key Vocabulary

Fill the gaps using these key words from the text:

humility	cardinal(n)	attribute(n)	rhetoric
adversary	lethal	blur(vb)	knee-jerk
1. lethal	2. blurs/is blurred	3. knee-jerk	
4. cardinal	5. humility	6. attribute	
7. adversary	8. rhetoric		

### 2 What do you know?

listening, welcoming, humility, faithfulness, praise and waiting

### 3 Comprehension Check

1. b; 2. a; 3. b; 4. c; 5. a

### 4 Collocations

Match the adjectives in the left-hand column with the nouns in the right-hand column. Look in the text to check your answers.

1. c; 2 e; 3. h; 4. a; 5. d; 6. g; 7. f; 8. b

### 5 Chunks

1. in	2. with	3. to	4. of
5. from	6. in	7. to	8. at

### 6 Grammar Focus – Reported Speech

1. (It said that) this intuition was linked to women's physical capacity to give life.
2. She said she didn't think the Catholic Church was in a position to make such statements.
3. It also pointed out that women had a big role to play in society.
4. A woman's unique ability to give birth allowed her to acquire maturity very quickly.
5. The gender war encouraged a perilous blurring of the distinctions.
6. Differences between the sexes tended to be ignored.